

## **Message from the Chief**

### **Chief's Memo – February 4, 2009**

#### ***Last Chief's Memo***

Yesterday I submitted a letter to Governor Schwarzenegger to advise him of my intent to retire from state service to pursue other opportunities.



I have not come to this decision easily, although I have been preparing for it for some time. I truly have enjoyed my time as the 13<sup>th</sup> State Fire Marshal of California and the 13<sup>th</sup> Director of CAL FIRE. “13” has been a lucky number for me. My first date with my wife in 1973 was on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. The time has come for me to spend more time with my family who has sacrificed much to allow me the opportunity to pursue my 34-year career in public safety.

My initial plans to retire in December 2007 were altered by the onslaught of the October 2007 fire siege and its aftermath. I then moved my prospective retirement date back to July 2008. But, once again, fate intervened when the unprecedented June 2008 dry lightning siege struck California. In this unpredictable line of work there is never an ideal time to leave.

However, I am now confident that I can move on to pursue other challenges in the field of public safety knowing that I leave behind a highly qualified team of professionals to continue with CAL FIRE's important mission. The department has been undergoing an eight month process of succession planning at the executive level. If a transition of leadership is to take place at CAL FIRE, it is best to occur well in advance of the peak fire season.

During my tenure as chief of CAL FIRE, we have successfully faced wildfires of historic magnitude. I am grateful to all of you for your dedication, courage, and leadership. I am proud to have been associated with such an outstanding organization and I will cherish the friendships and professional relationships that have been developed. I am proud of the men and women that carry out the diverse and complex mission that provides protection year-round to all Californians.

Our experienced team of leaders at CAL FIRE has had many successes:

- Adopted Wildland Urban Interface Building Standards
- Adopted International Code Council (ICC) Building and Fire codes for CA

- Built strong relationships with local government through cooperative fire agreements delivered in a customer-oriented manner
- Confronted salary inversion and compaction issues
- Filled key leadership positions
- Replaced aging infrastructure at an accelerated rate
- Replaced an aging emergency fleet at an accelerated rate
- Addressed forest practice regulatory responsibilities and the future management of the state demonstration forest system.
- Developed 2-Year Work Plans for every CAL FIRE Program.
- Completed a reorganization that better integrates Fire Protection, Resource Management, and State Fire Marshal responsibilities.
- Clarified the mission of the organization and re branded CAL FIRE's all-risk capabilities,
- Coordinated with other state agencies on statewide emergency responses.
- Made significant progress preparing the next generation of leaders and retaining our talented and diverse workforce
- Ensured that personnel selected for any position were qualified by training and experience.
- Reviewed and updated job classifications (firefighter 1, dispatcher clerks, etc) to ensure appropriate responsibilities and compensation levels
- Maintained aviation capabilities to ensure that CAL FIRE fixed-wing and helicopter fleet is able to meet all necessary response mission needs.
- Prepared necessary reports for the Governor's Emergency Response Initiative for future emergency needs and capabilities.
- Provided innovative use of "Supertanker" aircraft to battle California wildfires.
- Maintained staffing levels at 4-person staffing during peak fire season.
- Developed and rolled-out Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps for State Responsibility Areas (SRA) and Local Responsibility Areas (LRA), working with local government to implement newly adopted Building Standards with the fire hazard severity zone maps.
- Increased defensible space inspections, enforcement, and monitoring of overall compliance.
- Completed State Fire Training Master Plan to improve/standardize fire training for state and local agencies.
- Improved and expanded arson prevention measures with federal, state and local enforcement agencies.
- Created penalty-based funding mechanisms for fireworks enforcement to reduce the use of dangerous fireworks.
- Enhanced program to pursue cost recovery for the department and take enforcement actions where appropriate for large fires where responsible parties can be identified.
- Developed comprehensive action plan to meet the Governor's Climate Action Goals.

- Maximized the use of bond funds to expand and increase urban and rural tree planting.
- Completion of a new management plan for Jackson Demonstration State Forest. Currently reviewing Timber Harvest Plans (THP) with stakeholders (Jackson Advisory Group).

While this is only a partial list of CAL FIRE successes, they were only possible because of our dedicated and talented employees, outreach to and participation by our stakeholders, and partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies.

As I have discussed in the past, leadership is about caring more about others than you do about yourself. People will follow when they know you are working toward common goals and a shared vision. I am confident you will continue to lead as CAL FIRE confronts future emergency and non-emergency challenges.

There are far too many people to thank. But, I must mention a few. First, I want to thank Governor Schwarzenegger for giving me the opportunity to serve in this capacity. His support, for me personally, and for CAL FIRE during the historic wildfires is something I will remember always. He led the State of California through these major disasters with courage, effectiveness, and compassion for our employees and for the people of California.

Secondly, I must thank Natural Resources Agency Secretary Mike Chrisman. He has been a leader, a friend, a mentor, and a supporter. It was his leadership at the Agency level and his support for CAL FIRE through the many challenges we have faced that has been instrumental to our many accomplishments.

Finally, I want to thank my executive team, our managers and supervisors, and the men and women of CAL FIRE. Your loyalty to our organization, your hard work and devotion, and your tireless efforts has greatly benefited the public we serve. We exist to serve the people of California. You have always gone above and beyond the call of duty to meet the public needs. I salute you!

Regards,



Ruben Grijalva, Chief