



LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT

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FIRE CHIEF

February 12, 2020

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
FILE NO. 20-018

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners

FROM:  Ralph M. Terrazas, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: OVERVIEW OF THE UNIFIED HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE CENTER
(UHRC)

FINAL ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

SUMMARY

As directed by Commission President Delia Ibarra, the Fire Department is providing an overview of the Unified Homelessness Response Center (UHRC) and the LAFD's role and responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board receive and file.

DISCUSSION

The Unified Homelessness Response Center (UHRC) is located in the Emergency Operation Center (EOC) at 500 E. Temple St., Los Angeles, CA 90012 and was established in April 2018 by the Mayor's Office. The purpose of establishing the UHRC was to coordinate response to the Homeless Crisis in the City of Los Angeles by co-locating representatives from all affected City departments in one space. This has allowed for increased efficiency when addressing all homeless related challenges. The UHRC is managed by a representative from LAHSA, Enrique Martinez, but also staffed throughout the week by LAPD, LAHSA, LADOT, LARAP, LASAN, Dept of Disability (DOD), the Mayor's Office, and the remaining departments with varied days and hours.

The hours are from 0600 to 1700 Monday through Friday. LAFD's role is to provide identification and reporting of Fire/Life safety violations and potential Fire/Life safety violations. This includes homeless encampments in brush areas, encampments in vacant occupancies, and possession of hazardous waste. Additionally, LAFD provides EMS service reports, windshield surveys, and attends policy group meetings.

This complex crisis has many prongs, requiring a multi-disciplinary approach. The collective efforts of this team approach has demonstrated to be a superior construct to the sum total of individuals. Representatives collaborate on several challenges daily. From RV parking concerns, coordination of Cleaning and Rapid Engagement (C.A.R.E.) teams,

coordination with Council District Offices, establishing Abridge Homes (ABH) sites, staffing, and more.

Service requests and concerns come from a variety of sources including Council District Offices and MYLA311 (App and Web Page), as well as inter and intra departmental reporting. LAFD members use MYLA311 for reporting of bulky items on the sidewalk, but will contact Captain Brian Wall, LAFD's Homeless Response Liaison, for time-sensitive life and safety issues.

An example of one of the success was when the City Attorney's Office, Council District Offices, LAPD, LAFD, and the Mayor's Office worked to amend an existing ordinance that allows for homeless individuals to be evacuated from the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ) during Red Flag weather conditions (Relative Humidity <15% AND wind >25 mph) and/or Augmented Staffing during fire weather conditions that fall short of Red Flag weather criteria.

Historically, the LAFD & LAPD respond to several hundred brush fires each year in these areas due to warming fires, cooking fires, and accidental fires linked to homeless encampments. During Red Flag conditions, there is a heightened risk of a large fire with rapid growth and catastrophic consequences.

This was the case in December 2017. Hot, dry, and windy conditions (Santa Ana Winds) had persisted for a few days leading up to the Skirball Fire in Bel Air. The evidence collected linked the origin of this fire to a homeless encampment on the East side of the I-405 freeway. All that was needed was an ignition source. Once the brush fire started it was potentially a devastating fire that could have burned down hundreds of homes with unpredictable loss of life if it had not been for the aggressive and decisive actions of the LAFD.

This amendment to the ordinance allows the LAPD, LAHSA, LASAN, and LAFD to coordinate evacuations during deadly weather conditions to prevent loss of life. It is nearly impossible to effectively evacuate homeless encampments in the VHFHSZ when a brush fire has started. These areas have difficult access and poor visibility with rolling hills and steep terrain, which places first responders in extreme risk for their own safety during a rapidly moving brush fire.

The first evacuation was coordinated on October 10, 2019. Later that evening at 2101 hrs. a brush fire started in Sylmar. This was day one of the Saddle Ridge fire. Lives were undoubtedly saved as a result of the proactive evacuation.

The LAFD ardently strives to achieve Mission critical objectives of saving lives and property. One example is the Homeless Encampment Task Force that is led by Fire Chief Terrazas and meets regularly throughout the year. Furthermore, the LAFD will continue its supportive role of identifying and notifying the UHRC of potential fire and life safety concerns.

CONCLUSION

Homelessness in the City of Los Angeles is of historical proportions. The complexities of finding solutions necessitates engagement and coordination from all city departments as well as development of public-private partnerships. The LAFD is committed to participating in the UHRC in order to provide expertise and oversight of all issues related to fire and EMS. LAFD assists with data capture and notification of homeless encampments in the VHFHSZ as well as areas which may pose a risk to public safety. This data is shared and ultimately populated on a map in the UHRC in order to provide situational awareness as well as being used to develop strategic and tactical decisions involving the collective efforts of all city departments.

Board report prepared by Brian Wall, Captain I, Homeland Security Division, Tactical Planning Section-Homeless Response Liaison.