

Executive Summary

Project Initiation

In July of 2005, the Stanislaus Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) entered into an agreement with Emergency Services Consulting inc. (ESCI) to complete a Countywide Municipal Service Review (MSR) of the county's fire protection services. The purpose of this MSR is to comply with the service review requirements set forth in the California Government Code Section 56430.

Scope of Work

ESCI agreed to perform the following tasks:

1. Develop a project action plan meeting the criteria of the agreement.
2. Conduct an initial stakeholder's entrance conference.
3. Collect and evaluate data on county fire service systems in accordance with the 20-point criteria outlined in the agreement.
4. Conduct a complete analysis of fire protection within Stanislaus County (County) based on Objectives A – I of the agreement.
5. Attend and facilitate public hearings and meetings as set forth in the agreement.
6. Deliver the drafts, copies, and final report to the LAFCO Commission in accordance with the agreement.

With delivery of this report, ESCI is confirming that the agreed services are completed, or will be completed, in accordance with the contract.

Acknowledgements

ESCI acknowledges and appreciates the cooperation and assistance provided by fire department members, LAFCO Staff, county employees, commission members, and residents of the County over the past year in our efforts to gather and review information to complete this project.

We recognize that information, by its very nature, is often incomplete and that active and dynamic fire agencies tend to undergo a process of continuous change. However, ESCI has made every effort to compile data that is accurate and comprehensive and to ensure that our analysis is based on objective findings. ESCI's evaluation methodology included the process of comparing Stanislaus County fire data with state and nationally recognized standards and professional practices.

Contents of the Report

A brief summary of the report chapters is provided to give an overview of the project.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This chapter includes the history of LAFCOs and their responsibilities. It outlines the scope and content of the report and suggests how this information may be used for evaluating fire protection services. A listing of all fire protection agencies included in this report has been included.

Chapter 2 - Overview of Fire and Emergency Services in Stanislaus County

This chapter identifies the six municipal fire departments and the 14 special districts that provide fire protection services. Background information is provided on the development of fire protection agencies within the area.

Considerable detail is given to current, ongoing cooperative efforts utilized to share resources and provide a higher level of service. Finally, ESCi has identified key economic considerations and community expectations.

Chapter 3 - Description of Fire Protection Agencies

This chapter contains a brief description of each fire agency within Stanislaus County providing jurisdictional boundaries, area served, revenue base, types of services provided, staffing levels, and workload.

Chapter 4 - Growth and Development

In this chapter, ESCi identifies critical growth factors that impact the delivery of fire protection. Each fire district and city area is reviewed based on current population and density.

Chapter 5 - Government Funding

This chapter provides background information about how funding for counties and special districts has evolved over the years. The impact of Propositions 13, 172, and 218 are addressed. The loss of county revenues due to the Educational Revenue Augmentation Funds (ERAF) is identified. All available revenue sources for fire agencies are identified and explained: limitations on such funding are addressed.

Chapter 6 - Principles of Fire Protection Service Delivery

In this chapter, ESCi defines the guiding principles used in establishing fire service delivery. These include the concepts of Standard of Cover, Level of Effort, Level of Service, Effective Response Force, Concentration, and Distribution. Staffing configurations are reviewed along with an explanation of factors dealing with alarm response times. Finally, this section addresses the impact of the insurance rating bureau (or Insurance Services Office - ISO) factors and the impact of federal and state laws on fire service delivery.

Chapter 7 - Current Delivery Systems: Issues, Analysis, Options, and Alternatives

This chapter identifies current issues facing the Stanislaus County fire protection delivery system. A major goal in this review is to evaluate infrastructure needs and deficiencies of jurisdictions providing emergency services throughout the County. A complete review of important considerations is identified.

Chapter 8 - Service Review Determinations and Recommendations

In this concluding chapter, ESCi addresses each of the nine categories LAFCO is required to review by state law. These include infrastructure needs and deficiencies, growth and population projections, financial constraints and opportunities, cost avoidance opportunities, opportunities for rate restructuring, opportunities for shared facilities and resources, government structure options, and evaluation of management efficiencies.(GCS 56430)

This chapter provides both a broad based look at the overall system and a table of the specific department's determinations

In the concluding section, ESCi provides a series of recommendations and options for the Local Agency Formation Commission to consider. These recommendations look toward short- and long-range implications for the enhancement of fire service delivery throughout Stanislaus County.

Summary

To those fire agencies in Stanislaus County much of what is contained in this report is not going to be new information. The challenges faced by the fire service have been accruing for many years. Without specifically naming any one agency, this report presents a theme that needs to be considered. That theme is the essence of why Municipal Service Reviews are developed in the first place. There is a need for concerted, jointly supported effort for these fire agencies to work together to address current and future challenges.

The challenges that face the fire service can be grouped into three different perspectives. They are financial, operational, and political. This was identified by one of the letters ESCi received from a department involved in this process. What is important, in the context of this report, is to recognize that these factors are not independent of each other. They are linked; one is affected by the other. Service levels are a function of having sufficient funds to provide services. The use of resources by fire agencies along with many misunderstandings about how a fire agency performs, especially with respect to response times and staffing configurations, often results in political impacts that effect voter support for a specific course of action.

There have been difficult times in the past for many of the fire agencies. There are going to be difficult times in the future regarding both financial and governance issues. This MSR provides a baseline for those discussions but does not presume to provide a simple solution. Rather, it focuses on the need to increased cooperation, coordination, and commitment of the various entities to craft a solution that meets the fire service's needs in the future.

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Figure 1: Major Recommendations

Recommendations Short Term	Priority A/B/C/D	Time Frame for Implementation	Anticipated Benefits	Responsible Position
<u>Recommendation</u> Have each agency officially adopt <u>levels of service</u> for— rural, suburban, and urban areas	A	As quickly as possible	Clarification of service level	Each fire agency
<u>Recommendation</u> Improve the ability to communicate over time and distance	B	Within 12 months	Improve upon level of awareness	Fire Chiefs Association
<u>Recommendation</u> Improve upon volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition	B	Within 12 months	Improve upon conditions	County government & Fire Chiefs Association
<u>Recommendation</u> Provide more guidance for managing volunteer fire departments to the leadership of these organizations	A	Within 12 months	Improve upon conditions	County government
<u>Recommendation</u> Support the development of a universal countywide development fee to create a future infrastructure for fire stations and equipment	A	In accordance with procedures	Improved service level	All parties
<u>Recommendation</u> Harden stations to allow them to function better in disaster scenarios by installing emergency generators where none exist	C	Within 24 months	Improved ability to perform in disasters	County government
<u>Recommendation</u> Improve public awareness of the capabilities of the fire services	C	Over the next two years	Improved public support	Fire Chiefs Association

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Recommendations Long-Term	Priority A/B/C/D	Time Frame for Implementation	Anticipated Benefits	Responsible Position
<u>Recommendation</u> Update Spheres of Influence based on existing policy and procedure, with consideration on the response polygon that is provided by each agency	A	Over next two years	Improved efficiency	LAFCO
<u>Recommendation</u> Re-align borders and consider district consolidations of some entities based upon level of service and response time criterion	A	Over next two years	Improved efficiency	Individual agencies
<u>Recommendation</u> Create a sub-committee of the Joint Powers Authority (JPA) to create a viable cost sharing agreement for consideration during annexation and detachment processes	A	Over the next year	Improved relationships and increased cooperation	JPA Board of Directors
<u>Recommendation</u> Continue to support the roles of the JPA among all fire agencies; county, cities, and districts to examine common issues and implement planning efforts for future options to be exercised.	A	Immediately	Economies of Scale and better utilization of resources	JPA Board of Directors
<u>Recommendation</u> Plan for major modifications to dispatching system. Consider allowing the JPA to operate a fire-based system	A	Over next two years	Retention of county-wide communications system	JPA Board of Directors
<u>Recommendation</u> Develop a countywide fire and emergency services master plan	A	Over the next five years	Improved clarity of purpose	County Fire Chiefs Association

Final Comments

Throughout this Municipal Service Review process, ESCi has identified fire service delivery factors that are working well for the county and some that are major deficiencies.

In preparing this report, two specific quotes came to mind. The first was by Benjamin Franklin. He stated, "We will all hang together – or we will all hang separately." That is in contrast to modern management guru Steven Covey's admonition, "We always start with the end in mind." Therefore, it should be noted ESCi's primary emphasis in this report is *on working more closely together, to achieve a common goal - instead of becoming more divided.*

The results of this review can be summarized into two categories - making choices and experiencing consequences.

In conducting research for this project, ESCi read the *Project 94 Report*. This was an effort to deal with a broad range of topics, not the least of which was consolidation. Much of what was discussed in that report is being re-reviewed in this document. The feeling of the group was expressed in one statement, ". . . most task group members were strong to very strong toward not having a fire agency associated in any way directly with the county government as whole." That statement is now 12 years old and the problems of continuing to sustain fire protection delivery services is still a topic of discussion.

The creation of the joint power authority (JPA) is an action that can result in any number of changes over the next decade that could resolve some to the issues being expressed. However, the re-organization of fire protection services cannot be mandated. It has to come from reasoned examination of the consequences of the decisions to be made. The MSR process is not about mandating either; it points out that failure to take action will result in the continued evolution of issues and concerns. The consequences of failing to act will likely be measured by the intensity of the system failures that will occur. Avoidance of these system failures is likely to be based more on the level of cooperation and coordination of agencies than the dominance of any one of them.

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