

DATE ISSUED: July 18, 2002

REPORT NO. 02-163

ATTENTION: Honorable Mayor and City Council
Docket of July 22, 2002

SUBJECT: Establishment of Pilot San Diego Fire and Rescue Helicopter Program

SUMMARY

Issues -

1. Should the City Council authorize the establishment of a pilot Fire and Rescue Helicopter Program with helicopter service provided by private vendor to be managed by San Diego Fire and Life Safety Services, contingent on receipt of funds from the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) and the County of San Diego?
2. Should the City Council authorize the City Manager to enter into agreements with the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) and the County of San Diego in order to secure funding for the helicopter program?
3. Should the City Council authorize the City Manager to execute a contract with Kachina Aviation to provide a fire and rescue helicopter service, with oversight by San Diego Fire and Life Safety Services, contingent on the City's receipt of funds from SAFE and the County of San Diego?

Manager's Recommendation -

1. Authorize the establishment of a pilot Fire and Rescue Helicopter Program, with helicopter service to be provided by a private vendor under the direction of San Diego Fire and Life Safety Services, contingent on receipt of funds from the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) and the County of San Diego.
2. Authorize the approval of agreements with the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) and the County of San Diego, to accept and disburse funding from these sources for the establishment of a pilot Fire and Rescue Helicopter Program.
3. Authorize a contract between the City of San Diego and Kachina Aviation, for the provision of helicopter services with oversight by San Diego Fire and Life Safety Services, contingent on the City's receipt of funds from SAFE and the County of San Diego.

Other Recommendations - None.

Fiscal Impact -

The cost of the helicopter program is estimated at \$470,000. The Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) proposes to contribute \$230,000 towards this program. The County of San Diego proposes \$50,000. The remaining \$190,000 is available in the General Fund Allocated Reserve.

BACKGROUND

Predictions indicate that the 2002 fire season will be one of the most active in history. Currently, San Diego's rainfall is 75% below normal, resulting in "live fuel moisture levels" that are 50% below normal. The proposed San Diego Regional Fire and Rescue Helicopter Program will ensure the availability of a helicopter for firefighting and rescue operations in San Diego for a ninety day period, during the height of the wildfire season. Although several fixed wing aircraft and one helicopter are assigned to the county from the United States Forest Service and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, they are re-assigned frequently to incidents elsewhere in the state.

The San Diego Regional Fire and Rescue Helicopter Program will provide multi-mission emergency services to the City and County of San Diego. Fees will not be charged to the county agencies which are signatory to the County of San Diego Fire Mutual Aid Agreement. The emergency services will include:

1. Wildland Firefighting - The helicopter, pilot and support personnel will be certified by the National Wildland Coordinating Group and will provide water drops and personnel transport.
2. Vehicle Accidents - The helicopter will provide rescue of victims from vehicles on the freeways and highways utilizing trained firefighters with specialized equipment, such as the "Jaws of Life."
3. Water Rescue - The helicopter will transport lifeguards to rescue victims in ocean or in swiftwater situations through the use of a short-haul rescue system, or by insertion of lifeguards with equipment into the water to conduct lifesaving operations.
4. Technical Air Rescue - The helicopter will use firefighters and lifeguards in the extrication of victims at cliff rescue incidents. It will transport firefighters to and rescue victims from the roofs of high-rise buildings involved in fire.
5. Homeland Security - The helicopter will transport technicians and/or medical specialists with equipment and supplies to incidents involving terrorism or accidental release of hazardous materials, explosives, and biological agents.

6. Medical Incidents - The helicopter and crew will respond to medical incidents to rescue victims and to coordinate medical transportation by air ambulance or ground ambulance. The helicopter will not be involved in the mission of air ambulance services. Currently, Mercy Air is the provider of air medical transportation in San Diego County and manages this service effectively.

In August, 2001, the City of San Diego issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for furnishing an operated fire fighting helicopter for a period of one year, with responses due on September 29, 2001. Six proposals were received. This contract has not been awarded due to funding issues; however, the evaluation was completed and Fire and Life Safety Services planned to recommend award of this contract to Kachina Aviation. Kachina Aviation submitted the best-value proposal based on cost, type of equipment offered and experience.

Based on its response to the RFP, Kachina Aviation was selected to provide the service for the ninety day pilot Fire and Rescue Helicopter Program. Kachina will provide a Bell 212 twin engine helicopter, equipped with a 375 gallon water tank. The helicopter can carry up to ten passengers and their equipment. Additionally, the company will provide the required equipment, pilots, maintenance, fuel, fuel truck with driver and insurance. However, the contract will not be awarded until full funding is assured.

DISCUSSION

San Diego Fire and Life Safety Services (SDFLSS) will administer and operate the Regional Fire and Rescue Helicopter Program through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE).

SDFLSS will manage the program via an existing deputy chief, with two helicopters managers (Fire Captain level) to coordinate routine daily field operations. Through the County of San Diego Fire Mutual Aid Agreement, on-duty SDFLSS personnel, both fire and lifeguard, will be transported to rescue emergencies to conduct rescues. SDFLSS paramedics will not operate as medics in other jurisdictions due to exclusive operating area agreements established through San Diego County.

The helicopter and crew will be on-duty primarily during the daylight hours for 10 hours each day for response to emergencies and training. The operating period would be extended when a working incident is in progress. During the remaining 14 hours of the day, the helicopter and crew would be required to be operational within one hour of dispatch.

The helicopter and crew will be based at Fire Station 43 (Otay Mesa) which abuts Brown Field. The helicopter could be pre-positioned at any time to other locations in the county, based on incident activity levels and weather, thereby lessening the response times to other county areas.

FISCAL IMPACT

The cost of the proposed program is approximately \$470,000. This includes \$367,620 estimated for the cost of the helicopter service itself, at a rate of \$3700 per day guaranteed up to 180 hours

and \$1450 per flight hour in excess of 180 hours. Personnel costs are estimated at \$102,380. This includes the cost of two helicopter managers (Fire Captain level): one working a 40 hour schedule and the other working 10 hours out of his normal 56 hour work shift, dedicated to preparation prior to implementation and post-implementation activities.

The Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) has offered \$230,000 towards the cost of the program. An additional \$50,000 is expected from the County of San Diego, via Supervisor Ron Roberts. \$200,000 was received from Council Member Bryon Wear's FY02 discretionary funds. This amount was placed in SDFLSS non-personnel budget, where \$10,000 was utilized for the cost of a consultant to review and apply for a proposed heliport at Montgomery Field (The heliport was under study pending a full time helicopter program). The remaining \$190,000 has been transferred to the general Fund Allocated Reserve for the proposed pilot helicopter program. Councilmember Wear supports the use of these funds for this purpose.

Respectfully submitted,

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Jeff Bowman Approved: .P. Lamont Ewell
Fire Chief Assistant City Manager

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