

# HALF MOON BAY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

## MEMORANDUM

To: Honorable Board of Directors  
From: Pete Bonano, Interim Fire Chief  
Date: March 21, 2006  
Subject: Fire Department Assessment

### Recommendation:

First, establish a policy of pursuing dual tract strategies to ensure the stability of fire services to the residents of the Half Moon Bay Fire Protection District. The two strategies to consider would be to contract out the Fire Department to another agency while at the same time continue our current strategy of consolidation with Point Montara.

Second, direct Staff to prepare a "Request for Proposal" providing fire services to the Half Moon Bay Fire Protection District.

### Background:

Earlier this month I sent each of you an email relating to our current dilemma of firefighters leaving this Department for other opportunities. As this email stated, if the three that San Jose has in their background process leave and considering the nine Firefighters currently in the Academy we will be faced with the potential of over 40% of our firefighters as probationary employees with no experience. This email didn't address the fact that our Fire Inspector has quit, the Fire Chief retired and one Division Chief quit, one of our Administrative Secretaries is retiring in May and we need to fill vacancies in the Volunteer Firefighters ranks. This number of openings would keep any Human Resource Department (which we don't have) busy for several months.

I feel it's important for me to be open and honest with each of you and provide you with my appraisal of the operation. I'm very concerned with the Department's ability to provide a level of service consistent with the Mission of the Fire Service. The Fire Prevention program is minimal at best and is in total disarray. As you all are aware the District is currently contracting with the City of San Mateo for Fire Prevention Services. The San Mateo City Fire Marshal provided me with five pages of deficiencies detailing issues that need to be immediately addressed. Additionally, the Engine Company Inspection Program is

nonexistent, we provide no Public Education Outreach Programs to the Community and there is no ongoing Disaster Preparedness Program.

Firefighters with little experience are placed in positions of operating fire apparatus, and many of the fire Captains have very little fire experience. It's my opinion that someday something serious will occur, either a life-threatening injury or large fire loss due to this lack of experience.

Morale in the Fire Department is low resulting in a culture of lawsuits, grievances and excessive sick leave use. On 3/14 all three stations were staffed entirely with overtime personnel. At times the Department is forced to down staff fire apparatus due to staffing shortages. While there are many shining stars in the workforce, we have our share of firefighters who are unmotivated, disgruntled and well versed at throwing up roadblocks.

With all of this being said, I think it's important for the community and residents we serve to take a hard look at what's going on and what options we have. There are no easy solutions here, we can continue with the consolidation process and fill all of the current vacancies, but then the root problems will still exist. The District can "clean house" and attempt to terminate the problem employees, which is very difficult and would require a lot of money and take years to complete. Or, timing may be right to explore contracting out fire services.

I understand that at first blush contracting out may not be something you're interested in, but I really believe that the Board should look deep inside and ask yourself, "how can we provide a higher level of service? Could another agency do a better job? Is what's currently going on in the best interest of the Community? How long is the organization going to bleed before we say enough?" With all of the current openings in the Department contracting out could be a viable option due to fewer positions to absorb. It's my opinion that contracting out the Department would cost less and provide a higher level of service.