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MOFD Board Reviews Exterior Hazard Program

By Lucy Amaral



The weather has not been cooperating for Fire Marshall Michael Mentink's Exterior Hazard Abatement program. It's too wet. At the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Board of Directors meeting held May 19th, Mentink said that the deadline for compliance is still June 4th, however the late season rains have kept much of the District still damp and green. Mentink said that if topography or wet ground becomes a safety concern for abatement, he will consider a deadline extension.

"The contractors that do this work will communicate with my office and we will evaluate the situation and make a decision," Mentink said. "We do not want people getting hurt."

The annual Exterior Hazard Abatement program, more commonly known as "Weed Abatement," began in mid-April when more than 4,000 letters went out to MOFD property owners advising them of their responsibility to keep their property free of fire hazards. This number represents an increase of 1,300 over last year's mailing. Mentink said that while every property in the District is required to meet the abatement standards, the District has two 'severity zones.' One of those zones, mostly in north Orinda, is now classified by the State as being in a "Very High Hazard Fire Severity Zone" which led to those 1,300 properties that were not already in the database to now receive letters.

MOFD

While called 'weed abatement,' the process also includes brush, debris, overgrowth and even lack of a spark arrester on a chimney. Mentink said that most property owners comply, however, the few who do not risk having the hazard abated by MOFD's contractor and the parcel owner billed for the work and administrative costs.

The Board also passed Resolution 10-06, establishing the MOFD replacement benefits plan, which is designed to ensure that all earned retirement benefits are paid. Currently, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) places a dollar limit on retirement benefits. A subsequent IRS section allows for the difference between that limit and the actual benefits accrued to be paid.

Board President Frank Sperling said that the passage of this resolution is a technical implementation and there is no fiscal impact - only a paper change to allow continued payment of all retirement pensions as prescribed by law. By not approving this resolution, he added, the District would have incurred increased costs.

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