

## *Message from the Chief*

### **Chief's Memo – February 3, 2006**

At the end of this week's "Weekly Memo" is a reprint of a January 27, 2006 article from the Los Angeles Times. In the story, an audit of the Los Angeles Fire Department was released with very serious findings regarding hiring practices, standards, workplace hostility, and discipline.

I want to take this opportunity to share my views on a few related items of importance. These issues have long been emotionally charged issues in fire departments across the country.

I am interested in looking at our department's hiring processes in the near future and I would also like to discuss these issues with management and labor representatives. I feel my experiences in addressing some of these issues have been successful and rewarding, for myself and for those I served. I look forward to that opportunity here.

With that said, I also must express my views about racism, discrimination, sexual harassment, and violence in the workplace. I have zero tolerance for such behavior. I take the legal responsibility I have as Chief to keep the workplace free from such unlawful behavior extremely seriously. From the time I first became a supervisor, I understood the "supervisory liability" I incurred for my actions or inactions regarding inappropriate workplace behavior that I was aware of, or should have been aware of. That same responsibility extends to every supervisor and manager in CDF.

In my 32 years in the fire service, I have always considered the fire service to be my family. While I recognized that the family-like environment was still a workplace, subject to all the workplace rules, I enjoyed the camaraderie and friendship that the fire service can provide. I have also seen some dysfunctional fire house families. I tried to live by one simple workplace rule and "treat my co-workers like I would want my wife, mother, or son to be treated in their workplaces". Keeping these views and actions at the forefront as I live my life has worked well for me, my family, and my extended work-family.



Ruben Grijalva, Chief  
(Acting) Director



## **Legal**

Pacific Lumber (PALCO) Case: The California Supreme Court affirmed that the State Water Board has independent statutory authority to require monitoring and waste discharge requirements on top of whatever mitigation CDF has determined to be sufficiently protective of the environment. This may have some interesting impacts on how we interact with other agencies in timber harvest plan reviews.

## **Fire Protection**

Command and Control/Automation: The CDF Emergency Command Center (ECC) Chiefs met with Headquarters' Fire Protection Operation staff last week in Garden Grove at the CalNena Conference. Major issues discussed included ECC staffing shortages, use of specialized ROSS expanded dispatch modules to support major fires, more minimal ROSS training curriculum for expanded support personnel, telecommunications training for ECC Chiefs, and the new Enterprise Rental Car contract. Several committees were established to assist in finding resolutions to the issues.

## **Resource Management**

In the effort to provide regulatory relief in forest management for the Lake Tahoe Basin, the Board published the 45 day notice for a hearing on regulatory modification to streamline permitting for timber harvesting within the Basin.

The Procedural Guide for Community Assistance Grant Fuel Reduction Projects has been completed and is posted on the Prop 40 website. Project applications are due to the CDF Unit Prop 40 contact by February 15, 2006. Final guidelines relative to advance payments are nearing completion and will be available soon.

## **Management Services**

Management Services met with the Resources Agency on our proposed deficiency package; received approval to move forward; delivered the package and other related fiscal information to the Department of Finance. Finance will review our fiscal condition and deficiency request; a response is anticipated in the next two weeks. If approved, the deficiency package must then be approved by the legislative budget committees.

The CDF Budget Pressures Committee met today and will continue on a weekly basis and identify, determine and recommend where there are current year savings. The Department of Finance is conducting a review of CDF's Emergency Fund and will be inspecting three fiscal years of records over the next several months.

Management Services will begin a series of ongoing quality meetings with the Department of General Services this week to help kick-start movement on CDF capital outlay projects pending completion.

Information on the Enterprise Rent-A-Car process will be released shortly. Please direct any questions you may have to Accounting (Russ Greenlee or Jack Kitay).

## **Technical Services**

Capital Outlay, Property Rights and CEQA were the focus of training last week at McClellan Air Base. The session was attended by approximately 35 Region Administrative Officers, Acting Unit Chief, CEQA and Capital Outlay Coordinators and Technical Services staff. Technical Services is currently working with the Department of General Services on the letter that is due in mid-February to the Department of Finance. Infrastructure Bond legislation is being analyzed and the Capital Outlay Finance letter is being prepared.

## **Audit Faults Fire Dept.**

**L.A. city controller finds a majority of women and minorities say the agency is a hostile place to work. The chief agrees harassment is common.**

By Lisa Richardson, Times Staff Writer, Los Angeles Times  
January 27, 2006

A survey of new recruits and minority and female firefighters at the Los Angeles Fire Department found that the majority believe they work in a hostile environment where sexual harassment, racial discrimination and hazing are rife. Specifically, 87% of African Americans who answered the survey said they either had experienced or were aware of discrimination, and nearly 80% of women said the same.

The audit, released Thursday by City Controller Laura Chick, also found that many firefighters believe discipline in the department is arbitrary and unjust, regardless of race, gender or rank.

Chick faulted top management, including the Fire Commission, for the ongoing problems in the department. In particular she faulted Fire Chief William Bamattre, saying the chief's vision for the department is poorly communicated to middle management and to firefighters in the field.

"The lack of strong leadership from the top management — that means the commission and that means the chief," Chick said. She called for the department to create a separate internal affairs division, similar to those in many police departments.

Bamattre said much progress has been made, particularly in increasing the 3,900-strong department's ethnic diversity, but he agreed that harassment and discrimination remain a part of firehouse culture.

"We support their findings entirely on that, and it's a real challenge," the chief said Thursday. Firefighters know harassment is unacceptable, he said, but that does not stop them from either watching it or joining in.

"Part of the problem is the slow willingness of the fire service — not just our department — to accept that respect in the workplace has become the law now," the chief said.

The harassment and hazing are also fueled by a larger change in firefighting, Bamattre said. Instead of spending most of their time battling flames, firefighters now respond mostly to medical emergencies.

"Eighty percent of our workload is medical, and the skill set we're looking for now is a higher, more academic" one, Bamattre said. Old-school firefighting required bravery, strength, speed and dexterity. The new firefighter requires additional skills, he said. The harassment, Bamattre said, is real.

During his own interviews with female firefighters, he said, many have told him they had experienced sexual harassment but did not report it to him or others in the administration, fearing retaliation.

"I think things have improved, without a doubt. But the work environment, particularly with women, is too slow to change," Bamattre said. Chick also faulted Bamattre for accepting recruits who had not passed the academy's exam.

In 75 cases where officials within the Fire Department said recruits were not up to standards and should not be admitted for training, Bamattre overruled them 45 times and accepted the recruits. About 78% of women and 40% of African Americans among those 45 ultimately were not accepted as firefighters. "What I'm saying is that's a dangerous way to increase diversity," she said. She linked the hazing and harassment in fire stations to resentment about hiring. "What's happened is firefighters in the field feel it is their responsibility to make sure these recruits are qualified" and are using their own methods to "weed out" recruits.

Bamattre said the numbers tell a different story.

Of those 45, nine were women, 10 were African American, 11 were Latinos, 13 were white and two were Asian. They were all within one or two points of passing

the academy exam, he said.

Ultimately, 25 of those who received training passed probation and went on to become firefighters, Bamattre said. "That means there were 25 candidates we would have made a poor decision on without giving them that chance," he said.