

1999 - 2000 Ventura County Grand Jury Report

Oxnard Harbor District

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Background

A protocol visit was made by the Ventura County Grand Jury on October 18, 1999 to the Oxnard Harbor District, Port of Hueneme. The general meeting presentation was chaired by Kam Quarles, Director of Marketing and Trade Zone Services, followed by a tour of the wharf area.

The Port of Hueneme is on an aggressive expansion program, and in 1997 acquired adjacent property from the U.S. Navy. Other underutilized Navy property is shared.

The Port of Hueneme is the only deep-water port between San Pedro and San Francisco. More than 1,000,000 tons of goods pass through the port annually. This volume translates into over \$300 million in benefits to Ventura County, at no taxpayer cost. There are 2700 jobs directly or indirectly related to the port's operations.

The major products shipped throughout the port are agricultural and essential materials for farm production. The Port of Hueneme is also one of the most active California ports for the import and export of cars and other rolling stock.

The Harbor District policies are set by a five-member Board of Commissioners. Each Commissioner is elected to a four-year term.

The District receives no taxes for its operation, and, in fact, it shares revenues with the City of Port Hueneme.

Over \$3 billion in cargo value moves through the port each year. Top trade partners include: Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany and Japan.

Methodology

The Grand Jury, as part of its oversight responsibilities, chose to raise the issue of fire safety in the port. A protocol visit was also made to the Ventura County Fire Protection District. When questioned about shipboard firefighting at the harbor, Fire District personnel felt there was inadequate equipment and training to respond

to shipboard fires. Subsequent questions were asked of the Harbor District, as to their procedure in the event of shipboard fire. Harbor District personnel responded that they would call the Fire Department.

Members of the Ventura County Grand Jury met with Fire Chief Bob Roper on March 3, 2000, and with Bill Buenger, Executive Director of the Oxnard Harbor District, on March 17, 2000, to offer assistance in reaching an agreement to provide proper firefighting and equipment.

Findings

A proposal was submitted by the Fire District to the Harbor District in 1994, but no agreement was reached. A fire fighter was sent to El Paso, Texas, for specialized training in shipboard fires, with the understanding that he would return and train other firefighters. When his training was completed, he obtained employment elsewhere, without sharing his expertise. There was no progress in deliberations for the next five years. The Grand Jury felt that the safety of the community in the proximity of the Port was paramount, and the continuing stalemate was unsatisfactory.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury is pleased that dialogue between the Fire District and the Harbor District has resumed. Mr. Buenger and Chief Roper have met, and are in the process of forming a cooperative partnership and a plan of action to include mutual aid from neighboring ports, should a shipboard fire occur. Assistant Chief Ken Maffei has been assigned as the Fire District liaison. Plans are being made to build a new tug that will deliver a minimum 1,500 gallon-per-minute flow rate with preference given to a pump that would deliver 5,500 gpm. The Fire District will work with the tug contractor as to specific design criteria.

Recommendations

The Ventura Grand Jury recommends:

- R-1 That open dialogue between the Oxnard Harbor District and the Ventura County Fire Protection District continue;
- R-2 That an understanding be reached as soon as possible on the chain of command for fighting a fire aboard ship, particularly if the ship is registered under foreign flag;
- R-3 That the cooperative partnership referred to earlier be formalized in a written agreement.

Responses Required By

Oxnard Harbor District (R-1, R-2, R-3)

County Fire Department (R-1, R-2, R-3)

