

**SALUD CARBAJAL**  
First District

**JANET WOLF**  
Second District

**DOREEN FARR**  
Third District

**PETER ADAM**  
Fourth District

**STEVE LAVAGNINO**  
Fifth District



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**  
County Administration Building  
105 East Anapamu Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
Telephone: (805) 568-2190  
[www.countyofsb.org](http://www.countyofsb.org)

## **COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA**

January 16, 2013

Governor Edmund G. Brown  
State Capitol, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown,

On July 7, 2011, Assembly Bill X1 29 was approved by the California Legislature and signed into law, establishing a Fire Prevention Fee assessed on owners of habitable structures located within the State Responsibility Area (SRA) to fund CAL FIRE prevention services. On behalf of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, representing the Santa Barbara County residents living within State Responsibility Areas, we want to express our grave concern regarding the imposition and implementation of the new fire prevention fees.

At the December 11, 2012 Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors meeting, and at the Board's request, CAL FIRE representatives provided a comprehensive briefing on the state's Fire Prevention Fee program. Additionally, the Board received information about a variety of legislative and judicial challenges to the SRA Fire Prevention Fee. After lengthy discussion and public comment, the Board voted unanimously to closely monitor the legal challenges and send this letter of dissatisfaction and concern for the following reasons:

- The law authorizing the SRA Fire Prevention Fee lacks clarity as to how the fees apply to specific fire prevention initiatives;
- This bill was passed by the legislature and signed by you with very little opportunity for public input, especially those impacted by the fees;
- The SRA Fire Prevention Fee appears to merely supplant CAL FIRE funding. There will be no new fire prevention programs or projects funded by the SRA Fire Prevention Fee beyond those that had been cut from General Fund in the state's Fiscal Year 2011-2012 budget;
- Additional detail is required for the SRA Fire Prevention Fee grant program, both in application and awards. While there is language in the bill to establish fire prevention grants, apparently the earliest grants will be available is 2017. The current lack of an allocation methodology makes it impossible to evaluate the effectiveness of the fire prevention grant program for improving the safety of Santa Barbara County residents;

- There is no clear basis for the \$150 fee structure. The SRA Fire Prevention Fee is assessed on property owners per habitable structure but is not applied to owners of agricultural, commercial or manufacturing structures, all of which pose a fire protection challenge as well as a potential threat to the wildland in the SRA. Additionally, the SRA Fire Prevention Fee is assessed at a flat rate on all habitable structures without regard to relative risks. The same fee is assessed for suburban density residential properties miles from the wildland-urban interface, as is assessed on large acre properties directly adjacent to or within wildland areas;
- There remains questions about the SRA Fire Prevention Fee being a tax or a fee;
- The SRA Fire Prevention Fee inhibits the ability of local government to raise revenue for their own fire protection services, and
- An exemption is needed from the SRA Fire Prevention Fee for acknowledged and proven fire prevention activities provided by local fire departments protecting the SRA areas.

Santa Barbara County enjoys a unique and strong relationship with CAL FIRE as a contract county. Additionally, County residents are very aware of the importance of robust fire prevention and they actively participate in local fire prevention organizations and programs. The implementation of the SRA Fire Prevention Fee has created confusion and concern among residents. As such, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors strongly encourages you to reconsider the application of this Fire Prevention Fee.

Sincerely,

Salud Carbajal  
Chair, Board of Supervisors  
Santa Barbara County

CC:

Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson, California State Senate, 19<sup>th</sup> District  
Assemblymember Katcho Archadjian, California State Assembly, 33<sup>rd</sup> District  
Assemblymember Das Williams, California State Assembly, 35<sup>th</sup> District  
Matt Cate, Executive Director, California State Association of Counties