

City of San Gabriel **STAFF REPORT**

DATE: May 3, 2022
TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Mark Lazzaretto, City Manager *ml*
BY: Steven Wallace, Fire Chief
SUBJECT: **FIRE DEPARTMENT ANNUAL UPDATE**

SUMMARY

The San Gabriel Fire Department is an all hazard, all risk service. Operating from two Fire Stations, the department responds to an average of over 3000 unique incidents per year. This report contains a history of the department; an update of our organizational structure; our accomplishments in the past year; the state of our current operations and organizational; goals as we look to the future.

HISTORY

The San Gabriel Fire Department was founded on May 13, 1913. It has provided continuous service to the citizens of San Gabriel since its inception. Operating with an appointed City Fire Marshal (who was on duty 24/7, 365 days a year and paid \$75 per month) and with a single American La France fire engine, the department responded from a station at 605 S. Del Mar Ave. As the population grew, a second fire station was built in 1949, housing an engine company and the first city ambulance.

By 1957, the department had outgrown the original station on Del Mar and moved into a newly constructed Headquarters at 1303 S. Del Mar Ave. At this time, the force consisted of three engine companies and one ambulance, with a call volume of around 400 responses per year. In the late 70's, one of the engine companies was disbanded and the daily operational staffing started to reflect what we see today, with two engine companies and one ambulance in service. The next major change occurred in 1997 with conversion of the Basic Life Support Ambulance to Advanced Life Support (Paramedic) service. In 2000, the department became a member of the Verdugo system, bringing state-of-the-art dispatching and seamless automatic aid to the city. The operational model of the department has remained largely unchanged at a structural level since 2000, except for the move to a non-sworn Deputy Fire Marshal and reclassification of the Division Chiefs from Battalion Chiefs in 2014 to reflect the administrative responsibilities of the

job. Our present daily deployment is two 3-member Paramedic Assessment Engine Companies (at least 1 paramedic is always assigned to an engine) and Advanced Life Support equipment is carried on the apparatus) and 1 Paramedic Ambulance (RA).

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Fire Department operates four divisions: Administration Bureau, Operations Bureau, Fire Prevention Bureau and Arson Investigation Bureau. Within each bureau, the daily operations of the department take place. There are 36 authorized FTE's within the Fire Department as detailed on the attached organizational chart. Sworn positions make up 34 of the FTE's with a civilian Executive Assistant and Deputy Fire Marshal rounding out the department.

- The **Administration Bureau** contains the Fire Chief and an Executive Assistant. Responsibilities include Personnel, Recruitment, Budget, Strategic Planning, Public Information Officer, Community Engagement and Ambulance Billing.
- The **Operations Bureau** contains: 3 Division Chiefs (Shift and Incident Commanders), 6 Fire Captains (Station and Field Supervisors), 6 Fire Engineers (Apparatus Operators) and 18 Firefighters, 17 trained to the level of Paramedic and 1 EMT. Line personnel (Firefighters and Engineers) report to the Fire Captain. Fire Captains report to the Division Chief and the Division Chief reports to the Fire Chief. The Operations staff responds to calls for service; conducts daily training in fire, rescue and EMS disciplines; conducts training for probationary members, both newly-hired and promoted; performs life-safety inspections in multi-family dwelling units; maintain fire facilities, equipment and apparatus, participates in public education and community outreach; incident cause and origin investigation; response and training record keeping and have specialized assignments including Paramedic Coordinator, EMS Ordering and SCBA Technicians. The Division Chiefs have added responsibilities that include program management of the four bureaus, budget compliance, purchasing, staffing, emergency operations center and disaster planning.
- **Fire Prevention** is an integral part of city operations that reaches across departmental boundaries and is staffed by a Deputy Fire Marshal (DFM), reporting to the Fire Chief. This is a highly technical position with areas of responsibility that include plan checks for new construction and remodel projects; investigation of code complaints; life-safety inspection of construction projects, high-hazard, and complex and assembly type occupancies. The Deputy Fire Marshal is based out of the McGroaty building and in addition to office hours, meets clients at the Community Development counter and in the field. The DFM makes recommendations to the Fire Chief on items such as fireworks permits, code updates, requests for variances and special events to ensure public safety and compliance with applicable code.
- The **Arson Bureau** is coming to the end of its first year as a funded and recognized part of the Fire Department. Although the capacity to investigate incidents has existed in the

city in the past, a formally organized unit had not been in place or funded until 2021. At present, two members (Division Chiefs Davis and Eakman) are trained, fully-qualified per California State Fire Marshal criteria as Arson Investigators. Two additional members are at various stages of training and will be available to assist once qualified. As incident investigations can be very complex, time and resource intensive, the San Gabriel Arson Investigators work closely with both the Verdugo Arson Task Force and the San Gabriel Police Department Detective Bureau. Notable investigations conducted by our members have included the Mission Fire (resulting in a suspect presently on trial) and a series of mysterious outdoor fires causing property damage (resulted in conviction of the suspect).

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Fire Department is proud of its staff and has continued to move forward through the pandemic and into the post-pandemic landscape. In the last year, the following items have been accomplished and programs implemented:

- Personal Thermal-Imaging Cameras issued to each member. This high tech device puts an infra-red thermal imaging device in the hands of each member assigned to suppression operations.
- Mental Health and Wellness and Critical Incident Stress-Debriefing Program established. Allowing 24/7 access to licensed mental health doctors and clinicians specifically trained to assist and support first response personnel in crisis and to prevention crisis, at no charge to staff.
- Issued the most modern structural, wildland and EMS personnel protective equipment. Each firefighter has two sets of state of the art structural turnout gear and have been issued wildland respiratory protection, improved wildland shirts and hybrid station – wildland pants.
- Issued each member with a personal wildland fire shelter and web gear.
- Migrated to an all-inclusive web platform for one stop access to training, records, exposure reporting, EMS updates and links to department and city documents.
- Rebooted the Auxiliary Firefighter Program, bringing in qualified cadets from local fire academies to complete the on the job portion of the California State Fire Marshal Firefighter Certification process.
- Conducted the first ever Captain Academy to prepare internal candidates for future promotional opportunities and professional advancement.
- Conducted the first ever San Gabriel Basic Fire Academy, instructing new hires in department operations, policy and procedure before being placed on a shift.
- Increased the Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating to 2, a rating achieved by less than 5% of the organized fire departments in the United States. The ISO rating directly affects the cost of insurance for businesses and residents in the city.
- Placed a new Rescue Ambulance into service.

- Specified and have an order pending for a new frontline fire apparatus, returning the city to a planned replacement cycle.

CURRENT OPERATIONS

Response Data

As we move toward the end of the current fiscal year and a third of the way through our operational year, the Fire Department has responded to 1005 unique incidents. This equates to 1726 individual unit responses by San Gabriel apparatus. The busiest resource is RA51, with 697 responses, followed by Engine 52 with 506 runs, Engine 51 at 478 calls and BC5 having been called to 45 incidents. BC5 responds to incidents requiring Command Supervision such as complex rescues and structure fires, therefore has a lower response count. In review of previous years, the number of unit responses is returning to normal from the pandemic years, and on track for a slight increase in calls for service from pre-pandemic levels. Response times are very good. The average turnout time (receipt of alarm to unit "on the road") is slated to be at less than sixty seconds 90% of the time and the SGFD has an admirable 57.41 seconds over 98% of the time.

Total response time (time from dispatch to first unit on scene) should be less than 397 seconds (our established goal) or 6.6 minutes 90% of the time, with the SGFD coming in at 265.77 seconds or 4.43 minutes 90% of the time. Response times can vary due to time of day, traffic conditions and resource availability.



Automatic Aid Statistics

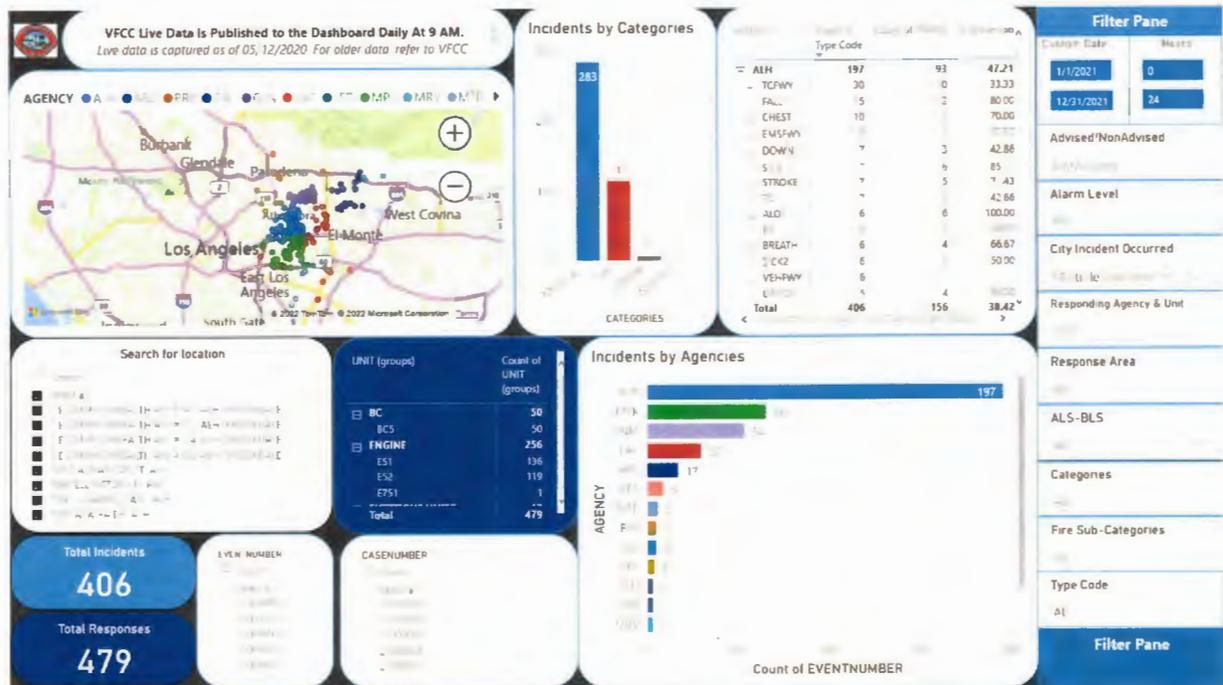
In Calendar Year (CY) 2021, San Gabriel received automatic aid on nearly 25% of the responses in the city, or 720 incidents. 448 of the 720 automatic aid responses into San Gabriel were for concurrent EMS responses, indicating that 62% of the time there is greater than one active incident in the city. Automatic aid includes Ladder Trucks and Engines on fire calls, ambulances on medical rescues and Battalion Chiefs on incidents requiring command-level supervision such as rescues and structure fires. Outside-agency ambulances transported 240 times in 2021. Year to date in CY2022, outside resources have made 277 responses to San Gabriel, with approximately 170 of those responses being for concurrent incidents.

CY2021 Automatic Aid into San Gabriel



The City of San Gabriel Fire Department responded to neighboring jurisdictions 479 times in CY2021 with the majority of the incidents being for medical rescues. Year to date, a total of 176 responses to 156 unique incidents have received automatic aid from San Gabriel.

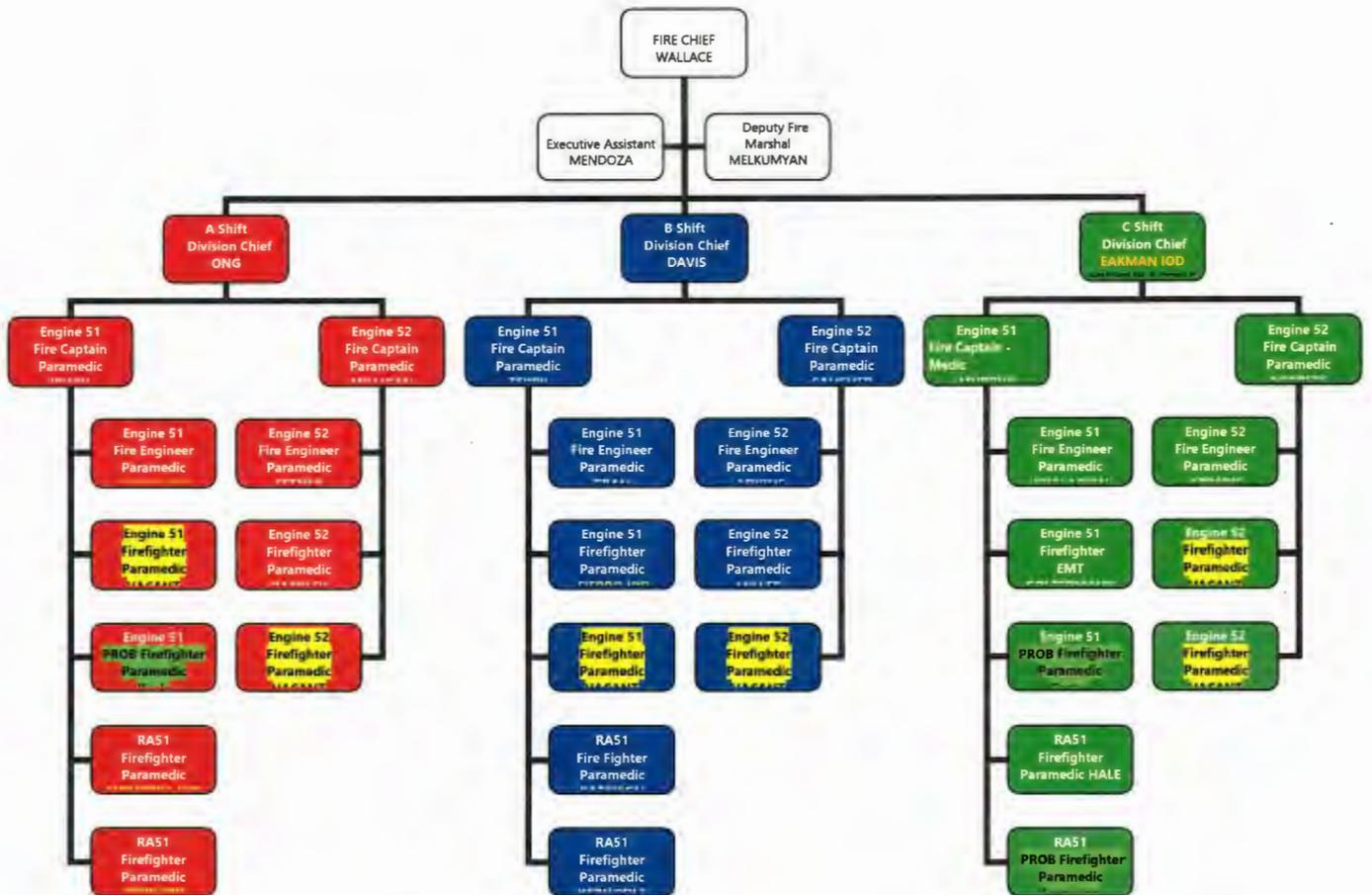
CY2021 Automatic Aid to others:



Staffing

As is being experienced by Fire Departments across the State of California, the past 2 years have proven to be challenging for our department with regard to staffing. Keeping up with attrition due to retirements, probationary separations and members transferring out of San Gabriel to other agencies has taken a toll. Due to budgetary constraints, up to 6 allocated positions were kept vacant, using savings to keep the budget balanced and the department operating. With all positions fully-funded, we have struggled to keep up with recruiting and hiring qualified staff to fill our vacancies. Over time, the department has become less competitive with surrounding agencies and we find that the level of candidates applying for our agency to be substandard. Very qualified applicants that come into the SGFD are being trained then are leaving for lateral transfer opportunities once off probation. In the past 18 months the Fire Department lost one member to Loma Linda and two to the Orange County Fire Authority. One current member has a provisional offer from the City of Pasadena and is expected to leave by the end of May. Extended injuries (IOD) are compounding the situation. One Division Chief, and one Engineer and three Firefighter Paramedics are off long term as of this presentation. One Fire Captain will retire at the end of May, with one Captain detailed as an Acting Division Chief, further reducing the available workforce. To meet our minimum staffing requirements, members are being force-

hired each shift. We have not had to make reductions in service, in great part due to the willingness of the Firefighters, Engineers and Captains to do what it takes keep apparatus in service. This is not sustainable and the ability to delivery services is at a critical level. The following graphic represents our Organizational Structure and current staffing levels: Yellow text of background indicates an open vacancy or IOD.



Steps including continuous recruitment, under-filling Firefighter Paramedic positions with Firefighter EMT's and accelerated provisional hiring have all been implemented in an attempt to keep services at 100%. The Human Resources Department is conducting salary and benefit surveys as part of the effort to staff the Fire Department and is sharing results with Council for consideration.

Facilities and Fleet

Fire Department Facilities are aging and in similar condition to the Police Department.

Fire Station 51 (FS51) was built in 1957, and had remained unchanged until the last decade. 2006 saw the addition of the Division Chief Office and dormitory. In 2008, the original kitchen area was renovated, with the firefighters serving as the General Contractor and completing a significant amount of work on their own. In 2019 – 2020, two dorms rooms were converted to house a mixed-gender workforce with private bathroom and shower facilities. In late 2021, Public Works began a remodel of the vintage main restroom and shower area and during this process discovered a large sinkhole under the bathroom shower and adjoining kitchen area. This was mitigated as part of the remodel process. Lead based paint was stripped from the apparatus floor brickwork in 2021 and whole station asbestos abatement was completed in all living and office areas. Asbestos insulation that is undisturbed remains on some structural components in the basement. The apparatus floor needs assessment as it is cracked and sinking in a few spots, and water damage was discovered in the roof during the restroom remodel. Public Works is aware of the needs and the Command Staff will develop a plan to correct the issues. The Fire Station is at maximum capacity for staff and apparatus.

The San Gabriel Emergency Operations Center, on the site at Fire Station 51, was built and expanded by the Firefighters in the late 1980's and early 1990's. It is in sound condition structurally and a plan is in place for technology updates, in cooperation with IT Manager David Tsuen and his team. Anticipated implementation and completion of this process is late 2022.

Several other buildings on the FS51 campus provide reserve equipment and apparatus storage and are in good repair with no known issues.

Fire Station 52, (FS52) constructed in 1949, has had two remodels. In 2008, the kitchen and day room area were rehabbed as part of the same Firefighter managed project that updated FS51. Asbestos abatement was completed during that time. In 2019 – 2020, a mixed-gender dormitory was added to the station, and the locker room and shower room completely renovated. Fire Department staff completed cosmetic upgrades including paint and new turnout lockers on the apparatus floor during the pandemic lockdown, giving the station a fresh look. In March of 2022, staff added a 120 sq. ft. external storage building to house seasonal wildland equipment and spare PPE, repurposing interior storage for EMS supplies. FS52 has the capacity for 4 full time staff and has no updates or major repairs known at the time of this presentation.

Apparatus Fleet

The active apparatus fleet consists of four triple-combination pumping engines, two Rescue Ambulances, two Command Vehicles, two Utility Vehicles, four Staff Vehicles and a Polaris ATV. Additionally, a 1957 Mack Pumper is kept for Christmas and special-event use.

Apparatus Fleet, continued

Deployment of the apparatus is as follows:

Engine 51	2014 Pierce Quantum Triple Combination Pumper
Engine 52	2016 Pierce Quantum Triple Combination Pumper
Engine 751	2001 Pierce Quantum Triple Combination Pumper (Reserve Status)
Engine 752	2006 Pierce Quantum Triple Combination Pumper (Reserve Status)
BC5	2012 GMC Yukon – Command Vehicle
BC751	2006 Chevrolet Suburban Command Vehicle
RA51	2021 Leader Type 1 Rescue Ambulance
RA751	2012 EVG Type 3 Rescue Ambulance
UT51	2006 Chevrolet 2500HD Utility
UT52	1995 Ford F350 Utility
ATV 5	2010 Polaris ATV with trailer (used for wildland responses out of county)
CH5	2021 Ford Explorer – Fire Chief
INV 5	2013 Toyota Highlander Hybrid – Arson Investigator
PR5	2011 Toyota Highlander Hybrid – Prevention Bureau
ST5	2004 Chevrolet Tahoe – Fire Dept. Pool Vehicle

Plans are in place for an on schedule replacement of E51, with BC5 due for replacement in 2022.

Reserve apparatus are aging out and will be replaced as new frontline apparatus come into service. The overall condition of the fleet is good, with all of the pumping apparatus having undergone in-depth repair in the last two months. One retired Rescue Ambulance is awaiting disposition or repurposing.

LOOKING FORWARD – ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS – INVENT, INNOVATE AND INVEST

As we look into the future, there are a number of benchmarks and goals needed to position the Fire Department to effectively serve the citizens of San Gabriel for years to come. Items 1 – 4 are immediate needs, with goals following #4, in order of priority.

1. **Establish an Identity.** The question of merging into the Consolidated Fire Protection District of Los Angeles County (LA County Fire Department) has been on the periphery for a number of years now and needs to be decided. Staff will be presenting updated information to both City Council and the Fire Department Employee Groups to assist in making the best decision for the city.
2. **Stabilize Staffing Levels.** As mentioned earlier, staffing is at a critical juncture. Making the city more competitive with other agencies as well as re-examining job requirements (i.e. hiring firefighter EMT's vs. a pre-requisite paramedic license) to bring high-caliber candidates into the hiring process.
3. **Conduct a Standards of Cover Study.** Standards of Cover studies are conducted by independent consultants and take a deep dive into all aspects of a subject fire

department. The last study of this type on the San Gabriel Fire Department took place in 2016 – and was completed in July of 2017.

4. **Maintain 4-Member Apparatus.** The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is the guiding body for the Fire Service. It is time for the San Gabriel Fire Department to come into line with NFPA 1710 stating that “each company be staffed with four firefighters, inclusive of company officer.” Studies conducted by both the NIST and UL have demonstrated beyond a doubt that the effectiveness of a 4-member crew provides an advantage both in operational efficacy as well as firefighter safety. The Fire Department, when fully staffed, has the authorized positions to fulfill NFPA 1710. This does not apply to the Rescue Ambulance, as staffing for that resource is controlled by the LA County EMS Agency.
5. **Stand Up an Additional Rescue Ambulance.** As noted in the 2017 Standards of Cover Study, our ambulance greatly exceeds standard for hours of emergency use. Although a more in-depth analysis into cost is necessary, the ambulance billing that can be captured by a San Gabriel resource and not to an automatic-aid city, may sustain this life-saving service enhancement. Additional authorized positions in the Fire Department would be necessary.
6. **Explore deploying a Contract Nurse Practitioner.** A Nurse Practitioner (NP) is another service enhancement that fire-based EMS providers are beginning to utilize. The NP is an effective way to reduce “frequent flyer” calls and provide a better level of care to those that otherwise rely on the EMS system as primary care. Staff is looking into the service model as well as costs to provide this service.
7. **Examine Service Delivery at Regular (minimum 5 year) Intervals.** A regular cycle should be established to look at resource deployment and seek out opportunities for enhanced operations in a cost-effective manner. Emergency Services are a basic service provided to the community and while generally not to be viewed as a profit center, the model needs to be fiscally responsible to the tax payer.

FISCAL IMPACT

No direct impact from this report.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council review and file this report.