

DRAFT Press Release/Letter to Editor/Marin IJ & Press Democrat

Recently passed legislation in Sacramento mandates that many homeowners living in forested or wildfire-prone areas pay an annual fee of \$150 to the State of California for fire-prevention services. The Fire Chiefs Associations in both Marin and Sonoma Counties are opposed to this legislation.

Both Marin and Sonoma have thousands of homes located in these SRA (State Responsibility Area) designated zones that are already primarily protected by local fire districts or the county fire department. These homeowners already pay local taxes for year-round fire prevention and protection services. It is the position of the Fire Chiefs Associations that this annual \$150 SRA fee is onerous to the residents who do not see any direct benefit from California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Cal Fire, the State's firefighting agency. Local fire districts will not receive any of the estimated \$125 million collected as the State struggles to fill its budget gaps.

The imposition of this SRA Fee by State legislation, without securing a two-thirds affirmative vote from the citizens affected, is poorly conceived. The Marin and Sonoma Fire Chiefs did not support this legislation nor believe that this fee should be imposed on the residents that we serve. What justification is there that the State levies a tax, yet the local fire department shoulders the day to day cost of providing the service? For decades, everyone in California has benefited from the shared firefighting efforts of local fire agencies and Cal Fire. California has developed a Master Mutual Aid System which has been held up as a model to the rest of the nation.

Furthermore, we believe that any future measures supporting local fire protection, prevention and paramedic services will simply not be approved by our voters on top of the SRA fee charged by the State. If it is the will of the State legislature to reduce the burden of Cal Fire to the State's General Fund, an alternate and more equitable mechanism is necessary.

Marin County Fire Chiefs Association

Sonoma County Fire Chiefs Association