



Sonoma County Fire Chiefs Association



Sonoma County Fire Prevention & Response Proposed Measure, 2023-2024

The Primary Goal: “Provide for more efficient, effective, and sustainable fire response, paramedic services, and wildfire prevention and response capabilities that protect the health and safety of Sonoma County residents, business owners, and visitors”.

The Problem

Like many counties in California, Sonoma County has faced major challenges in recent years when it comes to the critical funding needs facing fire services as we all prepare for future wildfire and winter storms impacts. The annual threat of both are now a reality that isn't going away, and the Fire Chiefs are concerned that the current County-wide fire service delivery structure, funding, and system structure isn't enough.

While our county grows and public safety demands increase, the public we serve needs and expects prompt, efficient and effective emergency service everywhere at any time. Our specific concerns include that the system is not meeting National Fire Protection Agency standards in all parts of the county. Several service gaps exist, especially in the more rural areas where there are currently extended response times to critical medical emergencies and vehicle accident victims. There are also significant delays in getting an effective firefighting force on scene to keep small fires from becoming major incidents.



The Solution

The Sonoma County Fire Chiefs Association has invested significant resources into exploring a signature-qualified initiative for the March 2024 ballot. The new initiative was written by local firefighters and fire chiefs, who believe the measure addresses a critical need facing Sonoma County and reflects their knowledge of the challenges and needs for fire protection.

All money raised by this measure will be spent in Sonoma County fire agencies to provide fire protection and emergency response services.

Strict financial accountability provisions, including oversight by citizens and local firefighters and chiefs and independent audits, will ensure money is spent properly, and that no funds are taken by the county, the state or used for any other purpose.

The Plan

Fire Chiefs recommendation: A regional plan based on population density, call volumes, station coverage, current service gaps, and special hazards to advance a comprehensive long-term strategy covering all jurisdictions:

- ½ cent sales tax is estimated to generate \$60 million annually to address funding challenges
- Increase effective firefighting force available countywide using National Fire Protection Agency standards 1710/1720 and a key goal of 3 local firefighters per engine
- Reduce the strain of responding outside of existing boundaries
- Increase the overall strength of the system
- Reduce dependence on larger fire agencies
- Increase capacity for the fire prevention/vegetation management effort with the vegetation management allocation directed towards the fire service
- Improving recruitment and retention of firefighters county-wide
- Includes funding for: 911 dispatch fees, Red Flag & Winter Storm Upstaffing, and other countywide expenses (e.g. technology), improved paramedic services

Proposed governance of expenditures:

- Representation from Fire Districts Association, Fire Chiefs Association, Taxpayers Association, Board of Supervisors Nominees, City Mayors Nominees, Citizen at Large, and Labor
- Fixed allocation cannot be reallocated; however, funding can be reduced if an agency/entity fails the annual audit
- Proposal to distribute “discretionary countywide funding” through REDCOM JPA
- Oversight of expenditures entity, not a decision-making body

Category	Percentage	\$
Staffing & Recruiting/Retention	70.5%	\$ 42,300,000
Annual payments for facilities	14.5%	\$ 8,700,000
911 dispatch fees, Red Flag Upstaffing, etc.	9.0%	\$ 5,400,000
Vegetation Management Crews	5.0%	\$ 3,000,000
Tax Collector	1.0%	\$ 600,000
Estimated Revenue	100.0%	\$ 60,000,000

