

# **FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY CHANNEL ISLANDS**

## **Background**

The State of California provided fire and rescue service to the Camarillo State Hospital until it closed in 1997. Due to the remote location of the hospital from the Fire District's locations at the time, Camarillo State Hospital provided engines, emergency and fire personnel on location 24 hours a day, seven days a week (24/7).

When the California State University system obtained the Camarillo property, it contracted with the Ventura County Fire District (Fire District) to provide part-time fire and rescue services to California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI). That agreement was later converted to a full-time contract. To service the full-time contract, the Fire District leased an electric vehicle (\$12,000.00) to meet the "green campus" environment and obtained a new fire engine (\$280,000.00) sized to fit the existing on-site fire station. This contract, which cost CSUCI approximately \$1.2 million per year, provided the campus with 24/7 fire and rescue service. Late in the year 2000, citing budget issues and the fact that the Fire District was relocating the Camarillo Airport fire station to Los Posas Road, CSUCI terminated the contract.

## **Methodology**

The Grand Jury visited CSUCI and was briefed by the President and his staff on the status of the University, its plans and its problems. The Chief of Police at CSUCI was also contacted. The Grand Jury also spoke with the Ventura County Fire Chief and discussed his opinion of the status of CSUCI fire and rescue service. The Grand Jury also received information on CSUCI Community Development Area Specific Reuse Plan adopted by CSUCI Site Authority (Site Authority) from the County Executive Office and spoke to the Site Authority Chairman.

## **Findings**

- F-1 CSUCI campus is State property and as such neither contributes to the Fire District nor pays County property taxes, and it is not part of the Fire District's population base.
- F-2 CSUCI established a volunteer fire services department when it terminated its contract with the County. At the present time there are no fire engines or fire personnel on campus. However, the CSUCI Police Chief indicated that there will be a small fire engine on campus, four paid fire captains, and volunteers from the training facility in Ventura County who will use hours worked at CSUCI for certification.
- F-3 There were no in-depth discussions between the Fire District and CSUCI when CSUCI decided to terminate its contract with the Fire District.

- F-4 The CSUCI decision to terminate its contract and establish a volunteer fire department appears to have been budget-driven as the new volunteer department will cost approximately one-quarter of the \$1.2 million contract with the Fire District.
- F-5 The Fire District is legally obligated to respond to emergency calls from CSUCI and will respond to the campus site. However, the Fire District is not legally obligated to construct and staff a facility on the campus site.
- F-6 The nearest Fire District station's crew, Station 50, is not always available at the station for response to CSUCI. If the crew is available, the response time from Station 50 to CSUCI is a minimum 10-minute drive. Response times have become an industry benchmark for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) (3-5 minutes by the American Heart Association) and fires (5-7 minutes by National Fire Protection Association).
- F-7 County response requires certain access, water flow and fire protection features required by local ordinances from which CSUCI is exempt because it is a State entity.
- F-8 The Fire District is obligated by contract with the California Department of Forestry to protect the wild lands surrounding CSUCI.
- F-9 A separate 911 emergency phone system has been established by CSUCI.
- F-10 Streets and addresses at the Campus site have been renamed by CSUCI without reference to the County process.
- F-11 Due to State fire code requirements, new residential buildings (except apartments) have fire alarms but not sprinkler systems. Apartments are required to have both.
- F-12 The Ventura County Fire Chief encouraged CSUCI to provide sprinklers in every structure to limit the need for on-site fire suppression staffing. The basic price of sprinklers (approximately one dollar per square foot) for proposed housing could offset some annual staffing costs for fire fighters.
- F-13 As of March 2003 at the campus site there are 100 new apartments, 71 new condos/townhouses and 36 new single-family dwellings.
- F-14 Old hospital buildings being used by CSUCI have sprinkler and fire alarms and are of thick concrete construction.
- F-15 The Site Authority was created to facilitate and provide for the financing and support of the site for use as a campus for CSUCI. The Site Authority is still holding fire protection meetings at CSUCI.
- F-16 The Site Authority proposes to develop the Community Development Area land for up to 900 housing units and up to 350,000 square feet of research and development facilities consistent with the Campus Master Plan.
- F-17 There is no hazardous materials protection plan at CSUCI and no agreement with the County for such protection. There is no "rescue" equipment for victims of inhalation from toxic gasses and smoke located at the CSUCI campus site.
- F-18 EMS normally constitutes 75% of the Fire District's call load. CSUCI Police Chief indicates that 9 or 10 police officers are EMS certified. CSUCI plans to acquire an Automatic Electronic Defibrillator (AED).
- F-19 In addition to residents at CSUCI, many students and personnel at CSUCI are residents of Ventura County and could be affected by substandard fire protection.

## Conclusions

- C-1 CSUCI has a clear duty to its present and future population to explore every possibility for assuring the safety of the population and to affect a safe fire and emergency environment and failed to do so. (F-2, F-3, F-4, F-6, F-7, F-9, F-10, F-11, F-12, F-13, F-14, F-16, F-17, F-18, F-19)
- C-2 Development and construction at the CSUCI campus does not and will not, as presently planned, meet County standards created after the devastating Arboles fire in the 1980s. (F-7, F-9, F-10, F-11, F-12, F-17, F-18)
- C-3 The distance of Fire Station 50 from the CSUCI campus and the occasional unavailability of the Station 50 crew on other missions increase the danger inherent in late response to emergency calls. (F-2, F-5, F-6)
- C-4 In light of CSUCI's decision to terminate its contract with the Fire District, the obligation of the Ventura County Fire District to respond to emergency calls from CSUCI constitutes an unfair financial imposition and an increased risk on County residents living in the Fire District. (F-2, F-4, F-13, F-16)
- C-5 The separate 911 call system will cause delays in response because calls to the CSUCI dispatch will have to be relayed to County dispatch on those occasions involving needed assistance from the County. Cell phone calls will go to the California Highway Patrol dispatch to be forwarded where appropriate. (F-9)
- C-6 Dedicated street names and conflicting address blocks may result in confusion and delay from the renaming of streets and addresses at CSUCI. This new street/mapping information is not readily available to outside response agencies through usually consulted sources. (F-10)
- C-7 The Insurance Services Organization rates jurisdictions for fire insurance rates and substandard fire response time may increase insurance premiums and, therefore, may discourage high-tech businesses from establishing themselves on campus. (F-12, F-17)
- C-8 High-tech business operations and courses being planned at CSUCI may require a need for emergency response for immediate mitigation, decontamination and evacuation. (F-6, F-17)
- C-9 The remote campus location dictates a need for advanced life support service or paramedics, which can promote better victim outcomes. (F-17, F-19)
- C-10 The Ventura County Grand Jury has determined that fire, rescue, and emergency response under current response time frames and operations at CSUCI are not within industry standards to protect people and facilities. (F-2, F-4, F-6, F-7, F-12, F-16, F-17)
- C-11 The Grand Jury has also concluded that Ventura County is being unfairly required to subsidize CSUCI; drawing emergency resources away from the existing Fire District service areas without compensation. Requests for Fire District services will proportionally increase with future population and facility increases at CSUCI. (F-13, F-16)
- C-12 The distant location from the existing Fire District station dictates that some type of essential public service (fire, rescue, and emergency response) be located at the CSUCI site. (F-6, F-17, F-18)

### **Recommendations**

- R-1 CSUCI make the safety of its population its number one priority and not let cost considerations drive the decisions to be made.
- R-2 CSUCI reconsider its decision to opt out of the Fire District.
- R-3 CSUCI reconsider the requirement for sprinklers in all its proposed housing.
- R-4 CSUCI and the Site Authority resume serious in-depth discussions with the Ventura County Fire Chief to resolve the problems inherent in the situation as it is now evolving.
- R-5 As a minimum, CSUCI, the Site Authority and the Fire District create a funded on-site emergency response provider (fire, rescue, and emergency response) to meet the industry's minimum response benchmarks.

### **Responses Required**

Ventura County Fire District (R-4, R-5)

CSUCI Site Authority Board (R-4, R-5)

### **Responses Requested**

California State University Channel Islands (R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5)

State of California Fire Marshall (R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5)