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## MOFD Board Approves New Communication System, Emergency Services Cost Recovery Policy

By Lucy Amaral



MOFD firefighters prepare to extricate a driver who was trapped in a burning vehicle after crashing into a tree on Highway 24 on Wednesday, February 23. According to Fire Marshal Mike Mentink, some Good Samaritans tackled the fire with extinguishers and tried to free the victim. "Moraga-Orinda Fire District would like to thank all the people that stopped to help put out the fire. Your involvement helped save the driver's life," said Mentink. Photo courtesy MOFD

recovering the costs related to fire-based emergency services such as motor vehicle accidents, collisions, vehicle fires, extrication and hazardous materials spills.

According to MOFD, everyone who owns and operates a vehicle in the United States is required to carry, at the minimum, liability insurance. The California Vehicle Code allows fire departments to recover costs associated with responding to motor vehicle accidents. Contracting with cost-recovery provider Fire Recovery USA, MOFD would bill reimbursable claims with the at-fault driver's insurance company. If the driver does not have insurance, the recovery service would bill the driver directly.

Depending on the type of services provided by MOFD, the at-fault driver's insurance company would receive an invoice for items such as personnel, equipment materials and rental costs; any items MOFD deems necessary for the response. Fees can range from \$435 for hazardous materials assessment and scene stabilization to \$5,900 and above for an advanced response which would require a hazmat certified team, a decontamination center, disposal and environmental clean-up.

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At the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Board of Directors Meeting held February 16, the Board approved a motion to join a new communications system authority as well as consented to establishing a cost recovery structure for fire-based emergency services.

In the staff report from MOFD to the Board, many of the emergency service providers in Contra Costa County and Alameda County use dissimilar communication devices and varying signals, and often it is difficult to communicate between agencies. The report added that there has also been an ongoing effort to develop a standard for uniform digital two-way radio for public safety organizations.

The East Bay Regional Communications System Authority (EBRCSA) was created as a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) to develop and operate an interoperable radio communications system. Using several federal and local grants, EBRCSA has developed the infrastructure for Contra Costa and Alameda County to move toward this uniform system. Currently 29 cities and five special districts (now including MOFD) are member agencies.

According to MOFD Fire Chief Randy Bradley, the District has delayed updating its current radio system in anticipation of purchasing a system that would be interoperable with other agencies. As MOFD's equipment is becoming obsolete, the Board opted to approve becoming a member of EBRCSA. The new communications system is scheduled to be up and running by January 1, 2013.

The Board also approved a schedule of fees and collection policy for