



**LAFCO - San Luis Obispo - Local Agency Formation Commission**  
*SLO LAFCO - Serving the Area of San Luis Obispo County*

**TO: MEMBERS, FORMATION COMMISSION**

**FROM: DAVID CHURCH, EXECUTIVE OFFICER (DC)**

**DATE: APRIL 19, 2018**

**SUBJECT: FIRE SERVICES FOLLOW UP: A SURVEY OF SEVERAL OTHER COUNTIES**

### **Recommendation**

It is respectfully recommended that the Commission receive and file this special report regarding the provision of fire services and provide any comments or direction to Staff.

### **Introduction**

At LAFCO's March, 2018 meeting the Commission considered a special report about the Fire Services provided in San Luis Obispo County. This was generated by the current Cayucos Fire District Dissolution application and a desire to better understand the overall service picture. We had presentations from a very experienced group of fire/emergency service professionals: CAL FIRE Unit Chief Scott Jalbert, former Unit Chief and current Fire Safe Council staff Dan Turner, Current Emergency Services Director Vince Pierucci, and Ron Alsop, Current County OES Emergency Services Manager.

The report was well received, however we did not get into a discussion about how other Counties are working through this issue. Staff sent out a brief survey of other LAFCO's which is summarized below and found is found in Attachment A:

### **State Examples**

A brief survey LAFCO's statewide is found in attachment C, with 18 LAFCOs responding to the following questions:

1. *Does your County have County-Wide Fire District (including a CSA)?*
2. *Is the trend in your County to move away from volunteer districts?*

<u>Attachments</u>
<b>A: State-Wide LAFCO Survey</b>
<b>B: San Diego MSR-Executive Summary</b>

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3. *Have you dissolved, consolidated, or formed a fire district since 2000?*
4. *If you have an example of how your County is addressing the provision of fire services that would be helpful!*

Each County has a variety of circumstances regarding fire service. Below is a summary of some of those responses. Also included is a summary of the San Diego LAFCO Municipal Service Review, which helped consolidate fire services in San Diego County. Below is a summary of some of the Counties responses and efforts to date. Attachment A has the entire list of responses to the above questions

Over the years **San Diego County LAFCO** has conducted a number of studies to improve the fire services provided to residents. These studies have included a focused Fire Service MSR and recommendation dissolve certain fire districts and have a regional fire agency provide the service. The Executive Summary is attached to this report. This model does not fit San Luis Obispo County, but it serves to identify the actions that a LAFCO could take to help improve a challenging service situation. Here is an excerpt from the MSR:

*The Municipal Service Review (MSR) for fire protection and emergency medical services within the unincorporated area of San Diego County represents a comprehensive evaluation of the unincorporated region's emergency services system. Within the area reviewed, 28 local agencies are principally responsible for providing structural fire protection and emergency medical services to just under a half million residents. SANDAG forecasts indicate that within the next 20 to 25 years, another quarter million people will be added to the unincorporated area population. Real need for emergency services will increase—along with constituents' expectations for an effective system to provide structural fire protection and emergency medical services. Unquestionably, the region must be positioned to respond to future need. The purpose of this MSR is to evaluate the region's current emergency response systems and to assess the potential of the system to efficiently meet future demands.*

**Butte County** has a County Fire Department that contracts with CAL FIRE for unincorporated coverage for \$15 million/year. Butte has only one very small independent fire district that struggles financially. The County is having trouble affording CAL FIRE and its cost increases that are out of the County's control entirely. The County desires to go a different direction, primarily to control costs and move the fire service costs out of the general fund. Butte is exploring a countywide CSA or perhaps establishing small CSA's to fund enhanced services within specified zones (high fire hazard foothills) that may then be consolidated into a single independent fire district once accepted by the residents. Butte LAFCO also has an existing CSA and could add a fire service power.

**Monterey County** does not have a county-wide Fire District. There are benefits in moving from volunteer to established fire districts. In 2015, Monterey LAFCO approved the divestiture of fire protection powers from the Spreckels CSD and a subsequent annexation of the subject area to a neighboring fire district. The CSD provided fire

service through the Spreckels Volunteer Fire Company (VFC) since 1991. While the VFC was the “official” responder to emergency calls, data showed that the neighboring fire district was the actual first responder to all fire-related emergency calls in the Spreckels area since at least 2000. The Commission approved a consolidation of two FPDs in 2010 and the reorganization previously discussed which included divestiture of fire protection powers and subsequent annexation to a neighboring FPD in 2015. LAFCO is currently working on a fire study which will analyze existing service providers, underserved areas, and communities that are outside jurisdictional and sphere boundaries. We will be coordinating with district and county representatives as part of this comprehensive evaluation.

**Ventura County** has a county wide fire protection district that is a dependent district of the county. It serves the entirety of the unincorporated county and six of our ten cities. In January the Commission approved the annexation of the one of the four cities to the district and we are currently in the protest period. The County does not have any volunteer districts.

**Placer County** does not have a county-wide district but like SLO County has several areas under contract with the county from CAL FIRE. The trend is moving away from the volunteer departments. Placer LAFCo has dissolved a district and consolidated two districts in the past year. Other than those, LAFCO has dissolved a district and the County/Cal Fire absorbed (2005), dissolution in 2001. Placer County is concerned and has conducted financial studies and worked on special tax elections. It could be that LAFCO will looking at several consolidations in the near future. Several small districts are having financial difficulty and their long term feasibility is in question.

**El Dorado County** does not have a county-wide fire district. The District’s would like become full service, but some districts cannot afford to pay their FFs. At best, they may have one paid chief and some admin support. Latrobe FPD was dissolved in 2014. The El Dorado Hills Fire District took on the services which they had been providing via a contract for years. In 2010 LAFCO was asked to administer a report on behalf of the districts and the County to study how well emergency services were being provided. It found that the rural fire districts will need to raise taxes or continue to receive financial assistance from the County in order to continue operating. The County discontinued all aid a couple of years ago. The fire districts are currently exploring a raise in county sales tax as a way to generate more revenue.

### **Possible Ideas for LAFCO**

The following are list of possible actions (for discussion only) that LAFCO might be involved in to help alleviate the fire service issues faced by local communities:

- **Municipal Service Review.** LAFCO is required to update the Sphere of Influence and Municipal Service Review every five years or as necessary. An MSR can be completed for each jurisdiction or focused on a particular service, like fire.

- **LAFCO Special Studies.** The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act allows LAFCO to conduct special studies as the Commission deems necessary to complete its mission. A special study could be completed to analyze the fire service situation in the County. There are consultants around the state that specialize in this topic and the study could be focused on the selected issues and topics.
- **Dissolutions.** In San Luis Obispo County, only two fire districts exist; Cayucos Fire and Santa Margarita Fire Protection District. While Cayucos fire has requested dissolution, Santa Margarita continues to operate.
- **Consolidations.** A Consolidation is the combining of two districts into one. If the two Districts are in favor of a consolidation, LAFCO is required to approve the consolidation. The action is subject to the protest process.
- **District Formation.** A Fire Protection District could be formed to provide services to a community or various communities. Some Counties have formed county-wide fire districts to provide fire services.
- **Activation/Divestiture of a Power.** An application to activate a District's fire authority could be considered by LAFCO. Conversely, a District could request "divestiture" of the fire authority. For example, the County could activate the fire authority of CSA a county wide district to help provide fire services to unincorporated areas. Or, a divestiture would take away the function from a CSD and enable another agency to provide service.

# **Exhibit A**

## **Fire Service in Other Counties A Brief Survey**

Questions	1. Does your County have a County-Wide Fire District (including a CSA)?	2. Is the trend in your County to move away from volunteer districts?	3. Have you dissolved, consolidated, or formed a fire district since 2000?	4. Provide an example of how your County is addressing the provision of fire services.
LAFCO				
Placer LAFCO	No, we have several areas under contract with county from CAL Fire, but not countywide	Yes-not a deliberate effort.	Have dissolved a district and consolidated two districts in the past year. Other than those, we have dissolved a district and the county/Cal Fire absorbed(2005), dissolution in 2001	The County is very concerned, has conducted financial studies, worked on special tax elections. I anticipate in the near future we will looking at several consolidations. We have several small districts that are having financial difficulty.
El Dorado LAFCO	No	They'd like to but some districts cannot afford to pay their FFs. At best, they may have one paid chief and some admin support	Yes, Latrobe FPD was dissolved in 2014. The El Dorado Hills Fire District took on the services which they had been providing via a contract for years.	In 2010 LAFCO was asked to administer a report on behalf of the districts and the County to study how well emergency services were being provided. It found that the rural fire districts will need to raise taxes or continue to receive financial assistance from the County in order to continue operating. The County discontinued all aid a couple of years ago. The fire districts are currently exploring a raise in county sales tax as a way to generate more revenue.
Riverside LAFCO	No	We only have one independent FPD. It has paid staff.	No	The County contracts with CalFire for full fire protection services (largest contract in the State). 20 of the 28 cities contract with the County. The remaining cities, with one exception, have paid professional staff. One remote city has always had a primarily volunteer department.
San Bernardino LAFCO	The San Bernardino County Fire Protection District serves all those areas of the County not provided by an independent district or City.	The county has an established policy to discourage volunteer districts.	In 2008 LAFCO reorganized 32 board governed fire protection districts, county service areas and zones of CSAs into the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District. Since then we have	Staff reports for the five annexations on our website under proposals available on-line. If you wish to review the larger change for SBCFPD, it is available.

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LAFCO			annexed five independent fire providers into the SBCFPD for service.	
Amador LAFCO	We have Amador Fire Protection District as a dependent district under the Board of Supervisors. The formation documents are very vague and unclear about the actual boundaries of the district, but I am told the intention was to have this district provide structural fire protection, etc. to the entire county. We, however, have 3 independent small fire districts.	There is a wish to do so, but insufficient funding.	No, several ideas and concepts to do so but lots of disagreement.	
Yolo LAFCO	No	Hard to say. 4 of our 15 FPDs contract with cities for service but it's been that way for a while (before my time). There's a mix of independent and dependent FPDs.	No	Trying to help the FPDs. The County is not anxious to jump in and provide this service.
Sacramento LAFCO	No	No momentum or resources, tho some rural areas would likely benefit.	No	None

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LAFCO				
Solano LAFCO	We have a combination of City Fire Departments (7) , unincorporated independent Fire Districts (5), and a unincorporated dependent Fire District (1).	Hard to move away from volunteer districts due to the anemic revenue streams	We are currently assessing the consolidation of 2 or 3 unincorporated independent Districts in Solano. On a personal note, I was very involved in the Contra Costa fire districts and the consolidation of 3 Districts into the East Contra Costa FPD from the County Administrator's side back in 2002 (worked with Lou Ann)	We have established a LAFCO Fire Committee to start identifying and qualifying challenges and opportunities. The problem we are encountering is that many of the volunteer districts are very administratively challenged, so it is hard to capture an insightful statistical snapshot.
Ventura LAFCO	We have a county wide fire protection district that is a dependent district of the county. It serves the entirety of the unincorporated county and six of our ten cities. In January the Commission approved the annexation of the one of the four cities to the district and we are currently in the protest period.	We don't have any volunteer districts.	No	

Questions	1. Does your County have a County-Wide Fire District (including a CSA)?	2. Is the trend in your County to move away from volunteer districts?	3. Have you dissolved, consolidated, or formed a fire district since 2000?	4. Provide an example of how your County is addressing the provision of fire services.
LAFCO				
Napa LAFCO	No.	No noticeable trend.	No	Our model of the County contracting with Cal Fire to provide service throughout the unincorporated areas seems to work great. Everyone seems to get along well and there are no significant service deficiencies that I’m aware of. The County of Napa contracts with Cal Fire to provide fire service to the unincorporated areas. Each incorporated city has its own fire department or contracts directly with the County to provide service. We do have a small CSA that doesn’t directly provide fire service, but provides extra funding for enhanced fire services through a special assessment within the Napa County Airport Industrial Area.
Santa Cruz LAFCO	The County has a large CSA that covers more than half the county— everything outside cities and fire protection districts. It provide the revenue for the County to contract with CALFIRE.	In urban areas yes. In rural areas, the volunteer and mixed departments are stable.	No. Our LAFCO denied a formation. Currently, our LAFCO is leading and partially funding a consolidation feasibility study of two urban districts.	See answer #3.
San Mateo LAFCO	No	We don’t have any volunteer districts (Just volunteer 2 or 3 volunteer companies that operate in conjunction with calfire.. We do have one paid call district in a very urban area that is wholly surrounded by a city and has a zero sphere indicating it should be dissolved.	We consolidated two fire districts in 2007. It was a friendly consolidation that was combined with contracting with CalFIRE, so there were issues with CalPERs that made it complicated...	We have one fire district that has requested that LAFCo perform a countywide fire MSR, which we don’t have funding for at this time.

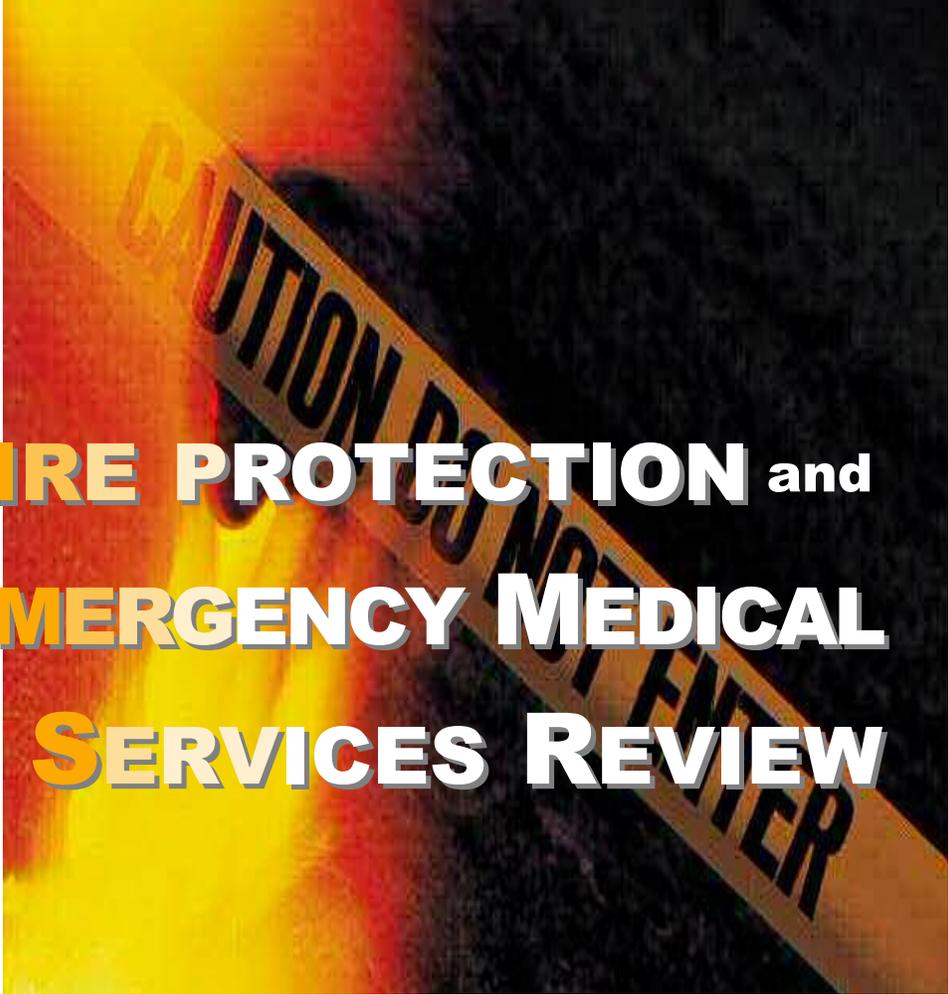
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LAFCO	No	No. The trend oscillates between status quo and Fresno County FPD advocating that volunteer fire companies improve their training to state-mandated minimums. We've used MSRs to recommend that they at least document what training they receive.	No	Fresno LAFCo adopted a fire transition policy that is intended to address the loss of property tax revenue from the FCFPD due to annexations to cities. That policy is supposed to freeze the district's base year allocation and convey that property tax to the district for 10 years after annexation. By 10 years the natural property tax increase is supposed to make the District whole.
Nevada LAFCO	No	Yes	Yes, LAFCo approved a consolidation of two fire districts in 2003. In 2006, LAFCo approved a reorganization that resulted in the transfer of fire & emergency services from one multi-service agency to a fire protection district.	Our county is very supportive of fire services and gives most of its Prop 172 funds to fire agencies. Most of our fire agencies have given up any pretense of being 'volunteer' organizations – they either have professional staffing or provide decent per-call compensation to 'interns.' We have eight dedicated Fire Protection Districts, most of them in pretty solid financial shape. We also have a county water district that provides fire and emergency response to a very poor community that is remotely located. We also have a volunteer fire district that serves a community of 9 (more or less) full time residents (they do ok, thanks to the County making sure they also get a little chunk of the Prop 172 funds).
Imperial LAFCO	No	No	Yes, we have dissolved three fire districts and the County is now providing the service to those areas. No successor district formed.	

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LAFCO				
Monterey LAFCO	No	There are benefits in moving from volunteer to established fire districts. In 2015, our Commission approved the divestiture of fire protection powers from the Spreckels CSD and a subsequent annexation of the subject area to a neighboring fire district. The CSD provided fire service through the Spreckels Volunteer Fire Company (VFC) since 1991. While the VFC was the “official” responder to emergency calls, data showed that the neighboring fire district was the actual first responder to all fire-related emergency calls in the Spreckels area since at least 2000.	Yes. Our Commission approved a consolidation of two FPDs in 2010 and the reorganization previously discussed which included divestiture of fire protection powers and subsequent annexation to a neighboring FPD in 2015.	LAFCO is currently working on a fire study which will analyze existing service providers, underserved areas, and communities that are outside jurisdictional and sphere boundaries. We will be coordinating with district and county representatives as part of this comprehensive evaluation.
Stanislaus LAFCO	No	No	No. There have been contracts since 2000 for shared administration /facilities, but no LAFCO-related actions.	
Butte LAFCO	No	Yes- We have only one very small independent fire district that is struggling.		At present the County Fire Department contracts with CDF for unincorporated coverage for \$15M/year. The County can no longer afford CDF and its cost increases that are out of the County's control entirely. The County desires to go a different direction, primarily to control costs and move the fire service costs out of the general fund. We are exploring a countywide CSA or perhaps establishing small CSA's to fund enhanced services

Questions	1. Does your County have a County-Wide Fire District (including a CSA)?	2. Is the trend in your County to move away from volunteer districts?	3. Have you dissolved, consolidated, or formed a fire district since 2000?	4. Provide an example of how your County is addressing the provision of fire services.
LAFCO				
				<p>within specified zones (high fire hazard foothills) that may then be consolidated into a single independent fire district once accepted by the residents. I also have an idea to "gut and amend" an existing CSA and add a fire service power, this would avoid protest proceedings but still leave a funding vote for the future.</p>

# **Exhibit B**

## San Diego LAFCO Municipal Service Review Executive Summary



**FIRE PROTECTION and  
EMERGENCY MEDICAL  
SERVICES REVIEW**

**Section One  
Unincorporated San Diego**

San Diego Local Agency Formation Commission  
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# Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services Review

## Section One Unincorporated Sub-Region

### **REPORT OF THE SAN DIEGO LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION**

Bud Pocklington, Chairman  
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Donna Frye  
Betty Rexford  
Patty Davis  
Bill Horn  
Dianne Jacob

Alternate Members:

Greg Cox  
Harry Mathis  
Andrew J. Menshek

February 7, 2005

The protection of the public safety is the first responsibility of local government and local officials have an obligation to give priority to the provision of adequate safety services.

California Constitution Article 13, Section 35

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# Executive Summary

## PURPOSE OF FIRE PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES MSR

The Municipal Service Review (MSR) for fire protection and emergency medical services within the unincorporated area of San Diego County represents a comprehensive evaluation of the unincorporated region’s emergency services system. Within the area reviewed, 28 local agencies are principally responsible for providing structural fire protection and emergency medical services to just under a half million residents. SANDAG forecasts indicate that within the next 20 to 25 years, another quarter million people will be added to the unincorporated area population. Real need for emergency services will increase—along with constituents’ expectations for an effective system to provide structural fire protection and emergency medical services.

Unquestionably, the region must be positioned to respond to future need. The purpose of this MSR is to evaluate the region’s current emergency response systems and to assess the potential of the system to efficiently meet future demands.

- **Organization of regional fire protection service providers**

Agencies within the MSR region can be broadly classified as *independent* limited purpose agencies—meaning each agency has a directly elected Board of Directors—or *dependent* agencies, which indicates that districts rely on elected officials from other levels of local government as policy makers. Agencies can be further categorized as **organizations that produce and deliver their own services or agencies that contract for service with another provider. The principle contractor, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), is also responsible for wildland fire protection on 1.2 million acres of state responsibility area within the County of San Diego.**

Regardless of classification, each of the fire protection agencies is autonomous; each local government has the ability to craft unique policies and practices and each agency is empowered, within the limits of State Law, to make independent fiscal decisions. Interdependencies that exist among the region’s fire protection and emergency medical

INDEPENDENT DISTRICTS	PROVIDER
Alpine FPD	District
Bonita-Sunnyside FPD	District
Borrego Springs FPD	District
Deer Springs FPD	CDF
East County FPD	District
Julian-Cuyamaca FPD	District
Lakeside FPD	District
Lower Sweetwater FPD	National City
North County FPD	District
Pine Valley FPD	District
Rancho Santa Fe FPD	District
San Diego Rural FPD	District
San Miguel Con. FPD	District
Valley Center FPD	CDF
Vista FPD	City of Vista
Mootamai MWD	CDF
Pauma MWD	CDF
Ramona MWD	CDF
Rincon del Diablo MWD	City of Escondido
Yuima MWD	CDF
DEPENDENT DISTRICTS	
San Marcos FPD	District
CSA 107 (Elfin Forest)	District
CSA 109 (Mt. Laguna)	District
CSA 110 (Palomar Mtn)	District
CSA 111 (Boulevard)	District
CSA 112 (Campo)	District
CSA 113 (San Pasqual)	District
CSA 115 (Pepper Drive)	City of Santee

service agencies are primarily voluntary as no local governmental agency can exert authority over another. Accordingly, each of the region's 28 fire protection agencies performs planning and funding activities in isolation with no obligation to consider the possibility of duplicating or under-utilizing existing regional resources.

#### **ABSTRACT OF MSR DETERMINATIONS**

The MSR presents 27 determinations in the nine areas required by State Law. Determinations indicate that the unincorporated region's system for providing fire protection and emergency medical services is dysfunctional—characterized by duplicate organizations and redundant layers of management that needlessly consume public resources and limit opportunities to provide enhanced services. The region elects 108 officials to govern structural fire protection; 23 fire chiefs oversee delivery of emergency services from 28 separate, autonomous agencies. Contrast this span of control with such organizations as the Riverside County Fire Department, whose single fire chief manages emergency services over the entire unincorporated area of Riverside County *and* 17 cities; or the Los Angeles County Fire Department, which provides services to 57 cities plus unincorporated Los Angeles County—also with *one* executive position; or perhaps the San Diego County Sheriff, who oversees law enforcement activities for unincorporated San Diego County and nine contract cities.

The performance of individual fire protection agencies in response to daily emergencies and epochal local disasters has been nothing less than heroic. Nevertheless, in the absence of compelling cooperative agreements or inclusive organizational structure, the region's 28 autonomous agencies exist in an environment that results in isolated policy decisions impacting the effectiveness of region-wide service. The region's agencies have not developed a universal response criterion; do not provide a unified command; do not employ unified standards for training safety personnel; and are not able to engage in strategic regional planning that could eliminate redundancies and engender more effective use of resources. Because emergency services are divided among so many agencies—no single authority is accountable for creating and implementing a comprehensive vision for the region.

In spite of the proliferation of fire protection agencies, many unincorporated areas are not included within a public agency that provides emergency services. Approximately 2,500 parcels have been granted some level of development approval outside of a fire protection agency. Annexation of these unserved areas into fire protection agencies is problematic because State Law for allocating property tax revenues among local agencies prohibits a transfer of property tax to fund the additional service area. Residents in some unserved areas have developed volunteer organizations that depend on the vagaries of local fund-raising to keep emergency facilities operational. Other unincorporated areas rely on the largess of neighboring fire protection districts to respond—and absorb costs—or trust that CDF will be available and able to divert resources to structural fires. Within significant portions of the region, inadequate public infrastructure precludes emergency response within the industry-prescribed standards for protecting life and property. Determinations indicate that there is no long-term comprehensive strategy to improve infrastructure.

Determinations conclude that individual agencies have minimal prospects of increasing revenues to enhance the delivery of emergency services. A legacy of voter-approved initiatives and the fiscal limitations placed on special districts by State Law have restricted fire protection agencies to voter approved benefit fees as the only means to substantially increase revenue. Between the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 and the election of 2004, there have been 73 proposals for new or increased revenues placed on local ballots by the region's fire protection agencies; voters approved only 26 of the 73 proposals. Moreover, there is now concern that future elections for new or increased fees may fail because Prop C, which was endorsed by such a large percentage of the electorate in November 2004, has created an expectation that fire protection services can be improved without costs to taxpayers. Options to increase revenues for fire protection and emergency medical services while adhering to the "no new tax" spirit of Prop C do exist, but are within the discretion of the Board of Supervisors or the State Legislature.

The Determinations in this report underscore the fact that the region's bewildering organization of unserved areas and redundant, under-funded public agencies did not evolve spontaneously; it was encouraged and given shape by short-sighted public policy choices that were adopted without a vision of how such decisions would impact public safety.

From the late 1920s, the County of San Diego contracted with the State to bring CDF coverage to the unincorporated area during non-fire seasons. In 1973, at the urging of a County-appointed fire committee, the scope of the CDF contract was expanded to provide structural fire protection to development outside of fire protection districts. In 1974—prior to the passage of Proposition 13—the County concluded that the contract was too costly and moved to phase out support. Unserved areas were encouraged to annex to agencies with fire protection services or form volunteer companies to provide emergency services in the wake of the County's departure. The County assisted the volunteers with start-up grants, public liability and compensation insurance, and dispatching services; however, there was no vision or priority to ensure that adequate safety services were provided to unincorporated area residents. Following the passage of Proposition 13, assistance to volunteer companies was phased-out. By 1982, the County Office of Fire Services was closed, the Board had rescinded the County Uniform Fire Code and financial support for the volunteer fire companies had been withdrawn.

In subsequent years, 11 fire protection districts were randomly formed to provide public agency status to many of the volunteer companies. Local agencies formed after Prop 13 cannot impose their own property tax rate—and are not eligible to share in the property tax revenue allocated to other local agencies. The Board of Supervisors voluntarily transferred a small increment of County property tax receipts to each newly formed agency and district officials—with varying levels of success—sought supplemental funding from district voters. LAFCO Determinations conclude that despite the unincorporated area being characterized by duplicate organizational structure and redundant layers of management that needlessly consume public resources, there is no central authority or cooperative organization capable of developing a cohesive strategy for funding effective emergency services.