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MOFD Approves Vehicle Accident Cost Recovery Program

By Lucy Amaral



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In his staff report, Bradley said that Fire Recovery USA developed its charges by surveying fire departments nationwide to determine average time-on-scene, type of equipment, materials, supplies and labor that would be needed, and billing rates were determined by itemizing costs for a typical run.

Fire Recovery USA, headquartered in Roseville, California, currently serves more than 60 fire districts throughout the state. Mike Rivera of Fire Recovery USA said that billing for cost recovery has been used by some fire departments for nearly 20 years. He added that more districts are beginning to implement this program primarily because of lower tax revenue, and higher costs.

"Since the fact is that taxes no longer cover the actual costs to mitigate these accidents, I believe tax money should provide the infrastructure of having a fire department available to provide service," Rivera said. "But the costs associated with an actual incident should be covered by the responsible party."

"The district is always looking for ways to efficiently provide quality fire and emergency medical service to the community while maintaining a balanced budget," said Wyro. "One way to do that is for users to pay for services. Currently, users pay a fee for such services as commercial fire inspections, plan review, fire code and construction permits. Ambulance and related medical response services are charged to the extent a resident's insurance company will reimburse for that service with no out of pocket expense to the resident. Non-residents are charged the full amount."

Wyro said the new program will follow along those lines, enabling MOFD to maintain its level of service while aiding the bottom line. "These user fees will generate an estimated \$72,000 for the current year's budget, funding necessary to keep the budget in balance," Wyro said.

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The Board of Directors of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) approved an ordinance establishing a cost recovery system with regards to motor vehicle accidents. The adopted ordinance outlined a schedule of fees and collection policies to recover costs for fire-based emergency services by charging the 'at fault' party of motor vehicle accidents which occur within the District's boundaries.

Fire Chief Randy Bradley said MOFD responds to an average of two motor vehicle accidents a day, not only on surface streets of the District, but also on Highway 24 where many involve non-residents either driving to or through the District. He added that according to the California Health and Safety Code, Districts such as MOFD have the authority to charge fees to cover the cost of any service that the District provides.

MOFD Board Member John Wyro said the fee structure put in place would charge the 'at fault' driver the costs incurred by the department for responding to a vehicle accident or hazardous material spill to the extent the 'at fault' driver's insurance will pay.

MOFD's Board also approved a motion to contract with Fire Recovery USA, a cost-recovery provider that tracks, bills and processes reimbursable claims with the at-fault insurance company associated with the motor vehicle accident.