



# Information Item

**Date: December 1, 2009**

To: Mayor and City Council  
From: Jim Hone, Fire Chief  
Subject: Reactivation of the Fire Department Communications Center

## **Introduction**

This Information Item provides a brief history of events leading up to and the benefits of reactivating the Santa Monica Fire Department's (SMFD) Communications Center on December 8, 2009.

## **Background**

On September 6, 2006 Santa Monica entered into a fire dispatch agreement with the Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD) as part of an effort encouraged by the federal government for emergency dispatching regionalization and to resolve critical radio infrastructure and operational deficiencies. Santa Monica utilized approximately \$2.4 million of no-match Homeland Security grant funds to participate in a regional fire dispatching system and resolve the deficiencies. In January 2007 Santa Monica closed its Fire Communications Center and LAFD's Operations Control Division (OCD) began dispatching for the Santa Monica Fire Department.

## **Discussion**

OCD dispatches nearly 1,100 emergency responses a day and manages its operation to meet the challenges of this large call volume. SMFD responds to approximately 32 emergency responses a day and has different needs and expectations from a 911 system. These needs include adequate staffing to process calls and reduce radio traffic, thus increasing effective communications between fire companies and the dispatcher and providing a higher level of service to the community.

Following almost two years of dispatching services delivered by LAFD, Santa Monica entered into an agreement on October 14, 2008 with GeoComm to conduct a comparative study and evaluation of current service levels. In October 2008 it was determined that reactivating the Santa Monica Fire Communications Center would provide services more in line with the expectations from the Santa Monica Fire Department and community.

On January 13, 2009 the City Council authorized the City Manager to terminate the fire dispatch agreement with the City of Los Angeles as soon as practical and reactivate the Fire Department Dispatch Center in the Public Safety Facility with Santa Monica Fire Department dispatchers. The City Council also approved the actual appropriations to initiate the process as part of the 2008/09 Midyear report and the FY 2009/10 budget.

Reactivating the Fire Communications Center will allow SMFD to take advantage of significant technological advances, including an updated Computer Aided Dispatch system, an Automatic Vehicle Location system and rapid availability of digital Geographic Information Services (GIS). This technology will provide a higher level of service to the public and safety for Fire Department personnel and the public.

The SMFD maintained the City's closed Fire Communications Center and has been able to reuse most of the existing equipment. In preparation for reactivating the Fire Communications Center one Fire Communications Center Supervisor and eight Fire Communications Operators have been hired and all have received extensive training.

The reactivation of the Fire Communications Center scheduled for December 8, 2009 will not require the public to change the way they request the Fire Department resources to respond to an emergency. The public will continue to dial 911. As a convenience to the public, the non-emergency phone numbers previously in use are still in operation and will be posted on local web sites and sent to the media.

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