



## **BOARD MEETING AGENDA SUBMITTAL**

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**TO:** GCSB Board of Directors

**FROM:** Peter Kampa, General Manager

**DATE:** March 12, 2024

**SUBJECT: Agenda Item 6E: Review and Consideration of Comments on the Draft Tuolumne County Emergency Services (Fire/EMS) Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover Evaluation, Draft Consultant Report Commissioned by the County of Tuolumne**

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### **RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

I move to direct staff to submit comments on the standards of cover evaluation in accordance with the discussion and direction given today.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Beginning in the year 2020, the district began encouraging the county to conduct a countrywide standards of cover evaluation for the purpose of establishing an emergency response time standard and to determine where the County and other Fire staffed stations needed to be located to meet those adopted standards. The county used state grant money to complete the risk assessment and the standard of cover evaluation, the draft of which has been circulated and is attached below. We have also attached the executive summary of the report which is an easier read in advance of our board meeting.

This item is on your board's agenda for discussion and direction to staff, as this report will be considered for adoption by the county Board of Supervisors during their meeting on the 19th of this month. On initial review of this report, staff believes that the findings and recommendations do not necessarily meet the objectives that were initially conveyed to the county and County Fire. We were hoping that this report would clearly identify the areas county wide where fire departments we're having to respond outside of their boundaries due to a lack of county fire department presence, as well as areas where there was little to no coverage by any department.

We do not expect the report should be revised to meet those objectives, what we would like to give feedback to the Board of Supervisors regarding our position on this matter as well as encouragement on next steps that meet our needs and the needs of the departments countrywide.

### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

None

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- [\(Hyperlink Only\) Draft Tuolumne County Emergency Services \(Fire/EMS\) Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover Evaluation](#)
- Report Executive Summary

# Executive Summary



The Tuolumne County Fire Department (TCFD) and the other fire agencies (Agencies) in Tuolumne County are at a crossroads. For decades, the county fire agencies have been operating as independent organizations with proud histories of community support and volunteer service. There are opportunities for regionalization with support at all levels within the County, including agency executives and elected officials.

The County, who contracts with CAL FIRE for fire protection for TCFD and is the largest local fire agency, is invested in creating regional solutions. The County Administrator, with support from the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors has taken on an important role in leading efforts to regionalize fire services. The County's interests, fiscal capacity and public policy goals in many cases align with the individual fire agencies. With some local fire agencies there are key policy areas where there is not yet alignment. The overriding sentiment of local fire agency representatives is who would lead the regional fire agency, local operators, or an expanded CAL FIRE contract solution. The County is appropriately focused on the solution that provides the most services, specifically operational, support services and administration, which is realistic, effective, and most importantly, one it can afford.

An evaluation of resource distribution in the Fire and EMS Programs, in particular station locations, is also included. Effective distribution of resources allows TCFD, fire agencies, and EMS to best serve the citizens and meet community risk. Fitch completed several distribution and station location analyses addressing all fire agencies, TCFD alone, and the EMS program.

Fitch completed a station analysis using a proprietary marginal utility model that identified which station locations would best serve the entire county and its communities. To adopt the best time performance model and corresponding station locations, agency executives and policymakers need to adopt system performance benchmarks for the fire and EMS programs. Detailed GIS analysis of different system performance benchmarks and station locations can be found in Section D: Fire and EMS Station Location Analysis and Appendix A: GIS Data Analysis, Baseline Performance, Distribution Models (Fire and EMS), and Risk Analysis.

For emergency medical and ambulance services, the Tuolumne County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and its contractor, Manteca District Ambulance, have professionally served the community since the County took over ambulance operations from a private provider in 1987.

The threat of catastrophic wildfire, tree mortality due to drought, limited financial capacity, insufficient staffing, aging apparatus and facilities, the changing nature of work and the workforce, economic development of Tribal Casinos and other businesses, and other local and industry factors have brought about existential threats to many of the county's fire agencies.

The EMS and ambulance service also face significant internal and external threats. These include workforce challenges due to a decreasing number of people entering the service, retention of emergency medical technicians and paramedics, deferred investments in data infrastructure and system improvement, increased need of services from aging populations, long transport times inside and outside of the county, citizens inability to pay the full cost of services, and reduced insurance reimbursements.

Most fire agencies in the county are underfunded and stretched thin as they confront call volume growth and evolving community risk. Over the last two decades, revenue enhancement measures have been voted down by community members, leaving agencies to struggle with constrained resources. Multiple attempts to merge, consolidate, and contract for services have also occurred.

The EMS ambulance service is operated as an enterprise fund with funding being driven by collected revenues. The deployment in 1987 consisted of four ambulances. Since 1987, an additional 1.5 ambulances have been added. The EMS service faces similar revenue constraints as the fire agencies. The contracted provider is increasingly challenged to maintain services within financial constraints, and it would come as no surprise if the company made a business decision to exit the County in the future.

Changing fire service employment and volunteer patterns, especially with interns, paid call, entry-level firefighters, EMTs and paramedics have left most county agencies with unfilled vacancies as fewer people enter the fire and ambulance service. In addition, larger agencies, mostly outside of the County, lure candidates and employees away with financial, work schedule, and career opportunities that local agencies cannot match. Exacerbating the openings, the nature of volunteerism in the fire service has changed. Fewer community members serve as volunteer firefighters due to competing career and family demands as well as the nature of emergency calls and the considerable training requirements needed to safely work as a firefighter or emergency medical provider. Some fire agencies are unable to answer emergency calls for service as no staffing is available or only for limited periods of the day.

As a rural county, the County faces unique and impactful challenges. These include static population growth, aging populations and other demographic changes, socioeconomic constraints including low income and high poverty rates, minimal workforce development, lack of access to capital, infrastructure deficiencies, health care needs found in rural and aging communities, land use, and environmental and community preservation.

To their credit, the county fire chiefs and ambulance service leaders have a demonstrated track record of working together operationally to serve the communities in the County. This includes mutual and automatic aid, shared communications systems, operations, and training policies. There is renewed interest in exploring regional solutions that leverage agencies' strengths to achieve economies of scale, improved resilience, and cost savings as a single fire agency.

As staff and policymakers know, there are no mandatory federal or state regulations establishing fire service levels, including staffing, response times, and outcomes. The level of service and associated costs is a local community decision. The Board of Supervisors, City Council members, and Fire Board directors purchase fire protection and EMS services when adopting annual budgets or contracts. With the assistance of staff, policymakers should establish outcome measures that match their ability to pay.

The following document functions as TCFD's All Hazard Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover statement. The Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) defines the process, known as "deployment analysis," as a written procedure which determines the distribution and concentration of fixed and mobile resources of an organization. The key goal of the project is to determine if resources, especially fire stations, engines, and ambulances, are in optimal locations to serve the community. The purpose of completing such a document is to assist fire agencies in ensuring a safe and effective response force for fire suppression, emergency medical services (EMS), hazardous materials incidents, and technical rescues, and in facilitating activities for domestic preparedness, emergency planning, and disaster response.

Creating a Community Risk Assessment: Standards of Cover (CRA: SOC) document combines a mix of objective and subjective research and analysis. This includes interviews with key stakeholders, research, study, and the evaluation of a considerable array of community features. The following report will begin with a descriptive overview of TCFD and the area that it serves. Following this overview, an all-hazards risk assessment provides an analysis of potential risks and describes activities the Department employs to mitigate those risks. Current deployment and performance were assessed to determine the capabilities and capacities that are available. Benchmark statements and baseline performance support TCFD's ability to meet distribution and concentration metrics. The report includes recommendations for maintaining and improving capabilities, as well as policy recommendations to address gaps in performance or desired outcomes.

This CRA: SOC is demonstrative of TCFD's continued commitment to regular community risk assessment. The Department has adopted a formal process of reviewing and assessing risk as an annual process. TCFD anticipates that regularly revisiting and revising the CRA: SOC will allow the Department to stay on top of changes in the community as well as enable staff to efficiently distribute and plan for resources allocated throughout the jurisdiction.

Under the leadership of TCFD and the fire and ambulance agencies, the public safety team has come together to wholistically assess the community risk and current deployment across the county. The TCFD would like to thank all members for their continued dedication to the citizens and visitors to the county and for their commitment to continuous improvement. Given the challenges and uncertain future, difficult choices may need to be made by all agencies, their elected boards, and staff.

## Recommendations – Fire Program

1. **Identify and pursue consolidation opportunities to save/reallocate resources and improve service delivery**
  - a. Utilize GIS Report and Fire Station Distribution Analysis (Appendix A) to prioritize the consolidation options that best serve Tuolumne County. Realistic fire station distribution models are 12 and 15-minute travel time for all emergency calls for service.
  - b. Redeploy current resources from all agencies to best serve communities using the GIS, fire station, and call distribution analysis.
  - c. Merge agencies that have already been discussing resource sharing and consolidation.
  - d. Take advantage of agency-specific scenarios to accelerate consolidation.
    - Do not fill vacancies of fire chiefs or other senior-level officers after retirements or other transitions
    - Fiscal deficits and staffing challenges of agencies
    - Where there is already current resource sharing including TCFD staffing other agencies facilities
    - Expand service agreements and fiscal support to full consolidation from Tribal agencies to neighboring local government agencies
  - e. Elected bodies of agencies considering mergers or annexations should adopt resolutions of intention seeking consolidation.
  - f. Conduct annexation studies for those local agencies wishing to pursue consolidation that comply with Tuolumne County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) guidelines and State of California Government Codes, specifically Sections 56425, 56430 and 56653.
  - g. Determine structure of the consolidated agencies.
    - Options:
      - Smaller agencies contract with TCFD for fire services.
      - Smaller agencies merge into the TCFD.
      - Create a new Joint Powers Authority (JPA) entity.
  - h. Determine organizational structure.
    - Eliminate duplicate staff and administrative positions to realize cost savings and cost avoidance.
    - Conduct an analysis to determine most cost-effective organization – local or contract.
    - Paid stations.
    - Volunteer stations.
  - i. Determine fleet program and apparatus ownership.
  - j. Acknowledge there may be a sense of loss of identity as agencies become part of a larger one.
    - Preserve unique community and historical connections.
    - Establish communication plans for communities who may experience a sense of loss of their local/historical fire agency.

**2. Adopt optimal fire station locations and staff accordingly to support service-level benchmark objectives in alignment with TCFD’s mission, vision, core values, and fiscal capacity**

- a. GIS and Fire Station Distribution Analysis (Appendix A) has identified the best fire station locations for different time performance benchmarks. Realistic benchmarks to consider are 12 and 15-minute travel time for all emergency calls for service.
- b. Adopt a plan to improve response capabilities
  - Reduce call processing time
  - Reduce turnout time
  - Performance-based time standards for call processing, turnout, travel, total response (Baseline, Benchmark)
  - Create urban, rural, wilderness response standards.

**Example of performance and response standards**

Call Category	90 <sup>th</sup> Percentile Alarm Dispatch Time	90 <sup>th</sup> Percentile Turnout & Travel Time (Urban)	90 <sup>th</sup> Percentile Total Response (Urban)	90 <sup>th</sup> Percentile Turnout & Travel Time (Rural)	90 <sup>th</sup> Percentile Total Response Time (Rural)	90 <sup>th</sup> Percentile Wilderness Travel & Total Time
Fire Program	2:30	12:30	15:00	22:30	25:00	Best Effort
EMS Program	2:30	11:30	14:00	21:30	24:00	Best Effort

**3. Consider selling or repurposing the property of unstaffed stations in areas with minimal community risk and call volume**

- a. Once performance time standards are determined by TCFD, Fire Agencies and/or adopted by policymakers, the 90% coverage marginal utility model will determine stations to keep and stations to sell or repurpose

**4. Invest in industry standard data and records management systems and analysis infrastructure that support decision-making, including station location, operational and deployment plans**

**5. Implement a Risk-based response to Target Hazards**

- a. More resources dispatched to incidents involving maximum hazards

**6. Continue to aggressively pursue revenue opportunities**

- a. Grants
  - SAFER

- b. New development agreements
  - Equipment, apparatus
  - New community risk equals new resources for the agency

**7. Modify the strategic plan to include**

- a. Assumption of no, or very limited, new revenue sources
- b. Create a communications plan to realistically describe TCFD's capabilities to meet service demand
  - Acknowledge and communicate that the agencies are rural fire agencies with rural service levels

DRAFT



## Recommendations – EMS / Ambulance Program

### 1. Establish Countywide Outcome Measures for EMS Program Performance

- This recommendation reinforces Tuolumne County Emergency Medical Services Agency (TCEMSA), and Manteca District Ambulance's (MDA) commitment to providing a high level of service to community members in all areas of the County, regardless of the type of emergency. To achieve this, the TCFD should establish and measure performance against benchmark objectives.

### 2. Invest in industry standard data and records management systems and analysis infrastructure that support decision-making, including station location, operational and deployment plans

### 3. Modify the funding process to support industry standard emergency medical services

- a. Additional resources for centralized EMS and Fire dispatch services include improved call taking and call screening, emergency medical dispatching and pre-arrival care instructions
- b. Investments in support services including station and fleet maintenance
  - Create support structures so operations staff are not expected to perform those duties, or the duties are not performed resulting in substandard facilities, equipment, and apparatus

### 4. Conduct detailed operational and financial studies into non-emergent, behavioral health, and critical care transfer calls for service, especially those that require extended transportation outside of the County

- a. Consider providers from outside the County for out-of-county transfers
- b. Consider ambulance cross-staffing in staffed fire stations that would be used only when County Ambulances are fully committed. These backup ambulances would be placed in service for emergency calls when all primary ambulances are committed, and the cross-staffed ambulances would follow County EMS transport policies.

### 5. If funding becomes available, adopt workload, deployment trigger points, and ongoing funding sources to support EMS Program

- a. Consider peak call-time staffing of stations when people are in the area
  - Weekends, holidays, events

### 6. Establish, adopt, monitor, and communicate service-level benchmark (goal) objectives in alignment with EMS's mission, vision, core values

- a. Adopt a plan to improve response capabilities
  - Reduce call processing time
  - Reduce turnout time