

July – August 2024

CHIEF'S MESSAGE

by Chief Eddie Dwyer



To the Mosquito Community

On July 25, the Mosquito Fire Protection District will be hosting the El Dorado County Office of Emergency Services for a Town Hall Meeting, to discuss on-going evacuation planning with community members and county partners.

With the retirement of Chief Jack Rosevear, I was appointed to the position of Interim Fire Chief. For those who may not know me, I was Chief of the department from August 2016- through February 2020. Prior to my return last summer, I assisted Chief Rosevear behind the scenes. I returned to a more prominent position last year as Battalion Chief. My return was simply to assist the department, help train Firefighters and build their skills and competencies. I did not intend to return full time as Fire Chief.

As we all know, plans have a way of changing. As I progressed through the year, I was placing more and more irons in the fire, building on more projects to modernize the Mosquito Fire Protection District, to identify the emergency service needs of the community and then work to focus on those needs. When Chief Rosevear decided he would be retiring in June of 2024, he and I spoke about my returning to the position of Chief. As we did, I asked for his blessing to seek the position, as I would never undercut his authority as Fire Chief. There can only be one head of the department who sets direction, establishes a narrative, objectives and goals, then relying on and empowering subordinates to build their future here.

With any endeavor this takes time and commitment. My commitment to the men and women of this department and the community is what drives me to bring the best First Responder Agency possible. Our firefighters have expressed a great commitment to each other and the community. We are here only to serve. We do not espouse any political agenda. It does not matter your political position, religious persuasion or social position. We are here to serve all residents of this community without question or hesitation to the very best we can.

We have an eclectic force with varying skill levels and backgrounds, from a 44-year Fire Veteran Paramedic, two part time Fire Captain Paramedics, we have some employees whose only experience is their employment here and others who have worked and continue to be employed by CALFIRE on a seasonal basis. We have had 4 members recently complete an intensive Firefighter I & II Fire Academy and have recently hired 6 other Firefighter I & II State OSFM Certified Academy Graduates.

Some may be wondering how we currently are able to hire so many personnel. The answer is, we have been funded by FEMA to take on and train personnel while providing them a very small stipend through a Recruitment and Retention Grant. To serve this community our Firefighters receive a stipend of \$150 for each 24-hour shift. As volunteer personnel, there is no requirement to meet the minimum wage standards. This equates to \$6.25 per hour without benefits. I feel it is imperative

that you understand that your Firefighters loyally serve you to ensure your safety at a moment's notice, while they receive a wage far below poverty level. I also receive a volunteer's stipend in service to this community.

The average Firefighter Salary in El Dorado County is over \$100,000 annually which does not include their overtime and benefit package. The typical base pay for a 24-hour period is estimated to \$1,000 per 24-hour period. This again, is without the addition of mandatory FLSA Overtime, which could bring the employee cost to \$1,500 per 24-hour period. So, for a stipend of \$150, our personnel serve this community at a rate of 10 times less than their counterparts in other County Fire Departments. The dedication your Firefighters show is unparalleled by any other standard.

Some of our Firefighters have come under attack by members of this community. Some of our members have made life mistakes but have striven hard to recover, working under withering insults and personal ad hominem attacks. Yet they continue to serve this community without question for \$150 per 24-hour shift. Some from the community have accused the department of a "Cover Up", in cases where an employee may have been disciplined. Any person with even the slightest knowledge of California Labor Laws will know that personnel matters cannot be discussed with any person who is not in a direct position of authority over that employee and that all disciplinary actions must remain private. What also must be known, is that all Firefighters who have a recognized schedule and receive compensation are entitled to the standards of discipline established in Senate Bill 206, the Firefighter Procedural Bill of Rights, which identifies a specific process for which disciplinary actions, if necessary, must be applied. The standards of privacy apply to all employees whether they are in the public or private sector. I will not violate that right for any reason and I will defend our members so long as they remain committed to the development of themselves and dedicated to this department and this community.

There are many groups in this community from the MVFA, Pilots, SCPOA, Crafters and the MFSC. The latest is our Fire District Auxiliary also known as DAX, who are the fundraising arm of the Fire District. If I forgot any group please forgive me, it is not intentional.

Aside from these community groups, it is understood that there is only one Fire Authority in this community. Established as a special district in 1978 under charter with the State of California, the Mosquito Fire Protection District is the only recognized Fire Authority in this District! Through State Statute, the Fire District is managed by a Board of Directors who in turn, delegate the legal authority of enforcement to one entity. That one entity is the Fire Chief.

The Fire Chief is charged with the responsibility to enforce all state and county fire codes and sets the direction of the Fire District. The Fire Chief identifies emergency response requirements, understands and enforces state and county employment labor laws, works with State Safety Oversight CALOSHA to provide for the safety of employees, sets training standards, and ensures that equipment maintenance is performed in accordance with established local, state and federal standards.

To be clear, there is no other group or council in this community that has the authority for the establishment and operation of emergency services or to coordinate emergency response, establish mutual aid or partner with other local emergency service providers and authorities. The Fire District is the only legal authority that other first responding agencies will recognize to

coordinate with and resolve emergency events. The Fire Chief is the only person in this community which Law Enforcement conveys authority to establish incident management and incident command. It is the Fire Chief who on direction of the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department will establish advanced teams that enter the community to provide for a coordinated community wide or focused street by street evacuation.

Any Council or community group that releases information regarding emergency operation or community evacuation that circumvents the authority delegated to the Fire District, places themselves in a state of civil and criminal liability. Any message distributed by any group or council that creates a state of confusion for the public regardless of intent can face criminal prosecution.

In recent weeks I have received communication from the Mosquito Fire Safe Council requesting they set up an information booth at the Fire Station during the Town Hall meeting. My response was intended to be a positive first step to resolve differences between the Fire District and the MFSC. As I see it, is the responsibility of the Fire Chief to work with all community groups to provide for the betterment and safety of the community. Via email communication I invited the MFSC to set up a booth, my only request was that they fill out a Station use form as we have asked all participating Community Groups to do including County OES. Since this is a Fire District function, all insurances requirements identified on the form were waived.

This information was given via email, then again verbally in open forum at the June Fire District Board meeting. After subsequent emails, the MFSC decided they were not going to set up a booth. As I could see the importance of their presence at the July 25th Town Hall, I nearly begged them to attend. Again, they refused stating that the El Dorado County Fire Safe Council recommended that they not attend. I then contacted the El Dorado County Fire Safe Council, advising Ken Pimlott that all insurance requirements were waved because this is a Fire District function and that the Fire District only needs the Station Use Form filled out to formally bring the MFSC under the umbrella of OUR insurance, thus providing indemnification. Ken and I came to understanding that the MSFC should attend and that he would advise the MFSC accordingly. Members of the MFSC filled out the Station Use Form and hopefully will be present at the Town Hall meeting. As I see it, communication and cooperation with all groups and councils will help this department serve this community better.

In recent days the MFSC has released information about the Town Hall meeting. I applaud this action and greatly appreciate it, though it was not done in coordination with this office. The MSFC for whatever reason, had chosen to circumvent the position of the Fire Department in their messages by completely omitting the Mosquito Fire Protection District, trying to establish themselves as the authority with jurisdiction. It must be understood, there is only one elected board of authority and that is the Board of Directors of the Mosquito Fire Protection District.

Since my return to this Fire District, I have made attempts to work with the MFSC, maintain an open communication channel and asking them to participate at the Town Hall meeting. I believed this would be a good first step to extend an olive branch. At first, I believed their actions of omission were unintentional, but still it continues. The messages given by the MFSC has caused considerable confusion and as of today, we have received 53 calls from residents based on the information they have read on social media, asking why they did not receive a flier regarding the Town Hall meeting and wondering why they will not be evacuated.

With all that I have on my plate, I was greatly appreciative that MFSC had taken up the task to further distribute the Town Hall information. Because of their effort, I pulled back to prevent any miscommunication or duplication of effort. While I believe getting the information out was a good thing, it must be understood the MFSC is an appointed council with no authority. They are a participant to distribute Community Fire Safe information only, they are not a partner in the Town Hall for evacuation preparedness. This distinction is important, and I still highly recommend they set up an education booth for the meeting.

I am asking That the Fire Safe Council realize what is past is past. Cooperation will only benefit our residents. It also must be known there has been considerable antagonism between the MFPD and MFSC. This must stop so that the MFPD can better serve the WHOLE COMMUNITY and the MFSC can be successful in their mission. My office remains open to assist the MFSC to provide for a greater Fire Safe presence, but I can only do so if there is cooperation across the board.

With this letter it is very possible I am placing my employment in jeopardy. I also have no doubt that social media channels will be on fire. There will be positive, and hate filled posts. None of which I will read as I do not participate in social media.

I just want this community to know I serve at the direction of the Board of Directors. I serve because I see value in what we do, and I believe the MFPD continues to provide the best emergency services available. I have given my all since my return, including for the first time getting our congressman into our community to see its beauty and understand its very real threats. Congressman Kiley has pledged his support for this district, and we will continually work with his office for the betterment of all our residents.

MY ONLY desire for this letter is to give the community a sense of understanding for your Fire Department. We have great challenges that must be overcome and having poor relationships with residents, groups and councils will not better this Fire District, or increase our ability to respond to your needs.

Emergency service messages must only come from this office and in coordination with our partner agencies in the county. A spirit cooperative communication channels that must be maintained. Cooperation, like communication, is a two-way street and I will do all I can to keep those channels open to provide the best service possible.

Eddie Dwyer,

Fire Chief (Int) EFO, BS, EMTP