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## Public Forum

To the Moraga-Orinda Community,

On June 5th, a terrible accident occurred in Orinda. Two workers who were washing windows at an office building from a cherry picker contacted a high voltage transmission line and were severely burned. The incident was witnessed by a number of people who were attending a nearby farmer's market.

While many members of the community have praised the heroic work of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) firefighters who responded to that event, a very few have been critical of the MOFD's response. Their criticisms have been based on inaccurate information and without full understanding of the procedures that are used in emergencies of this type. This letter is intended to provide our community with the relevant facts in response to those criticisms.

Criticism - "There was a long delay in transferring the initial 911 call to MOFD because it was placed by a cell phone."

FACT - The first 911 call was placed by a cell phone and was answered by the California Highway Patrol's (CHP) emergency operators in Vallejo. They transferred the call in 33 seconds to Contra Costa County Regional Emergency Communications Center's (CCRECC) which provides emergency dispatch services for MOFD. CCRECC then notified MOFD personnel in less than 20 seconds of receiving information from Vallejo.

Criticism - "The Fire District didn't arrive for at least 20 minutes."

FACT - From the moment MOFD received the notification from dispatch, they were on-scene in 6 minutes and 5 seconds. There are countless incidents when witnesses reference "time seems to stand still." No doubt, for many attending the farmers market adjacent to this tragedy, time seemed to stand still.

Criticism - "Once the MOFD's units arrived, they took their time to extricate the victims."

FACT - The line that the window washers' equipment struck and which then fell to the ground carried 115,000 volts of electricity. At an emergency of this type, the firefighters' first duty was to ensure that the downed line did not endanger anyone else - particularly those attending the nearby Farmers Market and the adjacent retail stores. They also could not attempt any kind of rescue of the victims until PG&E first de-energized the fallen line. CCRECC had immediately notified PG&E of the emergency at the same time it dispatched MOFD's units. The first PG&E Troubleshooter arrived on-scene approximately 20 minutes after that notification. When PG&E was unable to shut down the other high voltage wires that were immediately adjacent to the cherry picker containing the victims, an MOFD Fire Captain and a PG&E Troubleshooter made the decision to attempt to rescue the victims amidst those still-active electric power lines. MOFD personnel carefully repositioned the district's aerial ladder truck to place it in the best possible position to effect a rescue while avoiding the power lines. Then, at great personal risk to themselves, the MOFD Fire Captain, accompanied by the PG&E Troubleshooter, maneuvered the aerial ladder's basket next to the power lines and adjacent to the cherry picker, transferred the victims to the aerial ladder's basket, and then lowered the basket to the ground.

Two MOFD ambulances then immediately transferred the victims to a nearby landing zone where two helicopter ambulances were waiting. In fact, both men were en-route to the hospital within about 45 minutes of initial dispatch.

Criticism - "The firefighters should have immediately sprayed water on the victims in the cherry picker."

FACT - Water conducts electricity. Spraying water on the victims in the cherry picker basket could have had disastrous effects on any firefighter who did so and could have exposed the victims to even greater injury.

Criticism- "It appeared as if the firefighters were not trained sufficiently"

FACT - This is the most disconcerting criticism of all. The fact is that MOFD's firefighters have received extensive training for this type of emergency (as well as every other type of foreseeable emergency) and that they acted in a totally disciplined and even heroic manner in the face of an extreme situation.

Criticism - "The ladder truck did not arrive for 45 minutes."

FACT - While en-route to the call, the MOFD Captain told CCRECC to add the MOFD's aerial ladder truck to the assignment. The aerial ladder truck arrived from Moraga within 12 minutes of being dispatched and prior to the arrival of PG&E's first troubleshooter, whose presence was required before any rescue attempt using the aerial ladder could proceed. As previously noted above, the two victims had been rescued and were being transported to the hospital within 45 minutes of MOFD's first-due units being notified of the emergency. Therefore the allegation is inaccurate.

We believe it is important for the public to have all of the facts in order to come to rational conclusions about the handling of this horrific event. The facts are that MOFD's firefighters acted in an expeditious, disciplined, and even heroic manner. For additional information regarding this event, please visit our website at MOFD.org.

Special thanks go out to the brave MOFD firefighters who were on-duty that day and for the key assistance they received from the Orinda, Moraga and Lafayette Police Departments, and the County Sheriff's Department.

Sincerely,

Frank Sperling

(President, MOFD Board of Directors)

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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