

# SANTA BARBARA COUNTY BOARD AGENDA LETTER



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

**Agenda Number:**  
**Prepared on:** 5/12/05  
**Department Name:** Fire  
**Department No.:** 031  
**Agenda Date:** 6/7/05  
**Placement:** Administrative  
**Estimate Time:** 1 hour  
**Continued Item:** NO  
**If Yes, date from:**

---

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** John M. Scherrei  
Fire Chief

**STAFF CONTACT:** Tom Franklin, Deputy Fire Chief  
681-5501

**SUBJECT:** Fuels Crew Proposal

---

## **Recommendation(s):**

That the Board of Supervisors:

- A) Receive a report on the County Fire Department's efforts to mitigate flammable vegetation.
- B) Approve establishment of a 14 person Fuels Crew effective immediately.
- C) Authorize the Fire Chief to enter into agreement with Ventura County Fire for the use of one Crew Carrying Vehicle at no cost.
- D) Adopt a Personnel Resolution adding 2 (two) Fire Captain Staff/Shift (3530/3531) positions, salary range 6336 (\$5,719-\$6,981 per month) effective June 20, 2005.

## **Alignment with Board Strategic Plan:**

The recommendation is primarily aligned with Goal No. 1, An Efficient Government Able to Respond Effectively to the Needs of the Community and Goal No. 2, A Safe and Healthy Community in Which to Live, Work, and Visit.

## **Executive Summary and Discussion:**

The Board of Supervisors recently requested information on the type of programs County Fire implemented to deal with flammable grasses and vegetation. This question was the result of the record rainfall received this winter, followed by a bumper crop of annual grasses and chaparral. Additionally, the question was raised regarding what other measures could be taken to deal with the ever present threat of wildfire to the urban interface areas of the county.

Santa Barbara County Fire Department currently operates several programs to mitigate fire hazards associated with accumulations of dead or flammable vegetation in the rural and urban interface areas of the county.

- The California Fire Plan/Santa Barbara County Wild Fire Management Plan (WMP) is the tool used to document the wildfire situation in the county. The WMP identifies strategic targets for pre-fire solutions as defined by the people who live and work with the local wildfire problem.

- High Fire Hazard Area Burn Permits allow residents within the designated High Fire Hazard area of Santa Barbara County to burn vegetation that has been cut and piled in an effort to reduce the fuel load on their property.
- The Vegetation Management Program (VMP) conducts “prescribed” burns designed to re-introduce the natural effects of fire on the environment, thus reducing the fuel load and avoiding catastrophic fires.
- The County Fire Arson Investigator is tasked through our agreement with the California Division of Forestry and Fire Protection to investigate and prosecute individuals responsible for causing a wildfire by negligent or illegal use of fire.
- Ventura County Crew is based in Ventura and available on a limited basis for brush clearance.
- The Santa Barbara County Public Works Department clears county-owned roadside easements of annual grasses and brush to a distance of 10 feet of each side as well as center medians.
- Cal-Trans clears state owned roadside easements of annual grasses and brush to a distance of 10 feet on each side as well as center medians.

Although the current programs are effective tools in reducing the impacts of flammable grasses and vegetation, there is more that could be done to mitigate the potential damage of wildland fires. A Fuels Crew would have a significant impact in dealing with vegetation management countywide. From 1975 to 1991, County Fire employed a crew to maintain fuel breaks, conduct roadside clearances, assist with the Hazard Reduction Program and fight wildfires. Currently, there are 23 crews statewide (down from 57). The nearest firefighting crews to Santa Barbara County are a federal crew housed at Vandenberg Air Force Base and CDF crew located in Ventura. A Santa Barbara County-based Fuels Crew would enhance the effectiveness of our current programs as well as provide additional firefighting resources. The Santa Barbara County Fuels Crew would work in conjunction with the VMP program in implementing projects that have been identified in the WMP as well as reducing fuels in high fire hazard areas. As the annual grasses die off in spring, the threat of uncontrolled fire is increased. If implemented immediately, the fuels crew could be put to work by July 7, 2005 to reduce the record fuel loads caused by last winter’s rains this proposal is for a 14 person crew operating 7 days per week for 13 pay periods. The total estimated cost for this period is \$390,000. The bulk of these costs are for salaries associated with both regular and extra help employees. Due to the limited performance period, the Department will minimize infrastructure and capital equipment costs by having the crew operate out of Cachuma Lake County Park and will utilize a crew carrying vehicle that will be loaned to Santa Barbara County Fire from Ventura County Fire. During the initial 4 months of this program, the Department will continue to evaluate the feasibility of a limited year round crew.

**Mandates and Service Levels:**

This is not a mandated program.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

The \$390,000 estimated cost of this program would be funded through the use of unanticipated Fire District property tax revenues from FY 04/05. A final budget adjustment will be processed to appropriate funds in FY 05/06 for this program. There are no facilities impacts as the crew will utilize Cachuma Lake County Park for their base operations and will primarily be doing field work.

**Special Instructions:**

Please send a copy of the minute order to Fire Dept., attn. Rose Pueschel

**Concurrence:**

County Executive Office