

La Pine RFPD reorganizes, lays off workers due to budget constraints

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

La Pine Rural Fire Protection District announced Thursday that it will cut two full-time and one half-time positions and reduce services beginning July 1, 2007.

The La Pine Fire District Board of Directors gave final approval in mid June to a plan aimed at recovering from funding challenges caused by defeat of the local option levy. After repeated attempts to pass a Local Option levy to support staffing, the loss of budget dollars has prompted the agency to reorganize, make changes in levels of service, and budget.

The proposed re-organization, designed to place its primary emphasis on emergency responses, will require intense cooperation from all fire district members and agencies bordering the fire district, and poses serious challenges to the entire organization. On July 1, the district will be losing a Battalion Chief, Prevention officer and half-time office clerk. In September, the district's maintenance/mechanic person has given retirement notice; his position will not be filled. Two additional firefighter positions were also planned for lay off. Dollars normally budgeted for running the fire district through materials and services, facilities, apparatus, and equipment needs will be significantly reduced to keep these two positions. These severe cuts were prompted to keep as many firefighter personnel as possible to respond to emergencies.

Desperate to salvage the existing services, the plan calls for scrapping or limiting services such as fire and health prevention, fire inspections, educational school programs, rescue services, community participation, and response to illegal open burning. Larger incidents and multiple simultaneous emergency calls will continue to stress the staff to the edge of their ability to provide service. Medical transports will continue to create situations of understaffing on average of 6-12 hours in a 24-hour period. Mutual aid partnerships with other adjoining fire departments to backfill responses will continue, which will occasionally cause increased response times and diminished levels of response normally provided by La Pine Fire District

when available. Sunriver and Crescent Fire Districts, the closest provider of mutual aid responses will commonly be at least a twenty-minute response to La Pine.

Fire stations located throughout the Fire District at Huntington Road in La Pine and S. Century drive will remain staffed. The station located on Burgess Road will fall again to budget restrictions and no permanent staffing.

Members of the Fire District remain committed to focusing on the goals of creating financial stability and funding to the point of providing services within the existing tax base.

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