



**2010-2011
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
Madera County Fire Station #8 (Chukchansi)**

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Introduction:

On October 13, 2010, the Grand Jury visited Fire Station #8 located at 47050 Road 417, Coarsegold, California and met with the Battalion Chief and Fire Captain. This is a follow up visit to the one done by the 2009-2010 Grand Jury. Station #8 serves a populace of 15,000 in Madera County, covering a total area of 216 square miles. It also serves an expanded casino and a 404-room hotel. Staffing is provided by CAL FIRE under contract with the County.

Findings:

The Grand Jury found Station #8 to be clean, well maintained, and staffed by highly trained and professional individuals.

The Grand Jury found response time to the casino and hotel is three to five minutes. Response time to other areas is dependent upon location and terrain.

The Grand Jury found, as noted in the 2009-2010 Grand Jury Report, that funding for Fire Station #8 operations is determined by the 2004 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the County and the Picayune Rancheria of the Chukchansi Indians (Tribe). Since the casino opened and the hotel was expanded, staffing levels of two on-duty positions have remained the same. CAL FIRE did prepare a presentation for the Tribe in 2009, setting forth the benefits and costs associated with three and four person on-site staffing. The Tribe thanked CAL FIRE for their effort stating, "... it was not a good time for them to fund any increased staffing." The 2009-2010 Grand Jury Report recommended, "The funding, staffing and equipment needs for the station should be reviewed. At the earliest opportunity, the Memorandum of Understanding with the Tribe should be amended to reflect the new personnel and equipment requirements resulting from Casino enlargement." There is no response to this recommendation to date.

The Battalion Chief and Fire Captain stated that in order to appropriately staff their current areas of responsibility, one of the following three options needs to be adopted and implemented:

- Add one Operator and one Firefighter to Station #8
- Add two On-Duty Firefighters to Station #8
- During the winter months, the County could staff the CAL FIRE Coarsegold station with two positions. This would directly help Station #8 due to the

proximity of CAL FIRE Coarsegold to the Casino. From May through October, CAL FIRE staffs both engines at Coarsegold at four person staffing levels.

The Fire Captain indicated that they do have support from several sources, specifically, volunteers from Yosemite Lakes Park Fire Station #10, Coarsegold Fire Station #13, and CAL FIRE Coarsegold located at 34555 Highway 41, Coarsegold, CA.

Winter responsibilities of Station #8 are expanded due to the Amador program, which designates station closure during non-fire season. Originally the Amador program affects four CAL FIRE stations in this area: Ahwahnee, Bass Lake, Rancheria, and Raymond. These designated stations close from November through April of each year.

Public evacuation drills at the Casino have been lax due to logistics and financial considerations. Staff evacuation drills are conducted on a yearly basis. The Casino takes the lead. Personnel from Station #8 are present. Written emergency preparedness/evacuation expectations were not available.

The Division Chief reported preventative pre-planning has been done to ensure the safety of patrons and personnel. Firefighting gear and equipment have been placed at various levels of the building, and state-of-the-art materials and construction methods have been incorporated.

Staff living quarters at Station #8 have not been connected to the existing emergency power supply. This issue was noted in the Grand Jury Final Report for 2009 – 2010. Connection costs are estimated to be less than \$2,000. There is no response to this recommendation to date.

In both fiscal years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, CAL FIRE requested that the Board of Supervisors designate funding for a fire truck. Station #8 is the only full-time staffed fire station in the county that does not have an engine less than five years old.

Conclusions:

The Grand Jury concludes that staffing levels at Station #8 are at a minimum and significantly dependent on the services of volunteers.

The Grand Jury concludes that the living quarters at Station #8 lack emergency power which affects response time.

The Grand Jury concludes that a posted emergency preparedness/evacuation plan would enhance the safety and protection of patrons and personnel at the casino and hotel.

The Grand Jury concludes that the current fire truck at Station #8 is due for replacement.

Recommendations:

- The staff living quarters at Station #8 should be connected to the emergency power system. This is a repeat recommendation from the 2009-2010 Grand Jury Final Report, which to date has not been responded to by the Board of Supervisors as required by law.
- A clear emergency preparedness plan should be posted.
- The County should fund CAL FIRE Station located at 34555 Highway 41 to remain in operation on a year-round basis.
- The MOU between the County of Madera and the Tribe needs to be re-negotiated to reflect realistic staffing needs, vehicle replacement needs, and comprehensive emergency preparedness planning.

Respondent: Written response required pursuant to PC933(c)

Madera County Board of Supervisors
200 West Fourth Street
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Respondents: Response Optional

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