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Chief praises firefighters for improved MOFD turnout times

By Nick Marnell



Firefighters from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District contained a May 16 structure fire to the garage at 199 Corliss Drive in Moraga, with minimal fire, heat or smoke damage to living space in the home. No residents or firefighters were injured. Because of the extensive fire damage the cause and origin of the fire remain under investigation.

According to the district incident report, the call was dispatched at 8:17 a.m. and the first responding unit arrived seven minutes later. Fire Chief Dave Winnacker attributed the quick response to a speedy turnout time, and also to a bit of luck, as the Corliss home is surrounded by fire stations 41, 42 and 44. "And there was a fire hydrant right in front of the house," the chief said.

Photo courtesy MOFD

Improved turnout time, the period between the call dispatch and the crew's departure from the fire station, has been an emphasis for Winnacker. He identified areas where the district was able to improve the times, such as the replacement of defective hardware and through firefighter education.

When the chief pulled daily reports of turnout times, he noticed one station in particular lagged in reported times. The captains and the battalion chief reported nothing out of the ordinary in firefighter behavior during turnout, so when the chief officers dug deeper, they found that the station was using defective communication equipment. As the fire engine was already a couple of blocks down the road, the equipment was only then reporting that the engine had left the station. The equipment was replaced, and reported turnout times improved.

Code 3 calls, the most serious of emergency calls, include lights and sirens, while Code 2 calls are nonemergencies, with no lights and sirens. Winnacker found that the firefighters treated turnout for the Code 2 calls exactly that way: that they weren't emergencies, so no need for the crews to hustle into their turnout gear. Firefighters changed that mindset.

Other tweaks to the system included reorganized turnout at Station 41, which houses five firefighters but contains only one bathroom. (The station is scheduled for an overhaul in 2019.) Five people battling over one bathroom can be hectic when the bell goes off, so the companies arranged for the two medics to use the bathroom first so they could run the ambulance out of the station. That tiny adjustment saves precious seconds of ambulance turnout time.

District records show that March and April median turnout times dropped an average of 17 seconds from those of December, January and February to 1 minute, 16 seconds.

"The crews have been committed," Winnacker said. "Their work is what is responsible for the drop in turnout time."

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[back](#)

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