



# VENTURA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

- **GEOFF DEAN**  
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June 24, 2014

RECEIVED

JUN 26 2014

The Honorable Brian J. Back  
Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California  
County of Ventura  
800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009

VENTURA COUNTY  
GRAND JURY

Subject: Grand Jury Report: "Firefighting Air Assets: The Camarillo Springs Fire"  
Dated May 14, 2014

Dear Judge Back:

This letter is in response to the Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations pertaining to the Sheriff's Aviation Unit's staffing, fleet composition, and aerial firefighting capabilities.

## **FINDINGS**

**Finding: FI-03** – *The VCSD helicopters are between 39 and 45 years old and are legacy aircraft. Parts are becoming scarce for these helicopters. The practical remaining lifespan of these helicopters is about ten years (FA-09).*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office agrees with the findings related to the age of the VCSD helicopters, as well as the availability of parts for the helicopters. However, the Sheriff's Office does not believe the practical remaining lifespan of these helicopters can be clearly defined. VCSD helicopter maintenance staff predicts that parts and vendor support will continue to be available for these helicopters for at least another ten years, which suggests the lifespan of the VCSD helicopters may extend well beyond ten years.

**Finding: FI-04** – *There is a need for additional and newer helicopter capabilities for the VCSD. There are no low-cost new or used replacement helicopters available (FA-09, FA-10).*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office agrees with the findings.

**SPECIAL SERVICES**

5177 Camino Ruiz  
Camarillo, CA 93012  
(805) 383-8791 Fax (805) 389-6549

**PATROL SERVICES**

2101 East Olsen Road  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360  
(805) 494-8260 FAX (805) 494-8295

**DETENTION SERVICES**

800 South Victoria Avenue #3400  
Ventura, CA 93009  
(805) 654-2305 FAX (805) 654-3500

**SUPPORT SERVICES**

800 South Victoria Avenue #3300  
Ventura, CA 93009  
(805) 654-5134 FAX (805) 677-8715

**Finding:** **FI-05** – *Because of the age of the fleet, pilots and mechanics experienced with these helicopters are becoming harder to find (FA-09, FA-10)*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office agrees with the findings.

**Finding:** **FI-06** – *The VCSO lacks an adequate number of helicopter mechanics to maintain their fleet (FA-10).*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office believes the Grand Jury's finding (FI-06) is unclear. To clarify our position: VCSO helicopters are maintained to meticulous standards and the VCSO Aviation Unit has an excellent safety record. However, repairs and routine maintenance could be accomplished faster with the addition of maintenance staff to the Aviation Unit.

**Finding:** **FI-07** – *When all current helicopters are operational, there is an immediate need for one additional pilot for the VCSO (FA-14).*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office agrees that the addition of a fourth pilot to the Sheriff's Aviation Unit would provide greater scheduling capabilities and flexibility for the air crews. It would also increase the Unit's aerial response capabilities in the event of a major incident or event requiring Aviation Unit resources.

**Finding:** **FI-09** – *The Bell Long Rangers helicopter refurbishment program is not adequately funded nor staffed (FA-12).*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office agrees with the findings.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Recommendation:** **R-01** – *The Grand Jury recommends that the VCSO hire at least one and probably two helicopter mechanics as soon as possible (FI-05, FI-06).*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office agrees with the recommendation and has already initiated a cooperative plan with the Ventura County Fire Protection District to fund the addition of a helicopter maintenance technician for the Sheriff's Aviation Unit.

**Recommendation:** **R-02** – *The Grand Jury recommends that the VCSO hire an additional helicopter pilot (FI-07).*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office agrees with the recommendation and has already initiated a cooperative plan with the Ventura County Fire Protection District to fund the addition of a helicopter pilot for the Sheriff's Aviation Unit.

**Recommendation:** **R-03** – *The Grand Jury recommends that the BOS commit the necessary resources for the expedited completion of the Bell 206 L-3 Long Ranger refurbishment (FI-09).*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office agrees with the recommendation and has already initiated a cooperative plan with the Ventura County Fire Protection District to fund the completion of the refurbishment of the Bell Long Ranger helicopter.

**Recommendation: R-05** – *The Grand Jury recommends that the BOS establish a capital expenditure fund, added to yearly, designated for the replacement of the legacy aircraft within the next ten years or when appropriate aircraft become available. The unavailability of the Huey helicopters leaves only the next generation of helicopters, possibly Blackhawks, as replacement for the Hueys. The cost for these helicopters (acquisition, maintenance mechanics, and pilots) will be significantly higher than the County has experienced using Hueys (FI-03, FI-04, FI-05, FI-08).*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office agrees with the recommendation and has already initiated a cooperative plan with the Ventura County Fire Protection District and the Chief Executive's Office to establish a capital equipment replacement fund; the purpose of which is to fund (partially or wholly) the purchase of replacement helicopters.

**Recommendation: R-06** – *The Grand Jury recommends that the BOS fund a new replacement helicopter for the VCSO for use as a dedicated search and rescue vehicle (FI-04, FI-08).*

**Response:** The Sheriff's Office agrees with the recommendation. With marked improvements in technological capabilities, reliability, fuel economy, and maintenance intervals; we believe a modern, dedicated search and rescue helicopter would vastly improve the capabilities of the Sheriff's Aviation Unit and therefore the services provided to the residents of Ventura County. The Sheriff's Office has been exploring options for the purchase of a new search and rescue helicopter.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this Grand Jury report. If additional explanation is needed, please feel free to contact Assistant Sheriff Gary Pentis at (805) 383-8784.

Sincerely,

  
Geoff Dean  
Sheriff

Cc: **Foreperson, Ventura County Grand Jury**  
Assistant Sheriff Gary Pentis  
Frank Chow, CEO Analyst  
Captain Chris Lathrop