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Good News/Bad News

MOFD awarded \$1.1 million; will lose \$100K

By Nick Marnell

The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced July 12 that the Moraga-Orinda Fire District will receive a 2013 SAFER grant of \$1.1 million.

The federal Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Act was created to provide funding to local fire departments and volunteer firefighter organizations to help them increase or maintain the number of trained, "front line" firefighters available in their communities. Outgoing MOFD Fire Chief Randall Bradley said that MOFD will use the funds over a two-year period to fund four firefighter positions.

The district has 60 days to formally accept the award, and according to Bradley, "there is no compelling reason not to accept." Districts have refused the SAFER grant, he said, because after two years, the district must maintain the increased staffing level and the new firefighters cannot be laid off. Bradley added that the addition of four firefighters should save the district well over the \$1.1 million in overtime costs over the two-year period.

The grant request was written by MOFD battalion chief Jerry Lee.

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District was awarded a \$6.5 million SAFER grant in 2011.

On the downside for the district, the Board of Supervisors recently approved a new funding formula for the disbursement of Measure H funds that will reduce the MOFD's revenue by more than \$100,000 per year beginning in fiscal year 2015-16. The details of the new plan were presented at the board's July 9 meeting by Pat Frost, Contra Costa Health Services EMS Director.

In 1988, voters passed Contra Costa County's Measure H which provided for upgrades to the Emergency Medical Services system. The \$10 parcel tax has been used to support fire-EMS programs, such as providing more paramedic ambulance availability and subsidizing paramedic-staffed fire engines.

The new funding formula changes the paramedic-staffed fire engine funding subsidy from one based on the number of operational fire engines in a district to a formula based on population. Overall funding subsidies to fire districts in Contra Costa County will increase \$600,000 per year under the new plan. But three fire agencies - MOFD, the Pinole Fire Department and the Rodeo-Hercules Fire District - will see a decrease in their allocations.

MOFD's share of Measure H funding for the current fiscal year is \$199,000; it will drop to \$93,000 in two years.

The top beneficiary of the reallocation is the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District; the Board of Supervisors also functions as ConFire's board of directors. "With the cutbacks in engines subsequent to the fire station closures, (the engine-based formula) was going to hit ConFire extremely hard and reduce their revenues almost by half," said Frost. ConFire's distribution of the Measure H funds will increase more than \$350,000 per year beginning in 2015-16. MOFD board president John Wyro said that this funding issue will be discussed at a future district board meeting.

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