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Fire Station 43 on track, temporary station not cooperating

By Nick Marnell



FS 43 days before paving completed Photo Nick Marnell

It wouldn't be the Moraga-Orinda Fire District Station 43 project without some degree of drama, but this episode has nothing to do with the new building; its construction has proceeded swimmingly through the rainy winter. The adjacent temporary structure, though, was closed down for an environmental review and an industrial cleaning after more than a dozen Station 43 personnel took sick in December and January.

Purchased in July 2016 for \$3,000 from the Carmel Fire Department, the temporary station was expected to house firefighters for at most 18 months, but those plans went out the window after two Station 43 contractors did not work out. (The principals of the second contractor, Federal Solutions Group of San Ramon, were charged in November with conspiracy, money laundering and insurance fraud by the Contra Costa County district attorney.)

An early sign of trouble with the temporary structure occurred in 2018 when work was done to repair floors that were "spongy," according to Capt. Mark McCullah, MOFD firefighters union representative. From late December into January, according to district records, 13 Station 43 personnel got sick, sick enough that the district recorded eight days of leave. Fire Chief Dave Winnacker closed the station on Jan. 29. "The number of people who got sick motivated us to close it down," Winnacker said.

Crews were reassigned to Fire Station 45 in Orinda Village, which according to Google Maps lies 2.5 miles from Station 43. Records supplied by the district show that Engine 43 responded to 78 calls out of Station 45 between Jan. 29 and Feb. 14, with 10 of the calls in Station 43's first due area.

The temporary station, actually a mobile home, underwent testing for contaminants Feb. 6 by EMLab P&K, and results came back negative. Central Valley Environmental began a major, industrial-type cleanup the following week, with project manager Braydon Stout confirming that no mold, lead or asbestos had to be removed from the structure. The temporary station was scheduled to be reoccupied the week of Feb. 18.

"The chief took all the necessary steps to bring the station to safe, working order," McCullah said.

New Fire Station 43 experienced no major issues through the early winter, just a few minor complications mostly attributed to the rain. "Everything has been addressed," Winnacker said, as the rebuilt station progresses toward its April grand opening.

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