

COLUMNS

Notes From SEFD: Rising Equipment Costs



by Eddie McArthur
April 3, 2025



SEFD's UTV is equipped for rescue operations. Photo by Tricia Flaherty

Equipment cost, both to purchase and maintain, takes up a large portion of SEFD's annual budget. That is only getting worse with changes in the industry.

During the recent fires in Los Angeles more than 100 of the 183 firetrucks owned by the L.A. Fire Department were out of service for repairs. Consolidation of the industry and ongoing supply chain problems have led to drastic increases in price for new fire suppression equipment. This has in turn led to equipment being in use longer and longer, requiring more frequent and much more costly repairs, with equipment sitting idle all the while.

Equipment used in public safety roles necessarily has a higher benchmark for performance. Only properly trained and certified personnel can work on repairs and maintenance, and in our rural location having trained mechanics come to us costs about \$150/hour. National standards suggest that equipment should be retired after ten years. Our small agency has only one piece of equipment under ten years of age.

The following apparatus comprises our fleet:

- A 2023 Polaris Ranger with trailer. This UTV is particularly useful for rescue operations in areas such as Gardner Canyon.
- A 2014 Command Vehicle Ram 2500.
- A 2004 Type 1 Engine with 2000 gallon water capacity and a 2016 Type 1 Engine with 1206 gallon capacity. These two engines are what one envisions when thinking “firetruck.
- A 2002 Type 3 Engine. This is an engine designed for fighting wildland fires. It is smaller, more maneuverable, and can also be used for structure and highway incidents when needed.
- A 2017 Type 6 Engine with 300 gallon water capacity and a 2017 Type 6 Engine. These two engines, designated “B” for brush, are very mobile, and designed for fighting grass fires and brush fires.
- A 2001 Tender with 4000 gallon capacity. The tender carries a large amount of water without which we would be hampered in fighting fires.
- Our three ambulances are all type 1, meaning a truck front with a specialized box on back. The upside of this arrangement is that either portion can be traded out for a newer piece of equipment without replacing the entire apparatus.

Ambulances are inspected and certified annually by the Arizona Department of Health Services. Type 1 Engines, Type 3 Engines and Tenders are inspected and certified annually by a qualified Emergency Vehicle Technician.

As you can imagine, equipment takes a beating on our rough roads, adding to ongoing maintenance issues. A new firetruck costs about \$1 million, and takes 24 to 36 months after ordering to arrive. A new ambulance runs \$350-500,000 depending on equipment. This past year SEFD had to replace a 30-year-old truck that simply quit working. A new truck was impossible, but we located a used vehicle in great shape.

SEFD is constantly aware of the need to maintain our equipment. A non-working truck or ambulance does nothing to serve our communities. We continue to maintain our equipment and train our operators in order to give you our best.