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2010-2011 GRAND JURY RELEASES REPORT ON MINIMUM STAFFING LEVELS FOR THE STOCKTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

The San Joaquin County 2010-2011 Civil Grand Jury today released its report investigating minimum staffing levels for the Stockton Fire Department. The investigation comes after the passage of Measure H in November 2010, which *“enhances the City of Stockton’s position in dealing with the fire department”* and during a time when *“local agencies are browning-out stations and equipment, unions are being asked for further concessions and cities are facing deeper budget cuts.”*

The Grand Jury’s investigation included interviews with the Fire Chiefs of Stockton, Tracy, Manteca, and Lodi. Each of these departments were surveyed and provided *“information regarding staffing, salary costs, budget, paramedic services, firefighter injuries and the number of calls for service.”* In addition to reviewing data supplied by the agencies, the Grand Jury reviewed City Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and budgets, Measure H campaign literature, and newspaper articles.

During the course of its investigation, the Grand Jury found that *“the cities of Tracy, Manteca and Lodi staff fire engines and trucks with three firefighters each. Stockton’s current MOU requires a staffing level of four firefighters to an engine and five firefighters on a truck.”* The Stockton Fire Department has contended that their current staffing levels are set for the safety of the firefighters and citizens; however, *“the Grand Jury found that approximately 3.5% of the calls for*

service to Stockton Fire are in fact fires, and approximately 77% are emergency medical calls". The remaining percentage of calls are for other services, such as fire alarms and vehicle accidents.

The report states that the department's union uses several Northern California cities (Oakland, San Jose, and San Francisco) as examples to justify minimum staffing levels; however, the Grand Jury writes in the report that the City of "*Stockton has more in common with other cities in San Joaquin County, than with San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland.*" Moreover, the report indicates that even those larger cities by which the union is comparing the Stockton Fire Department's staffing levels to will be reducing the number of firefighters on engines and trucks in the near future.

Based on the findings from the investigation, the Grand Jury made the following recommendation: "*Reduce staffing on Stockton fire engines to three firefighters and trucks to four firefighters. Create a relief pool from the staffing reduction that would cover firefighters on leave rather than pay overtime*". The Grand Jury further stated that it "*believes the residents of Stockton would continue to be safely served with the reduction of one firefighter per engine and truck. This staffing would be consistent with surrounding agencies and counties. This limited action at cost containment would result in a savings of \$5,000,000 - \$7,000,000 annually.*"

The City of Stockton is required to respond in writing to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court within 90 days of the publication of the report as to each finding and recommendation.

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(Copy of report attached)

San Joaquin County Grand Jury



STOCKTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

MINIMUM STAFFING

2010/2011 San Joaquin County Grand Jury Case No. 0610

Summary

The Grand Jury reviewed minimum staffing levels of the Stockton Fire Department to determine at this time of fiscal instability if a cost savings could be achieved. Measure H was a contentious ballot measure that overwhelmingly passed in November 2010, enhancing the City of Stockton's position in dealing with the fire department. Local agencies are browning-out stations and equipment, unions are being asked for further concessions and cities are facing deeper budget cuts. The Grand Jury investigated cost savings to the City of Stockton by eliminating one firefighter from each engine and truck. These eliminations would align staffing levels consistent with surrounding cities and regions, with a minimum cost savings of \$5,000,000 to \$7,000,000.

Glossary

- **Apparatus:** Fire engines and trucks
- **Fire Engine:** A fire suppression vehicle that has a water pump and is designed to carry hoses and a limited supply of water.
- **Fire Truck:** A fire suppression vehicle that carries ladders and tools necessary for a fire scene. The truck is responsible for ventilation of a structure on fire.
- **Structure Fire:** Fire involving the structural components of various residential or commercial buildings i.e. single family homes, townhomes, apartments, malls and high-rise buildings

Background

The Grand Jury reviewed the fiscal impact of Stockton Fire Department's minimum staffing levels on engines and trucks. The cities of Tracy, Manteca, and Lodi staff apparatus with three firefighters compared to Stockton staffing engines with four (Captain, Engineer and two firefighters), and trucks with five (Captain, Engineer and three firefighters). The Stockton Fire Fighters Union has publicly announced their unity in sustaining the minimum staffing that is

currently in place for the safety of the firefighters and citizens. During the course of the investigation, the Grand Jury found that approximately 3.5% of the calls for service to Stockton Fire are in fact fires, and approximately 77% are emergency medical calls. (See Table 1). This is consistent with the national trend of fewer fire-related calls and more medical emergencies.

Every fire chief in the country would embrace four firefighters on the engines and five on the trucks, but in reality the cost to sustain those firefighters must be addressed at a time when cities are planning deeper cuts to city services to balance the budgets.

Table 1
Calls for Service – Stockton Fire Department

	2008	2009	2010
Structure Fires	536	476	381
Vehicle Fires	362	365	296
Brush/Grass Fires	564	451	462
Chimney Fires	12	15	11
Total Fires	1,474	1,307	1,150
Fire Alarms	2,258	2,138	1,620
Vehicle Accidents	2,138	2,032	1,709
Miscellaneous	3,581	3,269	3,032
Total Other Services	7,977	7,439	6,361
Emergency Medical EMS	27,583	28,982	25,225
TOTAL CALLS FOR SERVICE	37,034	37,728	32,736

*Statistics provided by Stockton Fire Department

Method of Investigation

The Grand Jury surveyed local fire agencies for information regarding staffing, salary costs, budget, paramedic services, firefighter injuries and the number of calls for service. The Grand Jury interviewed the Chiefs of Stockton, Tracy, Manteca and Lodi.

Materials Reviewed:

- City Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and budgets
- Data provided by agencies

- Measure H campaign literature
- Newspaper articles

Discussion, Findings and Recommendations

1.0 Minimum Staffing

The cities of Tracy, Manteca and Lodi staff fire engines and trucks with three firefighters each. Stockton’s current MOU requires a staffing level of four firefighters to an engine and five firefighters on a truck.

OSHA Standards “Two in Two Out” requires two firefighters outside for two firefighters inside an immediately dangerous to life or health environment (IDLH). When a structure fire is reported in Stockton, the initial first alarm assignment is three engines, (12 firefighters), two trucks (10 firefighters), a mobile command unit, and both on-duty battalion chiefs. One engine is intended as a safety resource and the second arriving truck company establishes a Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) intended for firefighter rescue. The OSHA standard for Stockton is the same for Manteca, Tracy, Lodi, Fresno and Fremont, yet all these communities have staffing of three firefighters on engines and trucks.

Stockton’s fire union compares several Northern California cities in examples to justify current staffing ratios, including Oakland, San Jose, and San Francisco. However, Stockton has more in common with other cities in San Joaquin County, than with San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland. These cities are significantly larger than Stockton. Their region has residential areas in the hills, creating unique firefighting issues. They also have many high rise buildings, international airports, major warehouse areas and densely populated cities. The City of Oakland currently has a supplemental tax (Measure Y, “The Violence Prevention Act”) that augments firefighter staffing levels. Oakland’s fire officials indicate they will be faced with reducing staffing when Measure Y sunsets in 2014. Similarly, the City of San Jose will be reducing truck staffing from five to four in July of 2011.

The Governor is proposing the states firefighting agency, Cal Fire, reduce their budget by \$30 million dollars for the fiscal year 2011/2012. Cal Fire responds to wild fires that frequently endanger many structures and densely populated areas. This will ultimately reduce the seasonal firefighter staffing from four to three on the engines. Table 2 shows a comparison of fire agency staffing locally and in surrounding communities.

Table 2

Engine and truck staffing in San Joaquin County and surrounding areas

City	Population (not including contract cities)	Number of Personnel	Current Staffing Levels
Stockton	291,707	229	4/5
Manteca	69,000	42	3/3
Tracy	82,000	73	3/3
Lodi	63,000	59	3/3

Fresno	494,665	383	3/3
Fremont	214,810	161	3/3
Sacramento	466,488	634	3/3
Oakland	390,727	500	4/4/5*
San Francisco	805,235	1450+	4/5
Modesto	201,165	141	3/4
San Jose	945,942	629	4/5

Population figures from the 2010 census

*3 of 7 truck companies are staffed with five firefighters based on numerous high rise structures and densely populated areas.

Finding: Tracy, Manteca and Lodi Fire Departments safely staff engines and trucks with three firefighters each. Stockton staffs engines with four firefighters and trucks with five firefighters.

Recommendation: Reduce staffing on Stockton fire engines to three firefighters and trucks to four firefighters. Create a relief pool from the staffing reduction that would cover firefighters on leave rather than pay overtime.

2.0 Minimum Staffing Cost Savings

Table 3

Stockton Fire Department Salary and Benefits

	Without Longevity		With Longevity (22 years of service)	
	Base Salary	W/Benefits	Base Salary	W/Benefits
Captain	\$ 91,656	\$ 171,960	\$ 102,204	\$187,764
Engineer	80,724	154,803	90,072	168,732
Firefighter	74,076	144,368	82,608	157,032

Stockton Firefighters are paid a base salary and are eligible for additional monthly salary increases depending on collateral duties, specialty assignments and higher education such as: paramedic certification receives a 6-11% increase in base pay, tiller operator receives a 5% increase in base pay, haz-mat receives a 5% increase in base pay, having a basic or advanced certificates receives a 3-6% increase in base pay, an AA degree and above receives a 3% increase in base pay and the sum of these special pay increases could add an additional \$15,000-\$20,000 to their salary.

Table 4

Minimum Cost Savings

Base Top Step Firefighter Salary and Benefits without longevity	Reduced Positions	Number of Shifts	Minimum Savings
\$144,368	16	3	\$6,929,664

Cost Savings equals Base salary x reduced positions x number of shifts

Finding

The cost savings by eliminating one position from each of the Stockton Fire Department Engine and Truck Companies on all three shifts would be a savings of \$5,000,000 - \$7,000,000.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury believes the residents of Stockton would continue to be safely served with the reduction of one firefighter per engine and truck. This staffing would be consistent with surrounding agencies and counties. This limited action at cost containment would result in a savings of \$5,000,000 - \$7,000,000 annually.

Disclaimer

Grand Jury reports are based on documentary evidence and the testimony of sworn or admonished witnesses, not on conjecture or opinion. However, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing such evidence except upon the specific approval of the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, or another judge appointed by the Presiding Judge (Penal Code Sections 911, 924.1(a) and 929). Similarly, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing the identity of witnesses except upon an order of the court for narrowly defined purposes (Penal Code Sections 924.2 and 929)

Response Requirements

California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to all findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the San Joaquin County Superior Court by August 23, 2011 from the Stockton City Council.

Hand Deliver or mail a hard copy of the response to:

Honorable Robin Appel, Presiding Judge
San Joaquin County Superior Court
222 East Weber Ave, Room 303
Stockton, California 95202

Also please email the response to Trisa Martinez, Staff Secretary to the Grand Jury, at grandjury@courts.san-joaquin.ca.us