



May 18, 2025

TO: All Los Angeles City Fire Department Members

SUBJECT: LAFD BUDGET CUTS – THREAT TO FIREFIGHTER SAFETY

**From Hero to Zero in 4 months:**

On Friday, May 16, 2025, the Los Angeles City Budget and Finance Committee made up of Councilmembers McOsker, Yaroslavsky, Blumenfeld, Hutt and Hernandez told the members of the LAFD that their lives are expendable, and they are not interested in their safety and survival while we save lives and property as an LAFD Firefighter.

They communicated this by voting to forward the recommendation to cut the LAFD budget and eliminate 42 Emergency Incident Technicians. They are cutting the very people that work hand in hand with Incident Commanders in tracking where you are when fighting a fire and assist in running a Mayday when the crap hits the fan and you are missing, downed or trapped.

The fate of the LAFD and your safety and survival are now in the hands of the full City Council and the Mayor as the budget goes to them this week for final approval. The Mayors original balanced budget did not include the elimination of EIT's; however, the Budget and Finance Committee slipped it in at the last minute. Yes the City is in dire financial circumstances; however, Firefighter lives should not be used to balance the budget and add back to the graffiti abatement program or restore 1 million for Represent LA, which provides legal defense of immigrants facing deportation or other enforcement actions (requested by Councilperson Hernandez).

The bad news is if the recommended cuts to the LAFD are passed, your safety and survival at emergency incidents and structure fires are at risk due to the elimination of the EIT that is responsible for tracking where you and your company are at a structure fire/brush fire and assisting the Chief in running a Mayday incident in the event you are missing, downed or trapped.

The good news is that if you are killed, your loved ones (wife, significant other) will receive your pension and if you are critically burned like the Firefighters at Boyd St, Workers Compensation will pay your medical bills. No sweat for the City Council and nothing for them to worry about. Additionally, the LAFD is keeping the two Chiefs (AC Crowley and BC Guggenheim) as the Wellness Chiefs, vs. utilizing that money for EIT's.

Politicians have short memories, but we the LAFD remember. In 1998, EIT's were cut and that was a documented contributing factor in the death of Engine 57 Captain Joe Dupee. EIT's have been a critical part of successful Firefighter Mayday Rescue incidents including the 2020 Boyd Street fire where 9 Fire personnel were critically burned, 2023, South Los Angeles Victory Baptist Church collapse, 2007 A/O through the roof successfully rescued and many more Firefighter Mayday incidents.

In January 2025, the Mayor and every Councilperson was praising the heroism and actions of the LAFD during the Palisades fire, the largest, most destructive fire in the history of the City of Los Angeles. Since that time, many Firefighters who worked at the Palisades fire for 3-5 days straight have shown elevated blood levels of carcinogens.

Four months later, those same politicians are now cutting the LAFD and eliminating a fellow Firefighter whose main responsibility at a fire is to track where you are in the event you suffer an emergency and are missing, downed or trapped. Politicians are temporary; but their policies can have lasting effects

Even though the Mayor and City Council may cut the very people (EIT's) that assist in ensuring your safety at fires, the good news is if you develop a debilitating respiratory illness or cancer because of the Palisades fire, you will be covered by Workers Compensation.

We should be asking how the EIT's came up on the chopping block. Interim Fire Chief Villanueva informed the Budget and Finance Committee during a hearing, that eliminating the EIT's would "come back and bite us". Letters have been sent to the Mayor, City Council and the Fire Commission with a detailed explanation of the 1998 EIT budget cut, the connection to the death of Captain Dupee and the duties and responsibilities of an EIT. In short, they know how valuable EIT's are, yet they are still willing to cut them and gamble with our safety and our lives.

In 1998, when EIT's were eliminated, Pat McOsker, the brother of current Councilman Tim McOsker was the President of UFLAC and very supportive of and assisted the Mayor in eliminating EIT's during a very tough budget year for the LAFD. It was no secret that Pat McOsker (then UFLAC President) despised Chief Officers and had no problem recommending the elimination of the EIT, a partner to the Chiefs. Fast forward to 2025 and Tim McOsker as a member of the very powerful and influential Budget and Finance Committee supports the elimination of EIT's. Go figure how he knew to cut them.

One must wonder how that recommendation made it to Matt Szabo the CAO and Sharon Tso, the CLA, both advisors to the Budget and Finance Committee. Neither the Mayor, the Fire Chief or anyone on the Fire Department budget team recommended cutting EIT's from this budget. How did Mr. Szabo even know about EIT's, and whether they should be cut. This needs to be investigated.

In closing, unless the Mayor and or City Council act, EIT's will likely be eliminated and our workplace, the fireground will become much more dangerous than it already is. We swore an oath to protect life and property and if necessary we willingly sacrifice our safety and place our lives in jeopardy for strangers. Will we all continue to feel that way knowing that the Mayor, and City Council do not have our safety, our well-being, our family's well-being and our back?

Take care of each other, take care of your family and be safe.

**BOARD OF FIRE  
COMMISSIONERS**

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**GENETHIA HUDLEY-HAYES**  
PRESIDENT

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**NEVERLY ANN HILL**  
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT II

**CITY OF LOS ANGELES**

CALIFORNIA



**KAREN BASS**  
MAYOR

**FIRE DEPARTMENT**

—  
**RONNIE VILLANUEVA**  
FIRE CHIEF

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May 10, 2025

Honorable Karen Bass, Mayor, City of Los Angeles  
City of Los Angeles Budget and Finance Committee  
Councilmembers, City of Los Angeles, Council Districts 1-16  
Ronnie Villanueva, Acting Fire Chief, Los Angeles City Fire Department  
Board of Fire Commissioners, Los Angeles City Fire Department

RE: Proposed removal of Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD)  
Emergency Incident Technicians

Honorable Mayor, Councilmembers, Fire Chief and Board of Fire Commissioners:

This letter is being forwarded from active and retired Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD) Chief Officers, Captains and Firefighter/Emergency Incident Technicians:

On May 7, 2025, Mr. Matt Szabo, City Administrative Officer transmitted Inter-Departmental correspondence to the Budget and Finance Committee. The Subject of the correspondence was "City Administrative Officer – Potential Savings In Large General Fund Appropriations" (attachment 1).

The CAO recommended that the Budget and Finance Committee consider implementing the following reduction in the Los Angeles Fire Department:  
*Fire Department – Eliminate all 42 Emergency Incident Technicians (\$7,418,354).*

Active and retired Chief Officers, Captains and Firefighter/Emergency Incident Technicians urge you not to approve the recommendation to eliminate LAFD Emergency Incident Technicians.

Imagine if a recommendation had been made to eliminate all Deputies assigned to a council office. A review of council districts show approximately 15 Deputies assigned to a council office, in addition to a Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff, Communications Director, Deputy Director of Communications, Communications Deputy, Digital Communications Deputy, and many other more staff persons, all who we are sure are critical to the efficient functioning of the council offices.



Mr. Szabo is asking to remove 50 percent of a Battalion Command team. There are two persons assigned to a command team, a Battalion Chief and an EIT. Remove the EIT and it is like you are removing the right arm of the Battalion Chief who is charged with the responsibility to manage emergency incidents and ensure firefighter safety.

An LAFD Emergency Incident Technician (EIT) is a specialist within the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) who plays a crucial role in incident command and management, especially in the initial stages of an emergency. EITs assist the Battalion Chief in developing an Incident Action Plan (IAP) and manage the overall emergency response until a command post is established.

The position of EIT prepares Firefighters for the position of Captain and is seen as an excellent promotional path to first level supervisor. Many minority (African American, Hispanic and Asian) and female Firefighters have held the position of EIT and used the knowledge, skills and abilities gained in that position to promote to Captain and beyond (Battalion Chief, Assistant Chief and Deputy Chief).

Here's a more detailed look at their role:

- Initial Response and Assessment:  
EITs arrive at emergency scenes along with the Battalion Chief and quickly assess the situation, identifying potential hazards and the nature of the incident.
- Developing the Incident Action Plan (IAP):  
They work with the Battalion Chief to develop the initial IAP, which outlines the strategies and tactics for managing the incident.
- Managing the Emergency Response:  
Until the command post is established, EITs manage the initial emergency response, coordinating resources and ensuring effective communication.
- Working with Battalion Chief:  
They work closely with the Battalion Chief, providing information, assisting in decision-making, and ensuring that the incident is managed effectively.
- Transitioning to Incident Command:  
Once a command post is established, the EIT will transition to supporting the Incident Commander, who takes over the overall management of the emergency response.

EITs are crucial for a smooth and efficient transition from the initial response to a fully established incident command structure, ensuring that the emergency is managed effectively from the outset.

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In 1998, due to budgetary reasons, EIT's were eliminated. Recognizing their importance in managing emergency incidents, the LAFD instituted measures to make up for the eliminated EIT's.

Command post companies (1 extra fire engine with personnel), additional Chief Officers and other measures were implemented with little success in adequately replacing the eliminated EIT's. The fix for the elimination of EIT's was a failure. In short, it was determined that it was impossible to replace the EIT who was part of the command team (Chief Officer and EIT) when an alarm is received, responded to and mitigated.

EIT's play a critical role in Firefighter Safety and Accountability at the scene of an emergency. In 1998, LAFD Captain Joseph Dupee tragically died in the line of duty. Captain Dupee was severely burned and suffocated to death fighting a warehouse fire in south los angeles. Captain Dupee left behind a wife and young son. Additionally, we almost lost several other firefighters who had become disoriented and lost at the fire. The fire occurred shortly after EIT's had been removed from the LAFD due to budgetary reasons.

A Federal National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) investigative team conducted an exhaustive investigation into the death of Captain Dupee and published report No. 98F-07 which was distributed throughout the country. Several of their findings connected the absence of Emergency Incident Technicians at the fire as a contributing factor in the death of Captain Dupee.

NIOSH investigators made a number of recommendations to prevent similar occurrences, including ***Recommendation #2, As a fire escalates and additional fire companies respond, a communications assistant with a command board should assist the Incident Commander with accounting for all fire fighter companies at the fire, staging location and at rehabilitation. One of the most important aides for accountability at a fire is an Incident Management System. The EIT is the communications assistant with the tracking board amongst many of their emergency duties and responsibilities.*** The report is attached for your review and reference (attachment 2).

In addition to the NIOSH report, an LAFD Serious Incident Review Team (SIRT) conducted an exhaustive investigation into the incident and the tragic death of Captain Dupee. All Command personnel present at the fire were interviewed as were over 50 personnel assigned to the incident, including the survivors of the flashover/backdraft that ultimately took the life of Captain Dupee. All fireground and incident radio transmissions were transcribed and reviewed. This report will be emailed under separate cover.

After a comprehensive four-month investigation, the LAFD SIRT Investigators concluded that the lack of EIT's at the Captain Joseph Dupee fatality fire was a contributing factor in the lack of accountability, incident management, communications



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and the tracking and location of Captain Dupee and the fire company he was supervising/leading.

After the tragic death of Captain Dupee, the LAFD created and codified comprehensive Firefighter emergency Mayday procedures implemented when a Firefighter is missing, down or trapped at an emergency incident. A key component to successfully handling a Firefighter Mayday Incident is the availability of a trained EIT discharging their duties and responsibilities when the Mayday occurs. An incident commander without an EIT would not be able to handle 6 plus radio channels, conduct situation status, resource status and successfully manage the Firefighter Mayday Rescue concurrently with managing the fire incident.

There have been Firefighter Mayday incidents since the tragic death of Captain Dupee where the command team of a Battalion Chief and their EIT successfully managed and concluded the firefighter incident where firefighters were missing, down or trapped and were successfully rescued and survived.

The death of Captain Dupee occurred during the 1998 budget deliberations. During the budget hearings, publication of the NIOSH and LAFD fatality reports occurred and when it was publicized that the lack of EIT's contributed to the death of Captain Dupee, funding was restored for the EIT's that had been removed (see LA Times article, attachment 3).

Please do not repeat the same mistake that was made in 1998 when EIT's were removed and said removal was found to be a contributing factor in the death of LAFD Captain Joseph Dupee. The Dupee family and the LAFD paid a terrible price in the name of budget cuts and savings.

Former Fire Chief Crowley publicly raised concerns regarding proposed cuts to the LAFD budget and the dire consequences of doing so. The President of the Fire Commission, Genethia-Hudley-Hayes has proclaimed at public fire commission meetings, that the LAFD is in "crisis mode". **Elimination of the EIT will have a direct impact on firefighter safety and survival and will lead to severe firefighter injuries and or death. It is not a matter of if, but when this occurs.**

Since the January Palisades fire tragedy, the Mayor and the City Council have publicly stated that the LAFD would not be cut. Despite the vigorous support for the LAFD, including its budget by the Mayor and City Council, here we are discussing recommendations to eliminate critical firefighting personnel.

We are aware of the dire financial straits that the City of Los Angeles is in. If cuts must be made to the LAFD, the Fire Commission, Fire Chief, United Firefighters of Los Angeles City and the Chief Officers Association must be asked to weigh in on the most appropriate cuts that will not impact firefighter safety.

Honorable Karen Bass, Mayor, City of Los Angeles  
City of Los Angeles Budget and Finance Committee  
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The Interim Fire Chief must be creative and lead in identifying mandatory budget cuts. With all due respect to Mr. Szabo, he has no clue as to the vital role and value that Emergency Incident Technicians bring to professional emergency management. LAFD cuts must not in any way, shape or form, impact or threaten Firefighter Safety.

Make no mistake about it, anyone that tells you that there will not be a negative impact on the delivery of emergency services and jeopardize firefighter safety (including injury or death) by the removal/elimination of EIT's is lying and or has no clue as to the critical role they play as part of the Battalion Command team.

The current interim Fire Chief is in a precarious position. He was selected as the interim chief by the Mayor, who will ultimately select a permanent fire chief. If the Mayor and or the Chief Administrative Officer direct the interim fire chief to cut the EIT's, then it is likely he will cut them. If cuts to the LAFD are necessary, purely administrative positions such as the Wellness Battalion Chief, and personnel assigned to the recruitment section, public service officer, public information officer, Medical Liaison personnel, Professional Standards and other administrative personnel, etc. that do not impact firefighter safety should be cut. Those jobs while extremely important to a functioning LAFD could be absorbed by other personnel.

Areas not directly or indirectly related to firefighter safety (incident command, control and personnel tracking) and the core mission of the LAFD (saving lives and protecting property) must be looked at for budgetary savings vs. positions that are directly responsible for firefighter safety and survival.

Please remember the death of Captain Joseph Dupee and the nexus to the lack of Emergency Incident Technicians at the fire that he burned and suffocated at. Experienced firefighter fatality investigators from NIOSH and the LAFD all concluded that the lack of EIT's was a contributing factor in the death of Captain Dupee. EIT's were cut once, and a terrible price was paid for those cuts. Please do not make that same tragic mistake again. Those that forget history, are doomed to repeat it.

Respectfully submitted

Active and Retired Chief Officers, Captains and  
Firefighter/Emergency Incident Technicians.

CC: LAFD Chief Officers Association  
Frank Lima, Secretary General, International Association of Firefighters  
United Firefighters of Los Angeles City, IAFF, Local 112  
LAFD Stentorians  
LAFD Bomberos  
LAFD Women in the Fire Service  
Media outlets (television, radio and print).

## **ATTACHMENT 1**



**CITY OF LOS ANGELES**  
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

Memo No. 82

Date: May 07, 2025

To: Budget and Finance Committee

From: Matthew W. Szabo, City Administrative Officer Subject: **CITY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER – POTENTIAL SAVINGS IN LARGE GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATIONS****APPLICABLE BUDGET THEMES:**

- ☐ Fulfills legal obligations
- ☐ Improves accessibility requirements
- ☐ Supports public safety
- ☒ Relates to proposed position or expense account eliminations
- ☐ Above themes do not apply

**RECOMMENDATION**

This Office recommends that the Budget and Finance Committee consider implementing the reductions we present in this memo on an ongoing basis if it intends to use the savings to restore filled positions that the 2025-26 Proposed Budget eliminates.

**DISCUSSION**

The Budget and Finance Committee instructed this Office, with the assistance of the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA), to report on the largest appropriations within the General Fund in an effort to identify potential savings. With the assistance of the CLA, this Office generated a list of potential reductions to items that are included in the Proposed Budget that are large, discretionary, and/or new appropriations.

If all reductions presented in the memorandum are approved, the Council may choose to use all \$59,174,959 in 2025-26 savings to restore eliminated filled positions and stay within the fiscally responsible parameter of using offsetting structural reductions to restore positions. If Council, however, chooses to approve a selection of these reductions or to approve them on a one-time basis only, to maintain fiscal responsibility, the cost of the restored positions should not exceed the ongoing savings that the reductions generate.

Based on an approximate average cost of \$91,000 for restoring eight months of salary and pension costs for a filled position, if Council includes these reductions in the budget, it could restore 650 filled positions. The remaining four months of funding for any restored positions is included in departmental budgets as a one-time salary account appropriation. It is contrary to the City's Financial Policies to use one-time funding to pay for ongoing costs. In this case, however, the ongoing 12-month cost of restoring 650 positions is approximately \$69 million, however, the ongoing 12-month cost of restoring 650 positions is approximately \$69 million.



which is less than the ongoing savings of \$99,232,472 that we present in this report. Therefore, the structural reductions would fully offset the ongoing costs temporarily funded in 2025-26 using a one-time appropriation.

The attachment presents a detailed discussion of the following reductions that we propose. In summary, the reductions are as follows:

- Fire Department – Eliminate several new or increased appropriations (\$27,257,702).
- ✱• Fire Department – Eliminate all 42 Emergency Incident Technicians (\$7,418,354).
- Police – Reduce sworn hiring from 480 to 240 (9,481,663).
- Police Department – Eliminate the Police Vehicle Recycling Program (\$3,000,000).
- Zoo – Reduction to GLAZA transition items (\$3,471,113).
- Capital and Technology Improvement Expenditure Program – Reductions to discretionary Municipal Facilities projects (\$1,253,000).
- General City Purposes – 10 percent reductions to all discretionary General City Purposes Accounts and full elimination of accounts with adequate balances or a pattern of limited spending (\$7,293,127).

This Office will present additional reduction proposals in separate budget memos that the Budget and Finance Committee has requested, including:

- Fire Department – Management restructuring.
- Information Technology Agency – Eliminating the 3-1-1 Call Center.
- Transportation – Reduction of the Crossing Guard Program.
- General City Purposes – Reduction of homelessness accounts.

## FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

If adopted, the reductions presented in this memo would reduce General Fund appropriations in the 2025-26 Proposed Budget by \$59,174,959. If approved on an ongoing basis, the savings that this Office supports could be used to restore approximately 650 filled position that the Proposed Budget eliminates.

## FINANCIAL POLICY COMPLIANCE

The recommendation in this report complies with the City's Financial Policies.

MWS:JWW:01250045C

Question No. 1

## Attachment

## **ATTACHMENT 2**





## *Commercial Structure Fire Claims the Life of One Fire Fighter—California*

On March 8, 1998, one male fire fighter, the Captain on Engine 57 (the victim), died while trying to exit a commercial structure after his egress was cut off by the wooden trussed roof that collapsed. Task Force 66 was the first on scene and reported light smoke showing from a one-story commercial building. A ventilation team from Truck 66 proceeded to the roof of the building and commenced roof ventilation. Forcible entry into the building required about 7 ½ to 9 ½ minutes from arrival on scene to force open the two metal security doors in the front. While fire companies waited for the security doors to be opened, fire conditions changed dramatically on the roof. Fire was coming from the ventilation holes opened by the ventilation crew. As soon as the security doors were opened, three engine crews (Engine 66, Engine 57, and Engine 46) advanced hand lines through the front door in an attempt to determine the origin of the fire. Approximately 15 feet inside the front door, the fire fighters encountered heavy smoke with near zero visibility conditions. The engine crews advanced their hose lines approximately 30 to 40 feet inside the building. As conditions continued to deteriorate inside the building, the members from the four engine companies involved in the fire attack began to

withdraw. During this time the victim became separated from his crew and remained in the building. The victim was subsequently located by the Rapid Intervention Team and cardiopulmonary resuscitation was performed immediately and en-route to the hospital, where the victim was pronounced dead. NIOSH investigators conclude that, to prevent similar occurrences, fire departments should:

- *ensure that incident command conducts an initial size up of the incident before initiating fire fighting efforts, and continually evaluate the risk versus gain during operation at an incident*
- *ensure that incident command always maintains close accountability for all personnel at the fire scene*
- *ensure communications are established between the interior and exterior attack crews, e.g., the ventilation crew and the interior fire attack crew should*



The **Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program** is conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). The purpose of the program is to determine factors that cause or contribute to fire fighter deaths suffered in the line of duty. Identification of causal and contributing factors enable researchers and safety specialists to develop strategies for preventing future similar incidents. To request additional copies of this report (specify the case number shown in the shield above), other fatality investigation reports, or further information, visit the Program Website at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/firehome.html>

or call toll free 1-800-35-NIOSH



## ***Commercial Structure Fire Claims the Life of One Fire Fighter—California***

*communicate conditions among themselves and back to incident command*

- *ensure that Rapid Intervention Teams are in place before conditions become unsafe*
- *ensure that some type of tone or alert that is recognized by all fire fighters be transmitted immediately when conditions become unsafe for fire fighters*
- *ensure sufficient personnel are available and properly functioning communications equipment are available to adequately support the volume of radio traffic at multiple-responder fire scenes*
- *consider placing a bright, narrow-beamed light at the entry portal to a structure to assist lost or disoriented fire fighters in emergency egress.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

On March 8, 1998, a 38 year-old male fire fighter, the Captain on Engine 57 (the victim), entered a commercial structure with heavy smoke and flames emitting from the roof. The victim, along with several other fire fighters, entered the structure through the front door while additional fire fighters continued to ventilate the wooden, arched-truss roof. While the fire fighters exited the building due to deteriorating conditions, the victim became disoriented, his self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) ran out of air, and his egress was eventually cut off by a partial collapse of the wooden trussed roof. Approximately 22 to 24 minutes after he entered the building, the victim was found unresponsive.

On March 16-18, 1998, an investigation of this incident was conducted by Ted A. Pettit, Chief of the Trauma Investigations Section, and Richard W. Braddee, Frankie C. Washenitz, and Tommy N. Baldwin, Safety and Occupational Health Specialists. Meetings were conducted with members of the fire department's Significant Incident Investigation Team (SIIT), Battalion Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs, Training Chiefs, fire fighters responding to the incident, and the IAFF union representative. Copies of photographs from the incident site were obtained from the fire department along with an estimated time line of the incident. Training procedures and a preliminary report prepared by SIIT were reviewed, and a videotape from the fire scene and a transcription of dispatch tapes were obtained. A site visit to the incident scene was conducted.

The fire department involved in the incident serves a population of 3 ½ million in a geographic area of 470 square miles. The fire department is comprised of approximately 3,300 employees, of whom 3,026 are fire fighters. The fire department provides all new fire fighters with the basic 20 weeks of training that covers National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Fire Fighter Level I and the majority of NFPA Fire Fighter Level II at their fire academy. The training is designed to cover all areas of fire departments operations, including fire safety, state and federal codes, fire behavior, fire protection and safety, and self-contained breathing apparatus. Refresher training courses are continued throughout the year during each shift. The fire department's written standard operating procedures manual was reviewed and appeared to be complete. The victim had 17 years of fire fighting experience.



## *Commercial Structure Fire Claims the Life of One Fire Fighter—California*

### **INVESTIGATION**

On March 8, 1998, at 0220 hours Pacific Standard Time, Battalion 13 and Task Force 66, which included Engine 66 (Captain, Engineer, and two fire fighters), Engine 266 (Engineer), Truck 66 (Captain, Apparatus Operator, and three fire fighters) and Rescue 866 (two fire fighter/emergency medical technicians) received the initial dispatch of a reported structure fire. Also responding were Engine 57 (Captain, Engineer, and 2 fire fighters), Engine 46 (Captain, Engineer, and 2 fire fighters), and Engine 34 (Captain, Engineer, and 2 fire fighters). Light Force 26 was also dispatched and was later replaced by Light Force 33 which included a Captain, Apparatus Operator, Engineer, and 3 fire fighters (a light force is a truck and 200 series engine, i.e., Truck 33 and Engine 233). At 0222 hours, Battalion 13 and Task Force 66 arrived on scene and reported light smoke emitting from a one-story commercial building that measured 110 feet long by 59 feet wide, which contained a dog treats preparation operation.

At 0223 hours, four members from Truck 66 (Captain and three fire fighters) went to the roof, via a 35-foot ground extension ladder, to start ventilation procedures as one of the fire fighters (Inside Member) of Truck 66 went to the front security door to evaluate entry conditions. As the ventilation crew went up the ladder, they noticed several windows on the south side of the building through which they could see fire in the ceiling area, which they reported to incident command. When they reached the roof, they reported grayish brown smoke emitting through a roof vent.

Engine 57 arrived on scene at 0224 hours and was assigned to assist with backup as soon as the Inside Member of Truck 66 made entry into the

building. Truck 66's Inside Member began to make forcible entry through the front metal security door of the building using a rotary saw and then by kicking the door. During this time, two members from Engine 66 retrieved a 1¾-inch handline off the pumper and laid it out by the front door. At approximately 0226 hours, Engine 33 arrived on scene and, after several minutes, assisted Truck 66's Inside Member at the front door. A fire fighter from Engine 33 used a sledgehammer to beat open the front door. The total process of gaining entry into the structure took approximately 7 ½ to 9 ½ minutes from the time companies arrived on the scene.

As Truck 66's ventilation team approached the center of the roof, they saw fire coming from a vent. The ventilation team opened an initial hole, approximately 4 feet by 4 feet, but was driven back by heavy fire and heat (see diagram A). By 0226 hours, members of Truck 66 were on the roof and reported the fire was somewhat heavy near the center ventilation hole. Even though flames were showing through the roof, they stated the roof still felt solid. Due to changing conditions, Battalion 13 requested two additional task forces at approximately 0226 hours, and Operations Control Division (OCD) dispatched Division II and Battalion 3 to the scene (the aforementioned units were delayed due to equipment failure at the OCD).

Between 0230 and 0232 hours, after gaining entry, the Captain and two fire fighters from Engine 66 advanced a 1¾-inch handline through the front door, followed by the Captain and two fire fighters from Engine 57 with a 1½-inch handline, and the Captain from Engine 46 with a 1¾ inch handline. A 15-foot long hallway with offices on one side and a storage area above led from the front door to a door into the manufacturing area. Approximately 15 feet inside



***Commercial Structure Fire Claims the Life of One Fire Fighter—California***

the front door, the companies encountered heavy smoke conditions with near zero visibility, but little heat. Due to considerable storage inside the building, advancing the handlines was very difficult due to 55 gallon drums (some empty and some containing dog treats) that were stored at the plant. At 0231 hours, a Captain and two fire fighters from Engine 33 advised the IC they had 10-foot pike poles and were going in with fire attack to help pull ceilings.

Fire fighters from Engine 66 and Engine 46 advanced their hose lines 30 to 40 feet inside the building but found no fire (see diagram B). As Engine 57's inside members advanced into the structure, their Engineer stayed in the hall area and helped advance the hose line. Engine 33's inside members advanced beyond the office area into the manufacturing area, and they raised their pike poles to touch the ceiling or roof. The pike poles proved ineffective since the fire fighters were beyond the mezzanine area which was 6 to 13 feet above the office area. Interior fire fighters reported they could hear the saws on the roof and knew that ventilation was taking place, but the heat and smoke level was intensifying as they advanced into the structure.

At 0232 hours, the Captain from Truck 66 advised Battalion 13 that they were getting real good fire out of the roof and were getting off.

Captains on the interior radioed Battalion 13 that they couldn't seem to find the fire; however, they were still advancing. The victim and the Captain of Engine 46 met on the inside of the structure and determined they were not making progress locating the fire. After speaking with the Captain (the victim) and considering the deteriorating conditions, the Captain on Engine 46 ordered a retreat and his crew to follow their hose line to exit. The crew attempted to follow hose lines on

the floor to locate the exit; however, hose lines were tangled on the floor, creating a problem on exiting. The victim (Captain of Engine 57) also ordered his crew to exit the structure. At 0236 hours, Battalion 13 advised all the interior companies to withdraw from the structure due to information received from the roof and the interior crews; however, the Captain of Engine 46 on the interior did not hear the order to withdraw.

Engine 57's crew stated they could walk slightly bent over, but felt heat coming down from above, and there was no visibility. The crews also stated that they were within touching distance of each other throughout the operations. The members of Engine 57 exited with the victim leading and the remaining two fire fighters following. The victim began walking toward the exit as the Nozzle Man of Engine 57 started lifting the hose to bring it out with them. The middle fire fighter made physical contact with the victim to verify his location and then went back to help the Nozzle Man. After pulling the Nozzle Man in the direction of the victim, the middle fire fighter again made physical contact with the victim and proceeded forward. As the two fire fighters followed the victim to exit the structure, the middle fire fighter lost physical contact with the Nozzle Man for a second time. The middle fire fighter let go of the victim and reached back to pull the Nozzle Man. After making physical contact with the Nozzle Man again, the middle fire fighter reached forward to locate the victim. The middle fire fighter could not physically locate or make any verbal contact with the victim. The Nozzle Man yelled for the victim four times but did not receive an answer. The Nozzle Man related that he heard a SCBA low-air alarm sounding, which he thought was the victim's.



***Commercial Structure Fire Claims the Life of One Fire Fighter—California***

The Nozzle Man and fire fighter from Engine 57, without their Captain (victim), dropped down to locate a hose line to guide them out. The Nozzle Man and fire fighter of Engine 57 stated that as they were following the line out they discovered that they were going back into the structure when they reached the nozzle. They immediately turned around and followed the same line out. The fire fighters stated that the hose lines inside were tangled together, making the hose line hard to follow (see diagram B). At this point the middle fire fighter stated that he spotted a light, and both members crawled toward it with the Nozzle Man following. It was the flashlight of Engine 57's Engineer. Upon their exit, the Nozzle Man and fire fighter asked if their Captain (victim) had made it out yet, and the Engineer of Engine 57 responded saying their Captain (the victim) had not come out.

A fire fighter from Engine 33 who became disoriented and was having trouble exiting, activated his radio's emergency trigger which signaled OCD he was having trouble on the interior. At 0238 hours, Battalion 13 was advised that Engine 33 needed assistance on the inside and that a fire fighter from Engine 33 was having trouble exiting. At approximately the same time, the other two members of Engine 33 exited the structure and discovered they were missing a member. The Engine 33 Captain (with a low amount of air) retrieved a flashlight from Engine 57 and re-entered the structure in search of his fire fighter. Within a few seconds, the Captain of Engine 33 found his missing fire fighter and they both exited the front of the structure at approximately 0239 hours. Also at this time the Division 2 Assistant Chief advised OCD he was on scene and would assume command.

By approximately 0242 hours the roof had fallen in and was blocking the front entry into the manufacturing area where the fire attack companies had just exited. After the Nozzle Man and fire fighter changed their air bottles, the Nozzle Man of Engine 57 went back to the front entrance with another fire fighter and a 2½ inch hose line. Their hose line and those operated by members from Engine 66, Engine 46, and Engine 33 proved to be ineffective because of the volume of fire in the entrance area.

The Captain from Engine 33 stated that at approximately 0243 hours, he informed IC in a face to face conversation that the Captain on Engine 57 (victim) was missing and still inside. This was not confirmed by the Command Post Staff.

At approximately the same time, the IC radioed companies on scene and asked if someone could give him a status on Engine 57. Engine 66 radioed the IC and stated Engine 66 was accounted for and they were going to look for Engine 57's Captain, who was still missing.

Due to heavy fire conditions at the front of the structure, Engine 15, who was assigned as the Rapid Intervention Team, proceeded to the rear of the structure to a rolling steel door. The Inside Member of Truck 66 and members from Engine 34 had earlier used a rotary saw to open the large steel door in the rear of the structure to allow access.

By 0246 hours, the personnel involved in the rescue attempt had no success in gaining entry to the structure, and with the conditions beginning to further deteriorate, IC advised Truck 66's Apparatus Operator to start putting water on the fire from the ladderpipe.



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At 0254 hours, Engine 15 radioed the IC that they had found the Captain on Engine 57 (victim), but their message was not heard by the IC due to heavy radio traffic. At 0256 hours, Truck 66 radioed Engine 266 and stated that entry was made in the rear through the rolling steel door and the RIT of Engine 15 would be entering. At that time, Truck 66's Apparatus Operator was advised by IC that Engine 15 had made access through the rear door and that they needed them to shut down the ladderpipe temporarily. At 0257 hours, the Red Alert tone (a term used to notify on scene rescue personnel that a fire fighter accident or emergency has occurred) was generated by the OCD.

At 0258 hours, Engine 15 was successful in notifying IC that they had found the victim and they would be coming out the back of the building (where they entered). When the victim was found, his helmet had been knocked off, the SCBA facepiece lens was missing, and his PASS device (set to automatic) was alarming.

Rescue 66 initiated Advanced Life Support (ALS) procedures and transported the Captain (victim) to a local hospital, arriving at approximately 0322 hours. The Captain was pronounced dead in the emergency room.

NOTE: There were two confirmed Automatic PASS device activations at this incident. One activation occurred inside when the Captain from Engine 66 lost his PASS device. The victim was eventually found approximately 21 feet east of this PASS device. It is undetermined if the victim heard this PASS device sounding and moved toward it. Of the 12 fire fighters/officers who entered the manufacturing area, the Nozzle Member and Hydrant Member of Engine 46 recall hearing a PASS device sounding in the alarm mode while they were inside the structure.

The Hydrant Member from Engine 46 stated he heard a PASS device in the background when he approached the loops in the hose. The Nozzle Member of Engine 46 also heard a PASS device approximately 1 to 2 minutes before beginning to withdraw from the structure. The second PASS device alarm activation was from the victim's device. It may never be known for certain why the Captain (victim) became separated from his company and ultimately entrapped.

**CAUSE OF DEATH:**

According to the medical examiner, the cause of death was smoke inhalation and thermal burns.

**RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION**

***Recommendation #1: Fire departments should ensure that command conducts an initial size-up of the incident before initiating fire fighting efforts, and continually evaluate the risk versus gain during operation at an incident. [1-3, 10]***

Discussion: One of the most important size-up duties of the first-in officers is locating the fire and determining its severity. This information lays the foundation for the entire operation. First, it determines the number of fire fighters and the amount of apparatus and equipment needed to control the blaze. Second, it assists in determining the most effective point of fire extinguishment attack, and the most effective method of venting heat and smoke. Several factors must be evaluated in conducting the size-up, e.g., type of structure, time of day, contents of the structure, potential hazards, etc. The size-up should also include risk versus gain during incident operations. The following general factors are important considerations: (1) occupancy type involved; (2) smoke conditions; (3) type of construction; (4) age of structure; (5) exposures; and (6) time considerations--time of incident, time fire was burning before arrival, time



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fire was burning after arrival, and effective attack made.

***Recommendation #2: Fire departments should ensure that fire command always maintains close accountability for all personnel at the fire scene. [4-6]***

Discussion: Accountability on the fireground is paramount and may be accomplished by several methods. It is the responsibility of every officer to account for every fire fighter assigned to his or her company and relay this information to Incident Command. Fire fighters should not work beyond the sight or sound of the supervising officer unless equipped with a portable radio. This member should communicate with the supervising officer by portable radio to ensure accountability and indicate completion of assignments and duties. When the assigned duties are completed the fire fighter should radio this information to the supervisor then return to the supervisor for additional duties. As a fire escalates and additional fire companies respond, a communication assistant with a command board should assist the Incident Commander with accounting for all fire fighter companies at the fire, at the staging area and at rehabilitation. One of the most important aides for accountability at a fire is an Incident Management System.

***Recommendation #3: Fire departments should ensure communications are established between the interior and exterior attack crews, e.g., the ventilation crew and the interior fire attack crew should communicate conditions among themselves and with Incident Command. [3,7, 9]***

Discussion: The size-up of a fire can be accomplished from both inside and outside of the

building. Often times due to construction features (mezzanines, attic space, partitions, etc.), interior crews may not be able to readily find or see the seat of the fire. Roof ventilation teams will often be able to provide a size-up of smoke and fire conditions to the IC and interior fire attack teams. It is important that ventilation and extinguishing operations be coordinated to achieve the maximum gain with minimal risk. Engine Companies need to be aware of possible truck problems causing delayed ventilation (steep roofs, difficult laddering, roof covering, and poor access). Truck Companies need to be aware of possible Engine Company problems which may cause a delay in fire extinguishment (security bars, occupancy type, tall ceilings, congested conditions, mezzanines, etc.). The IC must be informed if Truck and/or Engine Companies encounter problems, which may affect their operation(s). In addition, Truck and Engine Companies need to communicate their progress or lack of progress to each other and the IC.

***Recommendation #4: Fire departments should ensure that Rapid Intervention Teams be established and in position immediately upon arrival at the fire scene. [5]***

Discussion: A Rapid Intervention Team should be positioned to respond to every major fire. The team should report to the officer in command and remain at the command post until an intervention is required to rescue a fire fighter(s). The Rapid Intervention Team should have all the tools necessary to complete the job, e.g., a search rope, rescue rope, first aid kit and a resuscitator to use if a fire fighter becomes injured. Many fire fighters who die from smoke inhalation, or a flash over, or are caught or trapped by fire actually become disoriented first. They are lost in smoke, their SCBA runs out of air, or they can't find their way out in the smoke, and become trapped,



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and then fire or smoke kills them. The primary contributing factor, however, is disorientation. To prevent fire fighters from becoming disoriented at fires, they should be taught safe search procedures, such as clockwise or counter-clockwise search tactics, or they should have search lines or hose lines. The search lines should be tied to a substantial object outside of the fire area and should be laid behind as fire fighters enter smoke-filled occupancies. The search line can be used by fire fighters to find their way out when disoriented in smoke.

***Recommendation #5: Fire departments should ensure that some type of tone or alert be transmitted immediately when conditions become unsafe for fire fighters. [6]***

Discussion: There is a difference between withdrawing fire fighters and calling for an emergency evacuation of fire fighters. A normal withdraw action is ordered when a fire is spreading beyond the ability of fire fighters to control it. An emergency evacuation is ordered when an extremely serious emergency has occurred or is about to happen, such as missing fire fighter(s), explosion, or collapse. In an emergency evacuation, unlike a withdraw, fire department tools and hose are left behind and a roll call or a head count must be conducted as there may be a missing fire fighter. An emergency evacuation is a rare occurrence in the fire service, and because of its rarity confusion and delay usually occur when it is ordered. For this reason, there should be a prearranged signal, tone, or sound to alert fire fighters of an emergency withdraw; fire departments should train their members for an emergency evacuation upon receipt of the signal. Fire fighters should immediately exit the structure upon receipt of the prearranged signal, leaving behind tools and equipment, which can be removed later. Incident

commanders should use the prearranged emergency evacuation signal or tone whenever they decide conditions are unsafe for interior fire fighting or an accident or emergency has occurred with a fire fighter.

***Recommendation #6: Fire departments should ensure sufficient personnel are available and properly functioning communications equipment are available to adequately support the volume of radio traffic at multiple-responder fire scenes. [6, 8]***

Discussion: Fire ground communications at the fire scene became ineffective at times because of electronic problems and excessive communications. Throughout the course of a fire attack, incident command is unable to communicate effectively and receive all radio signals from fire fighters on scene because of problems with the communication equipment. In the control of communications, the human factor is the deciding element. During the course of the operations, incident command must be heard and also must hear everyone on scene. All members at an incident should follow the radio communication guidelines, keeping transmissions short, specific, and clear. However, these areas can't be complete if electronic problems occur. Therefore, fire departments should implement a backup communications plan to avoid unanticipated equipment problems at the fire scene. The plan should include backup electronic equipment, additional channels, training, and consideration of face-to-face communication or the utilization of runners to communicate an important message if radio communication fails.

***Recommendation #7: Fire departments should consider placing a bright, narrow-beamed light at the entry portal to a structure to assist lost or disoriented fire fighters in emergency egress.***

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Discussion: In a dark, smoky environment, fire fighters often become lost or disoriented and all too often they are unable to escape. A bright, narrow-beamed light at the entry point could possibly assist fire fighters in emergency egress situations, i.e., when lost or disoriented. This investigation revealed that a light assisted some fire fighters in an emergency egress situation when they spotted the flashlight of Engine 57's Engineer.

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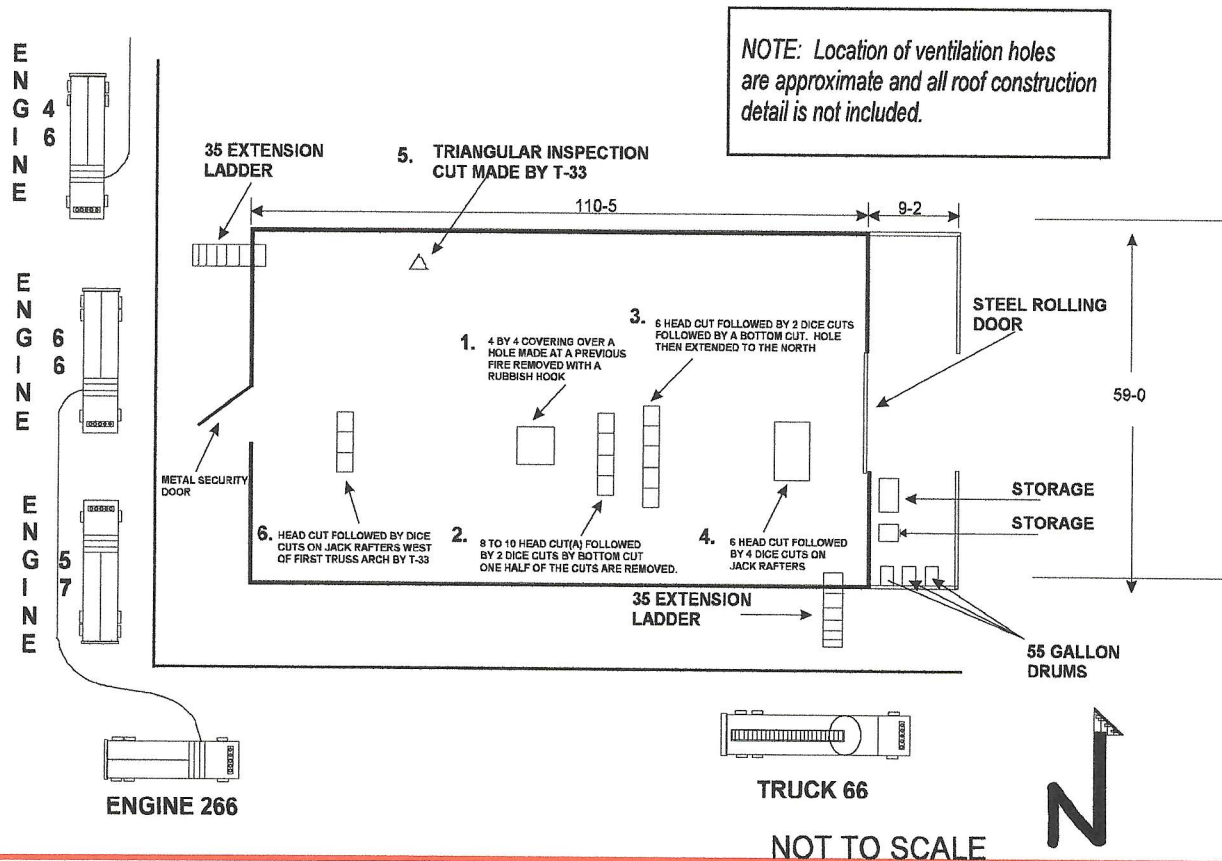
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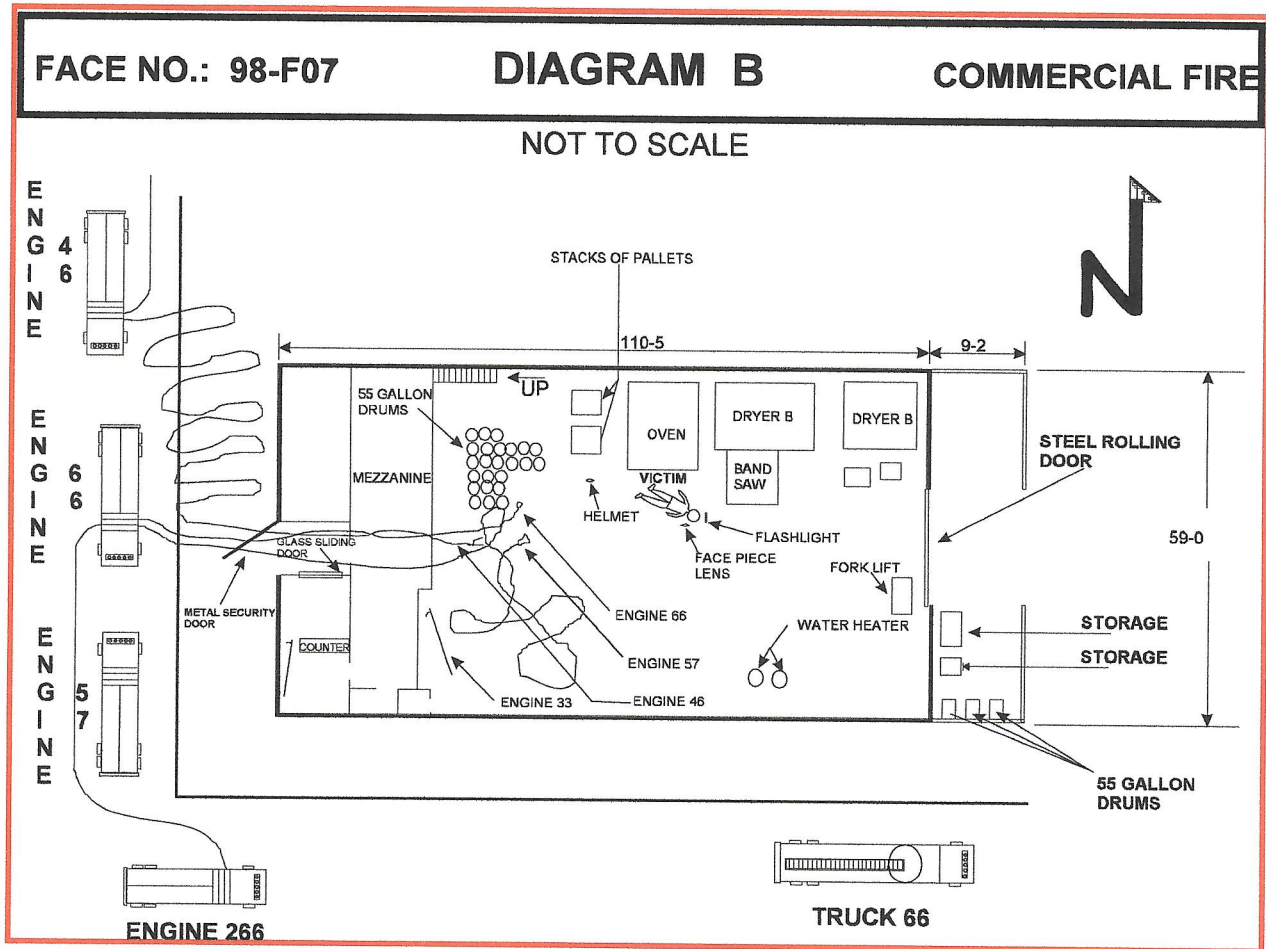
DIAGRAM A

COMMERCIAL FIRE





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### **ATTACHMENT 3**

# Council Restores \$3.6 Million to Fire Department

By **BETH SHUSTER**

March 21, 1998 12 AM PT

**TIMES STAFF WRITER**

In a preview of the bruising budget battle that could pit one public safety agency against the other next month, a rancorous and often emotional City Council agreed Friday to restore \$3.6 million cut from the city Fire Department, some of it just a month ago.

The council's unusually swift action followed the release of an internal Fire Department report linking the death of a captain nearly two weeks ago, in part, to the cutbacks. The preliminary investigation found that many factors contributed to the March 8 death of Capt. Joseph Dupee, including budget-induced reductions in the department's command staff, which impair the department's ability to account for firefighters at the scene of a blaze.

In a related development, sources confirmed that Mayor Richard Riordan's office has asked Los Angeles Police Chief Bernard C. Parks to cut his billion-dollar budget by \$10 million. The mayor is looking for ways to boost Fire Department funding, which has been severely cut over the past three years.

On Friday, some council members charged that the Police Department's budget has been protected--even expanded--at the expense of the firefighters--a contention with which Fire Chief William Bamattre agreed.

"There's a lack of recognition that the Fire Department is an integral piece" of the city's public safety effort, Bamattre said in an interview. "We're kind of like a peacetime army: When you don't need them, you don't think about them."

Councilman Mike Feuer said that the Fire Department has "been sacrificed to other services in this city."

Over the past three years, cuts in the department's budget have forced the elimination of many staff assistants responsible for helping battalion chiefs keep track of firefighters during significant fires. Just a month ago, the council extended those reductions, agreeing to cut five more of the staff assistants.

But on Friday, the council reversed itself, restoring nine of those positions and adding staffing to the department for a total of \$3.6 million. The Fire Department budget has a nearly \$7 million shortfall this year.

Despite its ultimately unanimous vote on the reversal, emotions ran high throughout the council chamber during the frequently bitter debate. Some observers speculated that lawmakers were fearful that Dupee's death, the department's first in 13 years, would be attributed to the economies they had imposed.

"The heat's on them," said Don Forrest, the firefighters union secretary. "They're the ones who voted for the cuts."

Councilwoman Laura Chick, chairwoman of the council's Public Safety Committee, said: "I very much think the death of Capt. Dupee brought a certain level of emotion and a certain level of expediency to this debate. We had a real example of the ultimate risk.

"The council will never make public safety cuts again--and particularly to the Fire Department--without being much more deliberative and thoughtful to the effects . . . the cuts will cause," Chick added.

Speaking before a council chamber packed mostly with firefighters wearing union T-shirts, Councilman Nate Holden raised the ire of his colleagues by suggesting that the fire chief went along with the lawmakers' previous cuts to further his own ambitions as chief. Union members applauded long and loudly.

But Councilman Joel Wachs, his voice at times shaking in anger, responded: "I think what you did today was the most callous thing I have ever seen. That was a public castration that was totally inexcusable."



Wachs, whose colleagues applauded when he finished, said Holden had undermined the strength of the Fire Department by purposefully pitting the chief against the union.

Union leaders, however, said they blame Bamattre for failing to more aggressively protect the department.

“I think it’s painfully obvious to the people I represent that the chief made accommodations to the mayor’s office,” said Mike McOsker, vice president of United Firefighters Local 112.

Fire Department command officers say they were forced to take the cuts and to manage the department by juggling and moving resources around. During his first mayoral campaign, Riordan promised to put 3,000 more police officers on the streets, and he has boosted Police Department funding to accomplish that goal.

“I’m representing the Fire Department. I can’t answer your fiscal questions,” Bamattre told the council. “I’m here to answer your Fire Department questions. . . . We cannot continue to juggle resources.”

LAPD and other city officials confirmed that the Police Department--known to some firefighters as “the blue hole”--has been asked to cut its budget \$10 million, up from the \$6 million requested earlier. The LAPD, however, has indicated that it needs to increase rather than decrease its funding.

Mayoral aides said all city departments have been asked to find additional cuts in their budgets, and they denied any link between the police cuts and the Fire Department.

Council members, who will begin their budget deliberations in a month, also received some sobering financial news from their administrative officer, Keith Comrie, who said the lawmakers will find themselves with a \$100-million shortfall.

Although Comrie said the additional funding for the Fire Department “will not bankrupt the city,” he said the council will be faced with some difficult decisions.

The council agreed.

“All of us collectively share the responsibility for where we are now,” Feuer said. But in the end, firefighters said they viewed the council’s action “as only the beginning” in restoring their budget.

“Firefighters view it as a good start,” McOsker said. “We appreciate the support of the council . . . but this is not a happy occasion. There isn’t cause for jubilation.”

Times staff writer Matt Lait contributed to this story.