

COLUMNS

Notes From SEFD: Planning for Changing Circumstances



by **Eddie McArthur**
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SEFD Captain Kevin Bowman coordinates a helicopter transport. Photo by Tricia Flaherty

Fire prevention in our communities is always at the top of our goals. We are increasing our review of construction plans, code enforcement, and the related services we offer. Evaluation of properties for fire safety is done without charge, and we maintain a list of persons and/or companies who will do tree trimming or removal, weed control, etc.

The emergency services we provide to our communities is being constantly re-evaluated. We have begun work to make use of the land near Elgin that was donated to Sonoita-Elgin Fire District (SEFD). When it became necessary to replace an engine, we sought out one that is also capable of being a water tanker, as availability of water is always an issue. That unit is scheduled to be delivered before year-end and will aid us in having water available where needed.

Our communities are evolving. Weekends and holidays see a huge increase in traffic, which can and does result in an increase in incidents. The number of times we have concurrent calls for service have increased. In addition, mining operations becoming established in the area also add to the potential for both number and severity of incidents. We have bicycle races, bird watchers, people pulling horse trailers, and weekend visitors to wineries. Each of these alone, and in combination, puts added pressure on all local resources including SEFD.

This area has a low population density which results in limits on our tax revenues. We are exploring other opportunities to increase our income stream. We obtained, and put to use, one grant and hope to receive other grants. We are looking into using an experienced grant writer to help in this. While some fire districts are supported by nonprofits such as an “auxiliary,” we have not had that benefit as yet. We’d love to see community members start a program of that type.

In looking at ways we can handle increased needs for services, we undertook a comprehensive evaluation of how we are operating. Many of you participated last year in the strategic planning process with the goal of a clear path forward for SEFD. We are committed to putting into practice the many items that came out of the process and have already begun doing so.

The plan emphasized the safety of our firefighters, their training and equipment, and the compensation we provide as being a top priority. We approved a significant increase in pay levels as well as additional training opportunities. We have improved the area where our members sleep, cook, and workout. We have initiated ongoing meetings with members to ensure that we meet their needs and listen to their concerns.

Having a strategic plan in place enables us to look at how to best serve our communities in our planning and budget. If you’d like a copy of the strategic plan, stop by the fire station during business hours, and we will be happy to provide one to you. If you’d like an electronic copy, let us know and we can email that.