

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Windsor is rapidly becoming the jewel of Sonoma County. It boasts a rejuvenated downtown, a healthy budget, a new high school, many beautiful parks, a low crime rate and good schools. Yet, in the midst of this abundance, the level of emergency/fire protection is dangerously below any acceptable standard. Inadequate staffing and inadequate funding are placing the community in a perilous condition.

### The Facts

Windsor Fire Protection District (WFPD) is:

- Unable to keep pace with community growth.
- Unable to adequately protect people in multi-story buildings.
- Experiencing a steadily increasing number of simultaneous calls.
- Not able to provide acceptable response times, greatly increasing risk to lives and property.
- Making impossible demands on volunteers who cannot respond to four or five calls a day nor back-fill stations in the middle of the night.
- Not meeting any nationally recognized staffing standard.
- Not able to meet the Federal and California OSHA “two-in/two out” rule.
- Regularly putting firefighters at unnecessary risk.

### Staffing

Staffing drives every aspect of a fire district’s ability to provide an acceptable level of service: response times, training, prevention, inspections, public education, etc. WFPD staffing is only slightly higher today than it was in 1994—the Town’s population has increased 70% during this period.

Each day, two people are charged with protecting 30,000 people in 30 square miles from Mark West Station Road and Trenton-Healdsburg Road to Chalk Hill Road and Spurgeon Road near Geyserville to Grant School Road on the Healdsburg city limit, and including the Russian River from 101 in Healdsburg to the new Regional Park. In 2004, WFPD responded to 1,900 emergency calls. Two-hundred sixty-five of these calls (five times per week on average) were simultaneous calls (two or more), guaranteeing either delayed or no response to the additional call(s).

Rapid response is essential to saving lives and property:

- A fire doubles in size every minute and within five to seven minutes reaches “flashover,” a condition where everything burns rapidly. Nothing survives flashover—no person, no property. Note: WFPD average response time is four minutes.
- Nearly 60% of WFPD calls are medical aids. A sudden cardiac arrest patient receiving treatment within two minutes has a 90% chance of survival. After four minutes, the chance diminishes to less than 50%.

## **Staffing Myth vs. Fact**

MYTH: More paid staffing isn't necessary because of volunteers.

FACT: By any accepted standard (and in fact) volunteers are not a reliable response resource. There is never a guarantee that any volunteer will respond to a call.

MYTH: Mutual Aid/Automatic Aid (MA/AA) agreements provide plenty of back-up.

FACT: MA/AA were created to provide assistance on major incidents, not to provide back-up on routine second or third calls. Response from neighboring departments always creates response delays. Additionally, statistics show Rincon Valley and Healdsburg call patterns very closely imitate Windsor Fire call patterns. Not only is there is no guarantee a neighboring department will be available to respond to Windsor's need, it is becoming increasingly unlikely they will be able to do so.

## **HISTORY**

### **Fire Service**

Originally, fire departments put out fires. Today "fire department" is a far too narrow name. Sixty percent of WFPD calls are medical aids; in fact, there are more "public service" calls than fires. As fire department roles have expanded, so have the training, equipment, and apparatus requirements.

### **Windsor Fire Protection District**

WFPD was founded as the Windsor Volunteer Fire Department in 1965, when local volunteers would close up shop or leave the farm to respond. Today, volunteer firefighters have full-time jobs, most outside of Windsor. WFPD's highest call volume occurs between 3:00 and 4:00 PM on weekdays—volunteers simply aren't available.

## **FUNDING**

Windsor Fire Protection District was formed in 1986 and is funded solely by a portion of the ad valorem taxes collected within the District boundaries (\$.03 per \$1.00) and a special parcel tax (\$67.50 per single family dwelling). The special tax rate has not changed since 1986. Two recent attempts to increase the rate have failed to achieve the required two-thirds voter approval. There are no other revenue streams available to a fire district.

Each year WFPD loses significant revenues (\$1 million to date) to the California Educational Relief Augmentation Fund (ERAF). In addition, WFPD revenues from properties within the Town's Redevelopment Agency (RDA) are frozen at pre-RDA (1984) levels. To date more than 200,000 square feet have been built (and another 700,000 are planned) in a number of multi-story buildings on the Town Green. WFPD must provide service to these buildings, yet WFPD receives ad valorem revenue based on the 1984 values of these properties, many of which were vacant lots in 1984.

Today, although District revenues continue to increase, the cost of doing business is increasing at a far greater rate. Since 2000, revenues have increased 48%. Following is a sample of costs that have risen significantly during the same period:

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>% Increase</b>
Health Care	\$10,857	\$59,000	443%
Vehicle Operations Costs	\$26,936	\$61,728	129%
Fuel	\$6,794	\$11,092	99%
Workers Compensation	\$30,387	\$53,206	75%
Utilities	\$16,027	\$22,720	41%

It is projected that costs will exceed revenues in less than two years (FY 2007/2008).

### **GROWTH**

Windsor's growth has created dramatic challenges to WFPD's ability to provide service, affecting:

- **Call Volume:** Emergency response calls have doubled in the past 10 years.
- **Response Times:** More traffic, more traffic control devices, more simultaneous calls.
- **Equipment:** More equipment, more wear and tear, increased maintenance and repair costs.
- **Greater Complexity:** Multi-story buildings create unique staffing, equipment and apparatus requirements.

### **WHAT IS NECESSARY**

Windsor's population and demographics dictate a minimum standard of:

- Six to ten firefighters on duty each day.
- The ability to have at least four firefighters on scene within four minutes 90% of the time.
- A staffed station on the west side of town, creating the ability to adequately serve that growing section and effectively respond to simultaneous calls.
- A ladder truck or quint, staffed with a minimum of four firefighters (either dedicated staff or achieved by cross-staffing), to serve the Town's many multi-story buildings.

### **IN CONCLUSION**

Windsor citizens deserve emergency response service on par with the overall quality of their community. WFPD has done an excellent job of serving the community for the past 40 years, doing so in recent years with minimal resources. Today, the District simply cannot provide an acceptable level of service. Planned growth is going to further strain already overburdened resources. Without immediate added staffing and at least committed solutions to infrastructure inadequacies, the level of service will continue to deteriorate, and it is a matter of time until there is a tragedy of the worst kind—one that could have been avoided.