



2009 – 2010
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
Madera County Fire Station #8 (Chukchansi)

Prepared By: Special Issues Committee

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Introduction:

The Madera County Grand Jury visited Fire Station #8 on October 14, 2009. The fire captain present at the station conducted a tour of the facility and gave a briefing covering the mission, staffing, operations, resources, and procedures of the station. This station has been open for just two years and has never been previously visited by the Grand Jury.

The Grand Jury reviewed the budget for the station. The Grand Jury also requested, received and reviewed the Memorandum of Understanding between Picayune Rancheria of Chukchansi Indians (the Tribe) and the County.

Findings:

Fire station #8 is one of 17 fire stations within the Madera County Fire Department. It is unique in that it is partially funded by annual contributions from the Tribe and has a special responsibility for providing fire services for the Chukchansi Gold Casino as well as the Coarsegold Service Area.

On May 4, 2004, the Board of Supervisors adopted an amendment to the Memorandum of Understanding with the Tribe to build the station. The Tribe agreed to contribute \$175,000 toward the cost of construction; however, the county agreed to reimburse the Tribe 50% of that amount (\$87,500) from fire mitigation fees received in the Coarsegold Volunteer Service Response Area and a portion of the Yosemite Lakes Park Service Response Area. On October 25, 2005, the Board of Supervisors approved a construction contract in the amount of \$1,004, 073 for construction of the station.

The 2009-2010 budget for the fire station is \$630,189. The Tribe's contribution is \$618,563; included in this amount is a 12% administrative charge. This recurring contribution only covers personnel costs and related expenses and is accomplished on an annual basis. As the Tribe materially expanded the public spaces of the casino after the Memorandum of Understanding was finalized, the County may have the option to request renegotiation. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) under contract to the county furnishes the current staff of five professional fire fighters.

The station is well maintained. The professional staff obviously takes pride in the appearance of the station and equipment.

The station's permanent crew of five consists of one captain, two engineers and two fire fighters. The station is manned at all times by at least two people, which would include at least one engineer and one firefighter. They work 72 hours on duty and 72 hours off duty. Station staffing has not been changed, although major additions have been planned and made to the casino. Evacuation of the casino in case of an emergency could not be done with the present staff; the captain indicated that he had approached the Tribe with a request for a staffing augmentation. He was told to submit a grant request that, at best, would fund additional staffing for a temporary period.

The county provides maintenance, supplies, and equipment. The captain indicated no problem with receiving an adequate supply of disposables or maintenance of equipment. The fire station is equipped with one engine that is used the majority of the time, a ladder truck, and a squad vehicle which is used sparingly as it is too small to carry all the needed equipment. All the equipment at the fire station was transferred from other stations, or was bought used, some with a one-time grant from the Tribe. Allocation of new equipment within the county is handled at the department level; stations receive replacement engines based upon mileage and maintenance history. No engines have been provided to the station since the construction of the additions to the casino. The ladder truck has no value in case of a fire in the new hotel tower. The captain indicated that it might be traded to the Oakhurst station in the near future.

The station responds to all types of emergency calls. The majority of them are for medical aid. All the personnel assigned to Station #8 are EMT qualified.

The area of coverage includes all of Indian Lakes to the East, South on Highway 41 to about three miles North of the 22 Mile House and West of Highway 41 to include all of Road 416 to the intersection of Road 416 and 415. Their Northern boundary is determined by when the Coarsegold Cal Fire Station is open or closed. The Coarsegold Cal Fire Station is only about two miles from Station #8. The Coarsegold Cal Fire Station closes for the winter months and Station #8 then covers the area North on Highway 41 to the top of Dead Wood Pass. Coarsegold and Yosemite Lakes, communities with significant populations, also have limited, immediate support by paid call firefighters.

Station #8 provides and receives mutual aid to/from other fire stations in the area when needed. Requests for dispatch for accidents come primarily from the California Highway Patrol directly by radio with the station. Requests for medical assistance may involve the area-wide emergency medical operations center, located in Fresno, which dispatches Madera County ambulances. Unfortunately, the operations center can only communicate by radio with the Cal Fire area control center in Mariposa; that center, in turn, radios the station.

The captain pointed out two difficulties with the station design. When this station was built, an emergency generator was installed to provide power to the station house in case of a power failure. However, the living quarters were never wired into this emergency generator system.

The personnel on duty within the living quarters are without communication when the power goes out. Also, their two-way radios and pagers that are kept in chargers in the living quarters do not get charged.

The main station has three engine bays. However, only two are full-sized and drive through. The third bay is too short to house any of the current trucks other than the squad vehicle.

Madera County is at financial risk, should a major disaster occur at the Casino, due to the inability of the fire station to respond appropriately.

Conclusions:

The Madera County Grand Jury found this station to be clean, well maintained, and staffed with highly motivated professional firefighters.

The station is fit-for purpose despite some design flaws. The one problem in need of correction is the limitations on emergency power. The living quarters should be placed on the emergency generator circuit.

Staffing is extremely limited, especially in light of the large service area and the special needs of the Casino. Since this is a county fire station, the county faces the potential liability in the event of a major disaster at the Casino. Mutual support from other fire stations is dependent upon the time of the year, the physical distance between stations, and the roads and weather in the foothill area.

The inability of the emergency medical dispatch system to communicate directly with the fire station invites delays in response.

Recommendations:

- The station's emergency power system should be expanded to include the fire crews living quarters.
- The funding, staffing and equipment needs for the station should be reviewed. At the earliest opportunity, the Memorandum of Understanding with the Tribe should be amended to reflect the new personnel and equipment requirements resulting from the Casino enlargement.
- Madera County Board of Supervisors should re-evaluate potential county liability with respect to the Memorandum of Understanding.
- Equipment allocations, especially of engines, should be reviewed to reflect the need to support a high-rise hotel, casino, and theater and parking structure unique in the county.

- The station should have direct, two-way contact with all elements of the emergency response system.

Respondents: Written response required pursuant to PC933(c)

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Respondents: Response Optional

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Attn: Chairperson
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