

CAMBRIA COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT

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September 29, 2017

Honorable Presiding Judge Barry T. LaBarbera
Superior Court of California
1035 Palm Street, Room 355
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

San Luis Obispo Grand Jury
P.O. Box 4910
San Luis Obispo, CA 93403

Re: RESPONSES TO 2016-2017 GRAND JURY REPORT, "Is it Five Minutes to Midnight in Cambria: An Update on the Risk of Catastrophic Fire"

Dear Honorable Presiding Judge LaBarbera,

This letter is the Cambria Community Services District's official response to the Grand Jury report referenced above, dated September 19, 2017.

Please note the following responses to the recommendations contained therein:

Response to Recommendation 1: Fire Hydrant Testing

Cambria CSD Fire Department has had great success in moving forward with this program. We did adopt two new policies regarding fire hydrant maintenance and flow testing. Beginning in the month of June, fire personnel began the systematic process of addressing each and every hydrant within the community. Of the 368 hydrants in our current system, we have been able to complete the testing and maintenance of 51 of those hydrants, just under 14 percent of the total system infrastructure, for an average of over 12 hydrants per month. There are a few important points to remember regarding this program. First, we are working closely with the water department to complete this project. As yet we have not found a single hydrant that was out of compliance or non-functioning. However, we do know that some hydrants may exist that need repair work, risers installed, etc. The Water Department has eagerly expressed an interest in working with us to expeditiously repair or replace any problem hydrants. Second, servicing of these hydrants is entirely dependent upon the availability of personnel balanced against other mandated federal and state fire and life safety requirements that are completed on a daily basis. The priority of this Department is the ready availability of on-shift personnel to respond to any emergency. Therefore, off-duty and reserve personnel are being used to service and test hydrants as they are available. Also, during fire season, we have had numerous automatic aid and mutual aid emergency responses to neighboring jurisdictions. Each time this occurs our staffing numbers are drawn down to minimum levels, which limits the continued availability of personnel. Third, each hydrant takes on average greater than one hour to fully flush and service. It is not uncommon to be limited to three or four hydrants per day, on days that are set aside for this purpose.

Finally, it the intention and commitment of the Fire Department to continue this process until all hydrants have been serviced and flow tested. Once the entire infrastructure has been addressed, a schedule will be developed that will ensure a continued flushing and maintenance program that will capture all hydrants on an every two year basis.

Response to Recommendation 2: "There has been some discussion that a simple expansion of the [2016 California Fire Code et.al] could address the issue of tree removal..."

We agree this should be a continued focus of the CCSD to possibly develop an ordinance that empowers the Cambria CSD Fire Department to enforce the removal of diseased, dead or dying, or dangerous trees. Earlier this year we did adopt the 2016 California Fire Code along with the local amendments. It is our plan to work with District Counsel to further expand and clarify the option of a specific tree removal ordinance. This concept was initially discussed and developed in its infancy by the CCSD's Fire Ad-Hoc Committee. The opinion of the two serving CCSD Board Members on that Committee was that by using existing code provisions we could develop such an ordinance. However, to date, no further work has been done to move this concept forward. Additionally, those two serving CCSD Board Members have recently resigned their positions and those vacancies are awaiting appointment by the remainder of the Board. No additional meetings have occurred; there will need to be two new CCSD Board Members appointed to the fire ad-hoc committee before we move forward.

We also are continuing to explore utilizing existing provisions of State law to facilitate removal of dead trees. Health and Safety Code Section 13870 provides as follows:

"(a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a district board or its authorized representative may issue a written order to correct or eliminate a fire hazard or life hazard.

(b) Any person who has been ordered to immediately correct or eliminate a fire hazard or life hazard pursuant to subdivision (a) and who believes that strict compliance with the order would cause undue hardship may, within 10 days, present a written request to the district board requesting a hearing on and a review of the order. The request shall state the reasons for making the request.

(c) Within 30 days of the receipt of a written request pursuant to subdivision (b), the district board or its authorized representative shall hold a hearing. The board may modify, vacate, or affirm the order."

The following Section, Health and Safety Code Section, 13871(b), provides enforcement provisions relating to the failure to correct or eliminate a fire or life hazard after written order of a district board or its authorized representative, making it a misdemeanor.

We are also continuing to support the blanket tree removal permit provided by the County, and have assisted numerous local property owners. We have worked to simplify the process. Those wanting a diseased or dead tree removed call the Fire Department relating their concerns. A Cal Fire forester is sent to the location and confirms and authorizes the trees removal, issuing a permit to do so at no cost.

Respectfully submitted,



Jerry Gruber
General Manager



William S. Hollingsworth
Fire Chief