

THE RATIONAL AND JUSTIFICATION FOR ESTABLISHING A FIRE PROTECTION  
DISTRICT FOR THE BALDWIN LAKE AREA

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## INTRODUCTION

The Community of Baldwin Lake is located approximately ten miles east of Big Bear Lake. In the past ten years, the community has increased in size from approximately 60 homes to 400 homes. The reason for the rapid growth is the availability of very desirable yet affordable building space in a geographic area that offers residents a much more tranquil setting than is found today in Big Bear Lake proper.

Despite the rapid growth in Baldwin Lake, the area is still generally considered to be the “forgotten or ignored stepchild” among the Big Bear Valley communities. Despite being labeled as such, Baldwin Lake is blessed with having a very well established volunteer fire department that provides fire and emergency medical services 24/7 to local residents. An area resident, Mr. Larry Winslow, created this department in 2007. Mr. Winslow not only built and funded the department at his own expense, he has continued to fund essentially all of the fire department’s operating costs since its inception. As Baldwin Lake falls within the San Bernardino County Fire District’s response area, a portion of the property taxes paid by property owners in the area is intended to pay for fire protection services in the Baldwin Lake area. Unfortunately, this is not the case; the Baldwin Lake Fire Department does not receive any of the approximately \$136,000 property tax dollars paid annually by Baldwin Lake property owners for fire protection services.

Several months ago a number of Baldwin Lake property owners formed a Committee with the express purpose of garnering financial support for the operation of the fire department and generating a stable long term program that ensures the proper delivery of fire protection and emergency medical services on an ever improving basis. The efforts of this Committee resulted in numerous meetings and discussions with the senior management of LAFCO, County Fire and Big Bear Fire. Despite these efforts, the Committee is of the opinion that virtually nothing was accomplished with regard to the goals set forth. Accordingly, the Committee is now making an application for the formation of a Fire Protection District to serve the Baldwin Lake area exclusively. The Committee believes that this is the only means that will bring about financial fairness to the situation and meet the consensus wishes and needs of Baldwin Lake property owners and residents. A description of the Committee’s efforts as well as a chronological review of the process that has taken place prior to this point in time are explained in pages 8-11 of this document.

The Committee Members would like to thank the readers of this document in advance for spending the time and effort to review the information presented herein.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE BALDWIN LAKE AREA AND THE BALDWIN LAKE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Baldwin Lake is located approximately ten miles east of Big Bear Lake and lies within the San Bernardino County Fire District and its Mountain Service Zone response area. Accordingly, prior to the existence of the Baldwin Lake Fire Department, the response by County Fire to all emergency calls in Baldwin Lake had to come from the County fire stations in Fawnskin or Lucerne Valley. The travel time to Baldwin Lake from both of these stations is 25 minutes at a minimum, even in good weather conditions. Aside from the long travel distance to Baldwin Lake, these small stations had and still today have very limited staffing. Any additional resources needed in the event of an emergency had to come in the form of mutual aid assistance from the Big Bear fire departments. When such assistance was requested, the response time was again very slow simply due to the inherent chain of events that have to occur when fire districts in another jurisdiction area are contacted for additional resources.

In 2003 Larry Winslow, a retired business executive and long time volunteer firefighter, moved his family to Baldwin Lake from San Dimas and built his home adjacent to where the Baldwin Lake Fire Station is now located. Having been a volunteer firefighter for his entire adult life, he soon came to realize how poor the response was in Baldwin Lake to fire and medical emergencies given the remoteness and fire prone nature of the area. He decided Baldwin Lake needed its own volunteer fire station. So in 2005, he proposed and received approval through the State of California Fire Marshall's Office under the California Health and Safety Code to build and staff a Volunteer Fire Department in Baldwin Lake. Subsequently in 2007, the County Board of Supervisors for San Bernardino County approved the Baldwin Lake Fire Department's response area, which includes Baldwin Lake proper.

With those approvals in hand, he invested \$325,000 of his own money to build a 2700 sq. ft. fire station and crew facility. He purchased the fire engines, medical equipment, personnel protection equipment for all firemen, jaws-of-life and other rescue equipment, plus additional equipment needed to properly respond to fire and other emergency calls. Next, he recruited firemen to work on a volunteer basis that were with other fire departments, some as Captains and Fire Prevention Officers, or were recent graduates of training programs such as the State Fire Marshall's Academy in Victorville. The firemen staffing the Baldwin Lake Fire Department today have on average seven years of fire fighting experience with all having been through a State of California Approved Fire Academy. In addition, 90% are Nationally Certified Emergency Medical Technicians. Some 30 firemen are on staff at the station which is manned 24/7. The firefighter-staffing model Mr. Winslow developed and implemented has proved to be so successful that other fire departments including Big Bear Fire have adopted it for their use for paid-call firefighters.

Since the department began providing service, Baldwin Lake Fire has responded to over 550 emergency calls, including five structure fires, several hundred medical calls, five CPR in progress calls and fifteen vegetation fires. These calls saved the lives of two local residents, whom would have died, had Baldwin Lake Fire not responded within five minutes of being called.

## THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS

In Southern California volunteer fire departments are somewhat rare by national standards. In large metropolitan areas such as Southern California where the predominance of fire protection organizations are municipally owned, a perception often exists that volunteer fire departments perform at a lesser standard. There is great evidence to the contrary; volunteer firefighters generally serve their own communities and voluntarily contribute their time, energy and well being for the betterment of their families and neighbors; this factor in and of itself results in a performance level that is consistently very high in volunteer fire departments across the Country. It is generally only in larger cities where the frequency of emergency calls is high that the full time staffing of fire departments with firemen paid union scale wages and benefits can be justified. Here are some other enlightening statistics about volunteer firefighters and volunteer fire departments in the United States

Today 86% of the fire departments are all volunteer or mostly volunteer.

72% of the 1.15 million firefighters are volunteers.

26,000 fire departments are all or almost all volunteer.

94% of volunteer fighters serve communities with fewer than 25,000 residents. Volunteer firefighters save local communities \$37.2 billion in taxes each year.

72 firefighters died in the line of duty in 2010; 44 were volunteers.

Given the aforementioned statistics, Baldwin Lake Fire Department is not an anomaly. Rather it is very much in the mainstream of the way fire protection is more often than not provided in the U.S.

## WHY A FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT SHOULD BE FORMED FOR THE BALDWIN LAKE AREA

As recently as 1990, Baldwin Lake was principally a collection of about 60 older homes generally occupied by individuals who lived there because they wanted little if anything to do with structured society in any form. Since that time, most of those residents have moved elsewhere or passed on. In their place are families that have built new or improved existing homes and frankly want and need community services. Because Baldwin Lake is somewhat remote and is a fire prone area, none of these services are more important to these families than fire protection and emergency medical response services. Today there are approximately 400 homes in Baldwin Lake and its residents generally take pride in the fact that most Big Bear Valley residents do not consider Baldwin Lake to be part of Big Bear proper. It is noteworthy that a much greater percentage of the homes in Baldwin Lake are full time residences as opposed to homes in other Big Bear Valley communities. Also, Baldwin Lake will probably be the fastest growing community in the Big Bear Valley for years to come due to an abundance of property that is available at reasonable prices and a lifestyle that many find to be much more tranquil and appealing.

As was previously mentioned, Baldwin Lake has historically been considered and treated like the “ugly step child” in the greater Big Bear Valley area; this has certainly been the case when it comes to how Baldwin Lake has been regarded when it comes to fire protection and the use of the tax dollars generated from Baldwin Lake. “Out of sight and out of mind” is a phrase that probably describes how County Fire has viewed Baldwin Lake. However given the growth and changes that have occurred in Baldwin Lake, the community can no longer be ignored and the misallocation of the funds paid by the property owners in Baldwin Lake should not be permitted to continue.

Baldwin Lake is a small community by standards and thus it has different needs than larger cities and communities. Accordingly, the means utilized to address challenges such as fire protection services has to be different. The perfect example is Baldwin Lake’s use of a volunteer fire department. There is not an argument against Baldwin Lake having a volunteer fire department that makes sense. The Baldwin Lake Fire Department has been an invaluable resource for the residents of Baldwin Lake and has performed to very high standards since it was established in 2007.

With the aforementioned being the case, the task of administering a volunteer fire department in a somewhat remote and sparsely populated area is also different. Those within the management authority have to have a thorough understanding of what makes volunteer fire departments successful and economically viable, and how they can co-exist with municipal fire departments. Under the proposed fire protection district for Baldwin Lake, this process will start with a non-paid five member Board of Directors elected every four years by property owners in Baldwin Lake. The Fire Chief of the Department will likewise not be paid to perform his or her services. This mindset is what makes it possible for a volunteer fire department to function at a high level, yet use equipment and apparatus that is previously used or donated to the department. For example, the department recently received a Spartan Pumper Engine through a donation; this engine is 16 years old yet will perform its intended tasks on a comparable basis to new equipment. In a volunteer fire department, the end result is what matters, not the glamour of having the newest and most expensive equipment.

Among the many reasons the residents and property owners in Baldwin Lake want to and need to have the benefit of a fire protection district specific to meeting the needs of Baldwin Lake are as follows:

1. Self-governance – The residents and property owners believe that only they are in a position to make the decisions that are in the best interest of Baldwin Lake. They point to the

example of how County Fire has done virtually nothing to benefit Baldwin Lake, and has had four different Chiefs in the five years that the Baldwin Lake Fire Department has been in existence. A frequent response that Committee members receive when discussing this matter with local residents is “even if promises of better support and financial fairness are now made by whomever, there is no reason to believe they will be honored over time.” Keeping an open mind, this point is hard to argue with.

2. Financial control – The residents and property owners believe that they will do a better job of using their tax dollars than will County Fire, Big Bear Fire or anyone else. Moreover, the Committee is of the opinion that if residents and property owners know that if the money they pay for fire protection stays in Baldwin Lake, they will readily support additional investment in Baldwin Lake’s fire protection resources. One good example of an additional resource needed in Baldwin Lake that will never become a reality without the proposed fire protection district is as follows; because Baldwin Lake is not on a centralized water system, there are currently no fire hydrants for the fire department to use. Larry Winslow has reached an agreement with a number of large property owners in key areas of the community to build ponds on their property that will be then used by the fire department when the need arises. This is an excellent example of a very good low cost approach to solving a problem to the benefit of the community.
3. Property insurance issues – Baldwin Lake currently has an ISO (Insurance Services Organization) rating of 9 on a scale of 1 to 10. By comparison, Big Bear proper has a rating of 4. This rating differential makes a major difference in the cost of homeowners’ insurance. The primary reason the area’s ISO rating is 9 not 4 is the lack of water for fire fighting purposes. The aforementioned plan to place ponds in strategic areas will solve this problem. Again, only local control of fire protection resources will see problems/opportunities such as this addressed.

In addition, with the large number of wildfires in the Western U.S. in recent years, the number of major insurance carriers offering property insurance in areas such Baldwin Lake has dropped to a point where they are almost non-existent. Farmers Insurance claims to be the only major carrier currently offering fire protection coverage in Baldwin Lake, and they will only do so on the basis that the Baldwin Lake Fire Station is manned 24/7 and is in close proximity to virtually all homes in the Baldwin Lake area. The residents and property owners of Baldwin Lake are under constant threat that there will be no insurance coverage offered in the area other than the State provided Fair Plan where the cost is double and coverage limited to fire protection only.

In summary, a fire protection district should be created for the Baldwin Lake area for numerous reasons. Moreover, the creation of said district is the best way the financial inequities and problems that have and continue to exist can be rectified. The creation of the said district will enable the residents and property owners of Baldwin Lake to actively participate in improving fire protection/emergency medical services as well as areas such as insurance cost and availability.

## THE VARIOUS FIRE PROTECTION ALTERNATIVES EXPLORED

As was stated briefly in the introduction section of this document, various alternatives to forming a Fire Protection District for Baldwin Lake were explored in depth; this section will provide a chronological review of the extensive process undertaken over a several month period leading up to this point in time.

The fact that Larry Winslow personally has shouldered the cost of building and operating the Baldwin Lake Fire Department while our tax dollars were used elsewhere has been an ever-increasing concern among area residents for some time. It was not however until early this past summer when County Fire introduced the idea of taking over the Baldwin Lake Fire Department and staffing the station with "paid-call" firefighters, that the "xxxxx" hit the fan." In the simplest of terms, their proposed action would mean that Baldwin Lake residents would lose the critical benefit of having a local fire department staffed 24/7. If County Fire were to take this action, the residents and property owners in Baldwin Lake would be in the same precarious position they were in prior to 2007. Moreover, all of the time, effort and money invested to build and staff the fire department would have been wasted.

Faced with this possible nightmare situation, several local residents along with Mr. Winslow formed a Committee to explore alternatives that would ensure the long term financial and operating stability of Baldwin Lake Fire. The Committee concluded that three alternatives should be considered.

First option, form a Baldwin Lake Community Services District (CSD) to provide fire protection and other emergency services, and possibly other services as well;

Second option, form a Baldwin Lake Fire Protection District to provide fire protection and other emergency services; or

Third option, join forces in some way with Big Bear Fire, the agency formed recently by the merger of the Big Bear Lake Fire Department and the Big Bear City Fire Department through a Joint Powers Agreement between the City of Big Bear CSD and the City of Big Bear Lake.

For advice on which of the three options best addressed the situation; Larry Winslow contacted Robert Smith of the Yermo Calico Fire Department whom Larry believed was familiar with similar situations. Mr. Smith suggested that Larry contact Ms. Kimberly Cox, General Manager of Helendale, California CSD, for her thoughts. Ms. Cox in turn advised Larry that he should contact Kathleen McDonald at LAFCO to review the matter.

Members of the committee subsequently met with Ms. McDonald and reviewed the Baldwin Lake situation. The options being considered were presented. With regard to forming a CSD just for Baldwin Lake, Kathleen made it clear that LAFCO would not support/allow our forming a CSD because another CSD, the Big Bear City CSD, was already in operation in close proximity to Baldwin Lake. Their position seemed to be based largely on economy of scale. In other words, it does not make sense for the small area of Big Bear proper to have multiple agencies performing duplicate services.

With that option off the table, we discussed the formation of a new Fire Protection District for Baldwin Lake. She said that if that were the direction we chose to go, LAFCO would accept and process our application, and submit it to the LAFCO Board.

The conversation quickly moved to collaborating with the Big Bear CSD. She said that LAFCO had always been of the opinion that this was the best approach as they were of the opinion that there should

be only one fire protection entity serving the entire Big Bear Valley. There was apparently a proposal on the table in 1995 for both Baldwin Lake and Lake Williams to join the Big Bear CSD for fire protection services. The residents of Lake Williams voted to join the CSD whereas the Baldwin Lake residents voted not to.

Based on the results of the meeting with Ms. McDonald, the committee members then had a series of meetings with Jeff Willis and Mark Mills, Chief and Assistant Chief of Big Bear Fire respectively. The meeting with Kathleen was discussed as well as the feasibility of Baldwin Lake Fire “merging” into Big Bear Fire. Their position on fire protection for the Big Bear Valley is consistent with that of LAFCO; there should only be one fire department for the Big Bear Valley. This having been said, everyone agreed that the merger should be seriously considered. Larry Winslow told Chief Willis that if a merger were to occur, he believed the assessment of a supplemental fee along the lines of the fee being paid by the other communities in the Big Bear City CSD would be acceptable to Baldwin Lake property owners provided their property tax dollars were redirected from County Fire to the Big Bear CSD. Chief Willis assured Larry that this would not be a problem.

Following the meetings with Big Bear Fire, the Committee began planning a “town hall” meeting for Baldwin Lake area residents to discuss the ideas on the table and receive their feedback. However, just short of scheduling the meeting, Larry Winslow was contacted by Chief Willis of Big Bear Fire who told him not to proceed further because Chief Mark Hartwig of County Fire who apparently questioned the idea of Baldwin Lake Fire joining Big Bear Fire had contacted him. Chief Willis told Larry that he would be contacted by Chief Hartwig’s office to set up a meeting to review the situation. That call from County Fire never happened, thus Larry contacted Chief Hartwig’s office; a meeting was then scheduled for approximately three weeks from that date.

At the first of two meetings held with Chief Hartwig, the meeting began with an extensive review of how fire protection services are provided in Baldwin Lake today as well as how they were provided prior to the creation of the Baldwin Lake Fire Department. Chief Hartwig began his comments by raising the issue as to the Baldwin Lake Fire Department being in compliance with the operating standards of County Fire. Larry assured Chief Hartwig that all steps needed to assure compliance were routinely taken and invited County Fire to verify this whenever and as often as they saw fit. Chief Hartwig acknowledged that there was no history of reported compliance violations or complaints. After that apparent concern was set aside, Larry raised the issue of County Fire using Baldwin Lake’s property tax dollars for communities other than Baldwin Lake and why this was improper. Chief Hartwig acknowledged that the tax dollars Baldwin Lake residents pay for fire protection were being used elsewhere by County Fire, specifically to support the shortfall in property tax dollars needed to fund the operation of the County Fire Station in Fawnskin.

Larry then shifted the meeting to discussing how firefighting services had to be performed for Baldwin Lake. He made it clear that the small taxpayer base in Baldwin Lake could not support a full-time County fire station and thus the volunteer fire program was the only workable means of providing services. He went on to emphasize however that, despite Baldwin Lake Fire being a volunteer fire department, there were day-to-day operating costs that had to be paid for. He made the point that Baldwin Lake not only needed to have use of the property tax dollars its property owners were already paying the County for fire protection, but also needed to have a suitable “taxing authority” that could assess a small fee to supplement the property tax dollars presently being paid. A proforma budget was presented to support the financial viability of this concept. Assistant Chief Dan Odom, who had at that point joined the meeting, suggested that a “Special Assessment District” should be established for the Baldwin Lake area to fund the operation of Baldwin Lake Fire. He explained that with the Special Assessment District in

place, both the aforementioned property tax dollars as well as supplemental fee funds collected would have to be used to fund the Baldwin Lake Fire Department. Everyone agreed that this was a good way to solve the problem. The Fire Assessment District would be established through County Fire who would in turn contract with Baldwin Lake Fire to provide fire protection services for Baldwin Lake. The meeting concluded with agreement that the matter would be reviewed with counsel and LAFCO to make sure it was workable from a legal perspective. A follow-up meeting was scheduled approximately four weeks later to review the aforementioned feedback and establish a process to move forward.

Following the first meeting with County Fire, Larry Winslow contacted Kathleen McDonald to make sure the concept discussed at said meeting was acceptable to LAFCO. Ms. McDonald said she would check with legal counsel to make sure that County Fire could legally contact with Baldwin Lake Fire to provide the necessary services in Baldwin Lake. She subsequently told Larry Winslow that there were no legal obstacles to the contemplated arrangement. She also said that she would be attending the follow up meeting that had been scheduled for late October.

We opened the follow-up meeting by stating that we were prepared to move forward with the Special Assessment District plan, highlighting the fact that Kathleen had expressed no reservations regarding the plan. We also presented a revised proforma budget for use accordingly. However, in total contrast to what had been agreed to at the previous meeting, Chief Hartwig made the statement that he was not prepared to move forward as was contemplated, as doing so would require County Fire to operate what he referred to as a "new model", a concept that was not acceptable to him. He went on to reiterate that only two avenues of support for Baldwin Lake Fire would be acceptable to County Fire (1) staffing the Baldwin Lake station with paid-call firemen or, (2) staffing the station with "limited term" firemen. Larry said that neither of the two proposals was workable or acceptable to the Baldwin Lake community for the following reasons. The use of paid-call firemen in lieu of full time volunteer staffing would not work for two reasons.

First, the response time to emergency calls would be too slow because paid-call firemen by definition would not be on site at the station when an emergency response call comes in. Chief Hartwig had been emphatic that County Fire could not allow paid-call firemen to occupy the station except when called to respond to a specific emergency.

Second, there are simply not a sufficient number of paid-call firemen available in the Big Bear area. Moreover, Big Bear Fire has a much more lucrative program to compensate paid-call fireman than does County Fire, thus almost all of those that reside in the Big Bear area work for Big Bear Fire. And also, County Fire has a policy that all paid-call firemen have to live within twenty minutes of their assigned station; thus paid-call firemen who might be willing to come to Baldwin Lake from outlying areas could not be hired by County Fire.

Mr. Winslow then explained that staffing the Baldwin Lake Station with "Limited Term" firemen was also not workable because the costs of doing so would be far too great. Chief Hartwig said the supplemental fee cost per property owner in Baldwin Lake would have to be approximately \$400 per year, above and beyond property taxes. Larry assured Chief Hartwig that the property owners in Baldwin Lake would never consider paying a fee of that magnitude. He pointed out that per the proforma budget submitted for the Special Assessment District plan, the cost per property owner for the supplemental fee would be well under \$100 per year.

With the previously agreed to Special Assessment District plan apparently off the table, Larry raised the issue of Baldwin Lake possibly joining the Big Bear City CSD as had been originally suggested by

Kathleen McDonald. Chief Hartwig stated that this idea would only be acceptable to County Fire if the residents and property owners in all of the Big Bear area communities agreed to support the formation of one fire protection organization for the entire Big Bear Valley. He went on to say that if and when the above choice was presented to those in the Big Bear Valley, he was 100% confident that the residents would want to go with County Fire as opposed to Big Bear Fire. Larry told Chief Hartwig that he disagreed on this point because it was his opinion that Big Bear Valley residents and property owners would choose local control of their fire services as opposed to County control. Chief Hartwig also said that he did not believe that Chief Willis and Big Bear Fire would want to raise that choice for the residents and property owners.

*In hindsight, his apparent agreement to give Big Bear Valley residents and property owners the right to choose was a meaningless gesture because he knows very well that Fawnskin would never agree to joining Big Bear Fire as they have every reason not to. Following the meeting, Committee members queried a number of prominent Fawnskin property owners for their thoughts on joining Big Bear Fire; all were adamant in their desire to continue having County Fire serve Fawnskin. They all pointed out that County Fire has a fire station staffed 24/7 with a Captain and Paramedic Engineer right in Fawnskin, and it cost Fawnskin residents and property owners nothing beyond their basic property tax dollars thanks in large part to the \$136,000 Baldwin Lake property owners pay in property tax dollars that the County uses to fund the Fawnskin fire station. Any decision by Fawnskin residents to join Big Bear Fire would simply cost them more money in the form of supplemental fire protection fees!*

The end result of the second meeting with Chief Hartwig, and seemingly the matter in general, was that everything will for the foreseeable future remain status quo and not change due in large part to political, and to a lesser degree, economic reasons.

With that disappointment behind us, we again reached out to Kathleen McDonald to seek her interpretation of the meeting and her advice as to our options. She said it was her opinion that County Fire would never adopt the Special Assessment District plan based upon questions of potential liability. Furthermore, she had serious doubts that any consensus could ever be reached on unifying the fire protection services in the Big Bear Valley under one authority given the diverse interest held by the numerous parties that would be involved in making this happen. She stated that LAFCO staff would not discourage the application for Baldwin Lake to become a fire protection district but that in all likelihood LAFCO staff would question the financial viability of said district in their report to the LAFCO Board. She added however, that the ultimate decision on the formation of a new fire protection district for Baldwin Lake would be in the hands of the LAFCO Board, not the LAFCO staff. Larry told her that given the volunteer aspect of the Baldwin Lake Fire Department and willingness of the community to support the department, that he would be able to show suitable evidence to support the long-term financial viability of a fire protection district for Baldwin Lake.

## QUALITY CONTROL, FIRE PREVENTION AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Quality Control - One of the benefits of having a locally administered fire protection district is the opportunity to ensure better quality control. The fact that the proposed new district's Board of Directors as well as the fire departments day-to-day management all live in the local community will significantly improve communication between area residents and Baldwin Lake Fire. Residents and property owners will have access to immediate response to both their need and concerns, and not have to look geographically elsewhere and search through a large bureaucracy for answers.

The two main regulators of the fire industry are the State of California Fire Marshall and the National Fire Prevention Agency (NFPA). Additional mandates come from Cal/OSHA and the federal OSHA. Adherence to their recommendation with regards to vehicles, equipment, tactics and building components helps minimize the risks and hence the potential liability to fire fighters, citizens and fire districts. As a fire protection district, we will be increasing our monitoring of both these agencies by subscribing to their update services and implementing proactively their recommendations as they apply within the Baldwin Lake area.

Fire Prevention – As a fire protection district we will assume this responsibility for the greater Baldwin Lake area; presently this is a responsibility of County Fire. The fire prevention regulations established by County Fire over the past twenty years may have been with good intent, but many do not make sense for Baldwin Lake, and probably many other outlying areas.

Two examples are as follows: first, prior to 2011, the County required owners of newly built homes in Baldwin Lake to install a 5000 gallon water tank for the fire department's use. The problem was this was two fold, (1) the County's fire engines do not carry "hard suction hoses" thus are unable to pump and use the water in these tanks in a fire situation, and (2) probably 80% of the tanks installed in Baldwin Lake which were to be kept full at all times, are empty. Follow-up inspections to make sure the tanks were kept full were apparently never performed. Possibly realizing that County Fire could not utilize the tanks, the County stopped requiring that the tanks be installed early in 2011, and instead started requiring that newly built homes be equipped with sprinkler systems. The idea was apparently that the sprinkler system would enable inhabitants to escape a burning structure. The sprinkler system concept was probably a good idea, at least in part, but eliminating the requirement for the 5000-gallon water tanks was a big mistake. The reason is sprinkler systems do nothing to prevent the outside of a structure from catching fire and the water supply incorporated into the sprinkler system is so small that it cannot prevent a fire inside the structure from engulfing the entire structure and spreading to other structures. If the 5000-gallon tanks were still required, the sprinkler systems would have enough water to really help control a fire and firefighters would have ready access to water on-site. *As opposed to County Fire's engines, the engines of the Baldwin Lake Fire Department have always been equipped with "hard suction hoses" and suction pumps to allow firefighters to pull water from the 5000-gallon tanks.*

A second example of County Fire lacking an understanding of community needs would be this year's weed abatement notices. In mid-June, County Fire issued notices to many property owners requiring all weeds over four inches tall be removed by the end of July. Anyone with any knowledge of the mountain summer weather would never have established this rule with these dates for one simple reason. It probably does not rain all summer in the City of San Bernardino, but in Baldwin Lake we always get substantial rain in the months of July and August. This was especially true this year as we received 16 inches in the month of August alone. Thus, even if all of the property owners removed all of the weeds by the end of July deadline, the weeds quickly grew back within weeks, if not days. As could have been expected, the inspector came back at the end of August and sure enough, the weeds had re-grown.

Residents tried explaining to the Inspector that they had removed the weeds in July as required, but the excessive rain had caused the weeds to re-grow very quickly. Rather than realizing that the weeds are not a fire hazard in any stretch of the imagination because the ground and the weeds are soaked from the rain, and reschedule an inspection after the rainy period, the inspector immediately started issuing \$100.00 fines. She was much more focused on collecting fines than understanding the problem. The right approach to this situation is to have a requirement that the weeds be removed by the 15<sup>th</sup> of September each year as the rainy season almost always ends by end of August. A lot of wasted time, effort and money would be saved for both the property owners and the County. This may be a long-winded description of what may seem a comparatively small issue, but it illustrates the problem and the contempt said actions could create.

There is plenty to criticize here with regard to County Fire's policies and actions, but that is not the intent; this is simply an illustration of why local control can deal much more effectively with fire prevention than by its nature has to be subject to numerous variables depending on geographic location among other things.

Risk Management – Managing a fire department is in general and by its nature, a risk prone endeavor. However, specific areas of risk that should be highlighted are as follows.

Hazardous Waste Cleanup - Hazardous waste spills by tank trucks or other vehicles carrying hazardous waste is abnormally high in the Baldwin Lake area due to our proximity to State Highway 18. However, because Highway 18 is a State Highway the cleanup responsibility falls to CALTRANS, thus not the proposed fire protection district. The remaining hazardous waste risk in the Baldwin Lake areas is centered on local residential property. This risk is best managed with local diligence and review of the properties in the area. In the unlikely event of a somewhat major waste cleanup problem whereby assistance is required, Baldwin Lake Fire will contract with other local agencies through mutual aid agreements. Lastly, if a hazardous waste situation originates as a result of criminal intent, the Sheriffs Department has full responsibility.

Major Fires\_- Should a major fire originate in Baldwin Lake, the primary responsibility to manage the fire falls upon the Baldwin Lake Fire Department. While we believe that we presently have the necessary tools and equipment to manage this risk, the funding received from property taxes and assessments will enable Baldwin Lake Fire to acquire specialized equipment to reduce the risk to homeowners from large fires that originate in Baldwin Lake or elsewhere. The additional equipment and resources to be added will include a "foam machine" to protect structures, a masticator for brush control and the previously discussed water ponds throughout Baldwin Lake to supply large amounts of water. Baldwin Lake is surrounded on three sides by the National Forest. If a fire originates in the National Forest, the primary responsibility for said fire falls to US Forestry. Lastly, Cal Fire has recently started collecting a new "Fire Protection Fee" to strengthen fire prevention and firefighting efforts throughout the State: we are currently holding meetings with Cal Fire concerning the deployment of their assets in Baldwin Lake to enhance fire protection in the area.

Volunteer and Employee Liability\_- We will have only one paid employee; all other staff will be on a totally volunteer basis. Nevertheless, we still need to be cognizant of and comply with various regulations such as workplace violence, sexual harassment, discrimination, etc. Baldwin Lake Fire presently has a full range of employee policies intended to properly educate everyone associated with the department in these areas. The practice of monitoring and regularly updating these policies, and making sure the related training takes place, is currently in place. Baldwin Lake Fire carries employment practices insurance should litigation occur.

Fire Fighter Training and Injury Potential - Being a firefighter is a dangerous occupation and with it comes a large potential for liability. This liability exist for volunteer firefighters or otherwise. In our best effort to manage this risk, we have an active and thorough fire fighter training program following the guidelines established by the State of California Fire Marshall. All of our volunteers receive certification as Volunteer Fire Fighters, Fire Fighter 1 and Fire Fighter II from the State Fire Marshall's office. Adhering to this multitude of requirements helps minimize the potential injury risks to our firefighters. To reduce the risk even further, Baldwin Lake Fire has an ongoing training program with monthly sessions to increase the safety and proficiency of all our firefighters. This program is implemented, monitored and documented by our training officers. We also budget additional training from outside sources for specialized or highlighted areas as needed and when necessary. Nevertheless, regardless of how much training and proficiency each fire fighter has, the potential still exists for an injury. An important side note regarding insurance is that as a volunteer fire department, Baldwin Lake Fire can obtain its liability, vehicles, property and management liability coverage through Volunteer Fire Insurance Services. This insurance company specializes in coverage just for volunteer fire departments.

## USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

California Fire Fighters Association [www.csfa.net](http://www.csfa.net)  
United States Fire Administration [www.usfa.fema.gov](http://www.usfa.fema.gov)  
California State Fire Marshall [www.osfm.fire.ca.gov](http://www.osfm.fire.ca.gov)  
County of San Bernardino Fire [www.sbcfire.org](http://www.sbcfire.org)  
National Volunteer Fire Council [www.nvfc.org](http://www.nvfc.org)

## ATTACHMENTS