

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT NO. 0908:
"SURROUNDED BY WATER, BETHEL ISLAND HAS LIMITED ACCESS FOR
FIGHTING FIRES"**

FINDINGS

Fire Department Staffing, Facilities and Equipment Prior to the Formation of ECCFPD

1. Bethel Island had 15 to 35 active volunteer Firefighters who were paid-on-call.

RESPONSE: *The Respondent partially disagrees with the finding. It is unclear what time frame is being considered, the source of the information and the definition of "active" that is being referenced. Active paid-on-call firefighters average approximately 20 hours per week (including training), and active paid-on-call firefighter-paramedics average 24 hours per week (24 hour shifts). In the period prior to consolidation, January 1, 2002 through November 2002, records indicate that 13 paid-on-call firefighters and 12 paid-on-call firefighter-paramedics were identified by the Bethel Island Fire Protection District. However, payroll records reflect that 3 of the 13 paid-on-call firefighters were active responders, and 3 of the 12 paramedic-firefighters were active responders.*

2. It became increasingly difficult to use volunteers because of changing standards and firefighting techniques.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

3. Prior to the formation of ECCFPD, firefighting equipment consisted of two (2) fire engines for fighting structural fires, two (2) designated for grass and brush fires and two (2) fire boats (converted recreational vessels), at least one (1) water tender and a rescue unit.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

4. The Volunteer Fire Department was composed of residents of Bethel Island who were knowledgeable regarding the unusual pattern of roads, street names and points of access.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. No documentation could be found to verify whether all personnel lived within the Bethel Island Fire Protection District.*

5. In the 1970's, salaried staff consisted of a Fire Chief, an Assistant Chief and a Communications Technician. In 1993-94 the Assistant Chief position was eliminated.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

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6. The salaried, full-time personnel were basically day time with a variable number of volunteers available after hours and weekends. Usually, some personnel were on site 24-hours per day, 7 days per week.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. We agree the full-time, salaried personnel were basically day time. However, due to the absence of staffing records prior to consolidation, it is unknown the number of staff that were in the station 24-hours per day 7 days per week. Payroll records indicate it is unlikely that a cadre of paid-on-call firefighters were frequently available for 24/7 coverage.*

7. Just prior to the formation of the ECCFPD, it became difficult to maintain an acceptable level of service.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

Fire Department Staffing, Facilities, and Equipment After the Formation of ECCFPD

8. The ECCFPD was formed in September of 2002. The new District was a consolidation of three dependent Districts in the eastern part of Contra Costa County, Bethel Island, East Diablo and Oakley. The consolidation resulted in nine fire stations within seven communities, including Bethel Island and other unincorporated areas.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

9. The BOS application to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) for the consolidation of East County fire departments to form the ECCFPD contained the following: ***"It is the intention of the Board of Supervisors to unify the three districts into a single district that will provide seamless service in a way that will enhance the emergency response network within projected revenues. It is also intended to coordinate future efforts to develop funding and fire protection service levels to equal status with the remainder of the Bay Area communities."***

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding. However, for clarification, the Board of Supervisors is the Board of Directors for ECCFPD.*

10. According to ECCFPD, firefighting procedures for Bethel Island are as follows: At the first alarm, one (1) engine and two (2) Firefighters will be dispatched to the fire. Simultaneously, a fire engine will be sent to cover the Bethel Island station from a nearby community. If necessary, reserve Firefighters can be called to provide additional support.

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RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. When a structure fire is reported on Bethel Island, the District dispatches four engines, one water tender and one Battalion Chief on the first alarm (five units and a Chief Officer is the standard response throughout the District). An engine is also dispatched to provide backup coverage to the Island if all of the above cited five units are going to be required at the emergency.*

11. Following the formation of ECCFPD, firefighting equipment and resources no longer available on Bethel Island are:

- Two fire engines for grass and brush fires,
- Two fire boats that were converted from recreational vessels,
- One water tender,
- The volunteer fire fighters.

The current complement of equipment and resources located at Bethel Island are two fire engines and two fire fighters and a contracted rescue unit.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. The District has a Type-1 structure engine, Type-3 wild-land engine and a Type-2 fire boat. AMR provides a Quick Response Vehicle (QRV) Paramedic unit that is housed at the Bethel Island station.*

12. ECCFPD recently acquired a state-of-the-art fire boat, which uses a two to three - person crew. This boat is on-call for all of Contra Costa County and surrounding waterways. Therefore, it may or may not be available at any given time because of its coverage area. If the boat is required to fight a fire, Firefighters from one of the responding fire engines could board the boat at the scene to achieve the needed crew size.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding. The District has the only fire boat within Contra Costa County Fire agencies. The Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department does have a patrol boat with firefighting capabilities. The US Coast Guard does not have firefighting capabilities in the delta region.*

13. The ECCFPD has stated that fire trucks have a shorter response time than a boat. For that reason the fire boat is not the primary piece of firefighting equipment.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

14. Currently, Bethel Island fire station is staffed with six firefighters, two per shift. Four are relatively long term. The remaining two firefighters are rotated in from elsewhere in the District.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees. According to I.A.F.F. Local 1230's MOU, personnel are allowed to bid their work stations. Therefore, any of these individuals may choose to bid for another station.*

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15. ECCFPD has contracted with American Medical Response (AMR) to provide three (3) paramedics who are shared throughout the District. One (1) paramedic is stationed at Bethel Island.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. It is true that AMR provides three (3) quick response vehicles within East Contra Costa Fire Protection District. However, AMR contracts with Contra Costa County Emergency Medical Services, not the Fire District.*

16. The system required to keep the water flowing to the business district hydrants failed in 2006 and has not been repaired or replaced. The pipes are old and in questionable condition. This pumping system, if operational, would provide water to service the business district. In addition to the 1,250 gallons of water available on the fire trucks and local private working pumps, water to fight fires is brought in by tanker trucks or drafted (pumped) from the Delta. The Grand Jury was unable to determine the ownership of the pump and hydrants.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. The District has been working diligently since September 2008 to repair the system. As of July 3, 2009, the system has been activated and operational. However, it is true that ownership of the pump and hydrants cannot be determined. It is also important to note that, with the Bethel Island bridge replacement, the bridge pump will need to be relocated.*

17. Water Tenders (Water Trucks) brought from off of the island must be used to replace the inoperable water hydrants. The water supply is limited.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. Water tenders have always been utilized on Bethel Island to supplement water.*

18. There are private wells and water systems on Bethel Island, but with few exceptions they do not provide water for fire protection.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

19. Prior to the formation of ECCFPD in 2002, there were approximately 450 calls per year on Bethel Island with an average response time of slightly more than 6 minutes.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. Based on data provided by the Davis Company's, "Evaluation of Fire Service and Financing for the Far-East Contra Costa County Fire Protection Districts" dated April 2002, response times appear to average slightly more than six minutes. However, data does not specify if there was more than one person on the responding equipment.*

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20. After the consolidation, the actual response time was recorded at approximately 10 minutes. A 2006 report by Citygate Associates showed that ECCFPD response times should be 5 minutes.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

21. Between November 1, 2007 and November 30, 2008, Fire District logs indicate average response times for fires were more than 8 minutes.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

22. The fire station is uninhabitable due to the presence of mold. This requires the leasing of temporary facilities for the housing of personnel. Only firefighting equipment is permitted in the existing building. When permits are issued, it will be demolished.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

23. ECCFPD Firefighter's wages and benefits are the lowest in Contra Costa County.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

24. The District provides no formal training of personnel regarding the confusing street patterns, names and terrain of Bethel Island.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. The District conducts training in all of its stations to educate personnel on streets in their first-due areas. District equipment includes Mobile Data Computers/GPS units for mapping and directions to calls.*

25. The ECCFPD provides no formalized performance evaluations or objectives related to all firefighting personnel.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. The District conducts probationary performance evaluations for all ranks and provides engine standards for firefighting skills.*

26. Delta Coves has most of its infrastructure requirement completed. Economic issues have delayed the development of the project indefinitely. Although fire hydrants are in place, a source of water will have to be acquired prior to any construction.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

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27. The ECCFPD Fire Chief reports to the BOS and the County Administrator.

RESPONSE: *The District partially disagrees with the finding. The Fire Chief reports to the Board of Directors and the County Administrator*

28. The ECCFPD encompasses portions of Supervisorial District Three and Five.

RESPONSE: *The District agrees with the finding.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish an oversight Commission, as was done during the formation of the ECCFPD. The Commission could assist in managing funding issues, determine future resources (equipment, personnel or fire stations), determine areas of risk, recommend the establishment of response time goals, improve local control and reduce perceived inequities as they pertain to Fire District decisions.

RESPONSE: *The recommendation will not be implemented as it is not warranted. The Board of Directors and the District feel that establishing an Advisory Commission is not warranted because the Board of Supervisors is the Board of Directors for ECCFPD and provides sufficient oversight and direction. The Board of Directors has also invoked local advisory sub-committees for specific issues as needed.*

2. That ECCFPD provide formal orientation training specific to Bethel Island for all District Firefighters.

RESPONSE: *The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. The District is currently building a formal orientation training program including check off for the Bethel Island area. All personnel will receive this training prior to November 1, 2009.*

3. That ECCFPD complete a risk assessment of all areas of the District and establish an acceptable level of risk for each area to include response-time goals established for each area. Measurements shall be taken and compared to goals. The District shall develop objectives based on existing available resources.

RESPONSE: *The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The Board of Directors authorized CityGate Associates, LLC, to prepare a "Fire Service and EMS Master Plan for the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District on August 10, 2004. The report was submitted and accepted by the Board of Directors in June 2006. The report included: a review of District operations, Risk Assessment, Service Levels and Standard Response Coverage, Revenue requirements to implement standards and Master Plan and Action Plan.*

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4. That ECCFPD develop a cost comparison of various options to provide additional water supply for fire use on Bethel Island. Suggestions include, but are not limited to:
 - Strategic placement of water tanks, and/or
 - Provide a method to move Delta water to the land side.

RESPONSE: *The recommendation requires further analysis. The District has analyzed the strategic placement of water tanks. Unfortunately, this analysis indicates private property would need to be utilized for placement. In addition, the District has been working with the community on a dry hydrant project. The dry hydrants could be placed around the levee tops, allowing fire engines to hook up and draft water from the delta. Current issues include ownership, easement, permits, insurance and funding source. At this point, no time line can be identified.*

5. That the BOS work in cooperation with the Fire District to ensure that the objectives of ECCFPD are part of the decision making process as the Bethel Island Delta Coves project progresses.

RESPONSE: *This recommendation has already been implemented. The Board of Directors and several County departments have been heavily involved with the Delta Coves project. Additionally, all projects within this area are reviewed by the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District's Fire Marshal and the Community Development Department.*