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Orinda Response Times Frustrate MOFD

By Nick Marnell



MOFD engine navigates Sleepy Hollow Lane in north Orinda. Photo courtesy Moraga-Orinda Fire District

district to improve inadequate emergency response times into the Sleepy Hollow, Orinda Downs and Upper El Toyonal portions of north Orinda, it should relocate station 45 to a site near the Camino Pablo and Miner Road intersection. Healy said that the district has no money to do that, and furthermore, he noted that moving station 45 would place it farther away from target hazards in Orinda, like Highway 24, the Caldecott Tunnel, the BART tunnels, senior assisted living facilities and a convalescent hospital. "This is an example of how every contemplated fire station relocation has potential positive and negative effects," he said.

The report also called for structuring aid agreements with adjacent Alameda County and East Bay Regional Parks fire districts. Healy said that MOFD has executed automatic aid and mutual aid agreements with the Berkeley Fire Department and EBRP.

Some have proposed using smaller, more nimble apparatus to quickly navigate that difficult terrain and those narrow roadways. "What we'd pick up in size we'd give up in tools and equipment," said the chief. District union representative Anthony Perry agreed. "The narrow roads and numerous blind spots of Orinda dictate the speed of the apparatus," he said. "A smaller response vehicle would have the same limitations, and yield no faster response."

As for those narrow roads, the district can expect no help from the city of Orinda. According to Chuck Swanson, director of public works and engineering services, Orinda is only reconstructing the road pavement, and because of the high cost will not be widening or straightening the city roads. "Also, many of our residents like the semi-rural character of the roads the way they are," he said.

In that case, those residents need to prepare themselves even more so for a major disaster, when evacuation times will matter maybe more than response times. District emergency preparedness coordinator Dennis Rein advises Orinda residents to not wait for the community warning system alert, but to take action on their own. "If there is any doubt in your mind, go," he said.

As Healy works on his Standards of Coverage document, and his geographic information system

For years emergency medical call response times in Orinda have exceeded those in Moraga. The terrain and the narrow, winding roads in sections of Orinda make it difficult for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to safely transport personnel and equipment to the emergency scenes. As fire chief Stephen Healy prepares to update the MOFD Standards of Coverage, a deployment analysis of district resources, he again confronts the reality of the lengthier Orinda emergency response times and what, if anything, can be done to reduce them.

Based on district records, the 2011 average medical emergency response time in Orinda ran six minutes and 15 seconds. The 2015 average Orinda response time jumped to a hair under seven minutes. The Moraga times rose from five minutes and 47 seconds to just over six minutes.

A 2011 MOFD facilities report stated that for the

analyst crunches the numbers yet again, the chief conceded that the fact of longer response times in Orinda will not go away.

"It may be an unavoidable issue," he said.

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[back](#)

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