Santa Rosa County
Emergency Services Advisory Committee
April 28, 2004
2:00 p.m.

Minutes

Members present:

Joe Diamond
Gerry Goldstein
Lew Oliver
John E. Reble
Chris Rucker
Don Vanderryt

Members absent:

Tony Simmons

Staff present:

Dave Ling
Deb Grinde

Staff absent:

Sheryl Bracewell

Agenda approved as submitted for this meeting.

Minutes for meeting held on March 24, 2004 approved as submitted.

Presentation by Chief John E. Reble City of Milton Fire Department
Chief Reble made a presentation to the committee regarding the City of Milton Fire Department. The City of Milton Fire Department, referred to as Station 23, started out as an all-volunteer fire department and was established in April 1914 after three (3) devastating fires at about the turn of the century. Milton Fire Department had the first automobile fire truck in Northwest Florida. Chief Reble provided a brief history of the evolution of the department. The present station was built in 1962. An inventory of apparatus which includes two (2) triple combination pumpers lists a 1998 Pumper, a 1986 Pumper, a 1974 Reserve Engine Pumper, a 2001 Rescue 23/Pumper and Boat 23.

The department consists of three (3) shifts of five (5) members each including a captain, a lieutenant and three (3) firefighters. Many of these employees are also emergency medical technicians. Each shift works 24 hours on and 48 hours off and an average 52-hour workweek.

The department has many responsibilities including Emergency Response, Life Safety, Fire Prevention and Public Education. In addition, the Fire Chief acts as the Emergency Management Director for the City of Milton.

The number of calls that the department responds to has been increasing at an average rate of 10% per year. Annual emergency calls are currently approaching approximately 1,600 calls for this year.

About 18% of the total responses are Fire calls. Though the smaller percentage of calls, fire responses are the most dangerous and call for the most personnel, the most equipment and the most training. Rescue calls represent about 74% their total activity. This includes medical calls, vehicle accidents sometimes including extrication and public assistance calls. Hazardous condition calls represent about 8% of total activities and these include potentially dangerous conditions involving gas, electrical issues, fuel leaks, chemical leaks or other hazardous conditions.

Some recent achievements of this fire department include:

Consistent response time of less than six (6) minutes
Comprehensive SOP's and training
Maintain an ISO rating of 4 – which provides a homeowner with the lowest insurance rate possible
Consistently low fire loss history
Life Safety Achievement Awards in 2000 and 2002
Smoke Detector Distribution Program
Newer responsibilities include the 10% increase in activity, Life Safety inspections of new businesses, child safety seat installation programs, CPR/First Aid training programs, Haz-Mat/Terrorism response training and specialized rescue responses.

Future needs of the department include:

New station with training facilities
Fire Marshal/Training Officer position
Secretary position
Replacement of Fire Chief's vehicle
Equipment upgrades
Aerial apparatus (ladder truck)

G. Goldstein questioned the Chief regarding the number of employees to the number of calls. G. Goldstein also questioned whether the ratio of employees to call load that applies to the City of Milton Fire Department would also apply to all other fire departments. Discussion ensued regarding optimum staffing, publication of same, etc for call load. Chief Reble advised that there would probably be no relationship between all departments for many reasons.

Chief Reble responded to the question of how the City supports the needs of the department. The Department requests the funds for their needs from the City Council. The City Council determines what the distribution of funds will be.

D. Ling took the opportunity to recognize the City of Milton, Fire Department and Chief Reble for all of their participation in Emergency Response activities. He noted that Chief Reble participates in this committee as chairman; he serves as Emergency Management Director for the City of Milton and is involved indirectly in many related activities. D. Ling commended Chief Reble for his involvement.

L. Oliver questioned the Chief regarding the success rate of the Child restraint seat program. Chief Reble explained that it was very popular when free seats were available through the program. When the availability of those seats no longer existed the participation diminished noticeably. Few people who purchase the seats approach the department for training.

C. Rucker questioned he Chief on the following issues and discussion followed:

Costs of equipment
ISO of 4 provides lowest possible residential insurance rate
ISO of 3, 2, or 1 provides for a lower commercial insurance rate
Effect of a lower call rate might have on equipment, fuel costs, etc.
Minimum staffing of four (Kelly days keep average lowered)
50% of the time 5 on duty – 50% of the time 4 on duty

Difficulty of recruiting paid employees, competitive wages, locale from Escambia to Washington County
Mandated 160 hour training has no effect on paid department

Determined that the committee will travel to City of Milton Fire Dept. after the May meeting to tour the department.

Review of Reports and Statistics
Reviewed revised report for month of February 2004. Report for month of March still indicates some districts with no response percentages in the double digits. Also indicated that some call types will no longer be included in the generation of the statistics.

Review of Correspondence and Additional Information Items
Two letters prepared and made available for review regarding the fire departments on our investigation of insurance and requesting information from them regarding fire hydrants, etc. If letters have not been distributed to the fire districts to date, Chief Reble will contact S. Bracewell regarding the mailing of same.

Chief Reble provided Three (3) Pensacola News Journal articles. These articles address the location or availability of fire hydrants, equipment failure and compliance to the Sunshine Law by a similar task force. He pointed out that the Commission has granted any requests for variances to ordinances for hydrants that have been challenged and forwarded to the County Commission. He further cautioned that this committee must be careful not to duplicate any problems that are occurring in Escambia County.

Old Business
(Switched Items A & B on the Agenda)

Water Purveyors
Jimmie Melvin, Director, Point Baker Water System joined committee for discussion regarding coordination between the fire departments and water purveyors. Ms. Melvin provided the committee with a brief summary of how the Point Baker Water System is handling hydrant issues. She noted that the community is mostly rural and only starting to see some commercial accounts.

Ms. Melvin indicated that they would support better communication between the water system and the fire departments. They also believe that there is room for improvement and that it is necessary for everyone involved to be on the same page so to speak. The need for a mechanism to notify the fire departments regarding information about hydrants was recently brought to their attention and is in the preliminary stages.

The water system has always been under the impression that the fire departments have been painting and maintaining the hydrants. They also realize that no testing has been completed and no agreement between the agencies is in place.

Discussion ensued regarding the communication (or lack of) between the two types of agencies. It is agreed that both entities require information from each other. The water purveyors must know when the fire department uses any water and how much water they use. Noted that not all departments know that it is necessary to notify the purveyors of this information. Ms. Melvin stated that the DEP requires this information.

Pointed out that the DEP regulates the water purveyors as providers of an environmental health issue. Also determined that the standards published by AWWA, M17 was adopted as a set of documented rules to use as guidelines.

Chief Reble stated that this committee might need to facilitate the coordination of exchange of information between the fire departments and the water purveyors and determine who will provide the answers to all of the questions.

Tony Mathis, Point Baker Water System then addressed the committee regarding usual operations. He pointed out that they know the amount of water used generally by the gallons per minutes, size of the tank, etc. Mr. Mathis also stated that Point Baker Water System is in the process of laying about 5,000' of 6" line along with some hydrants in the district. He also indicated that the fire departments do contact him with requests for hydrants at specific locations.

J. Diamond questioned whether the water purveyors as a group hold any formal meetings to discuss issues affecting them. Ms. Melvin advised that they do speak to each other but not in a meeting format. Mr. Diamond also suggested that it might be necessary to form a committee consisting of representatives from both the group of water purveyors and the fire departments in order to exchange information. He noted that communicating with each other would teach both entities what the other's needs are, e.g. a monthly statement of use, use of a backflow, etc.

G. Goldstein asked at what point the water purveyors would be notified that a request was being made for a variance on a new hydrant. Ms. Melvin replied that they are not notified regarding any hydrant needs, new or otherwise.

Chief Reble advised that the AWWA states that the fire departments operate the hydrants. However, it is the responsibility of the owners (water purveyors) to maintain, test and inspect the hydrants, especially when no written agreement exists.

Mr. Mathis expressed a concern to the committee regarding new construction development. He stressed that the builders must adhere to water mandates issued by the DEP. In most instances the water capacity is there. However the correct means for distributing the water may not be adequate. Chief Reble advised him that this committee would review the problems that Mr. Mathis described.

Fire Department MSBU and Other Funding
Hunter Walker, County Administrator appeared to advise the status of the request for increased MSBU funding.

Mr. Walker advised that our request is going to be reviewed on May 13 along with all other funding sources. These requests include infrastructure fees similar to the type mentioned during discussion of water purveyor issues with new construction development. These will be submitted along with the revenue modeling at the request of the BOCC.

If the BOCC were to address the MSBU fund request as a separate issue, the deadline for approval of the MSBU ordinance would need to be no later than May 1 for the purpose of effecting the legal advertising requirements by the tax assessor. Mr. Walker does not foresee that the MSBU resolutions will meet the requirement of the Property Appraiser in that it will be impossible to fiscally amend the tax rolls for the proposed changes. A simple change would afford only one change to the rolls. However, the proposed changes that include gradient level changes, etc are complicated and would affect hearings, mailings, notices, etc.

Chief Reble observed that by virtue of putting the issue in with the revenue modeling, they (BOCC) have precluded the possibility of action by taking no action. They will be able to renew the ordinance by resolution at a later date, but will be unable to take action on the rate adjustment request this year.

New Business

Items A & B have been tabled in T. Simmon's absence

Fire Department Budget submittals
Joel Haniford, County Budget Director appeared to discuss the submission of budgets by the volunteer fire departments and to explain the formatted documents distributed to the departments for completion by them.

Mr. Haniford advised that the form was designed primarily to assist the departments in identifying their costs. They must anticipate their incoming funds or projected revenue and identify where they might allocate or spend those funds. At the end of the year they must be able to identify what they actually spent the money on to the auditors.

A letter accompanies the budget form and requests that they complete the form as best they can. There are no instructions provided. There is nothing that states they must spend the funds on what they planned for. The form is only an aid or a means to assist them in identifying what they might spend the funds on. The BOCC did not advise the departments that the budgets had to be completed in an exact manner. It is not a binding format; it is not a statutory requirement. The only legal restraint is that there is one total expenditure line item that is presented to the BOCC.

The budgets are kept on file. At then end of the year the auditor, who falls under the authority of the Clerk of the Court, only audits a sampling from the checkbooks. There is no end of year budget reconciliation by the fire departments. Mr. Haniford stated that part of the reason is that, as volunteers, they may not always be consistent and so they may be "roughly" correct. Mr. Haniford indicated that through the course of the budget year no one is responsible for monitoring the spending of the departments' funds. He stated that if the expenditures balance with the revenues his department has no reservations regarding their budgets.

C. Rucker suggested that maybe the individual boards of fire commissioners for each district are scrutinizing their spending habits.

Mr. Haniford indicated that the Budget department does not substantiate any needs for increases by each department because they do not have the expertise or controls over the fire districts. His suggestion would be that there is only one MSBU fund and that a board similar to this ESAC committee determines how the funds are distributed to each fire district.

Discussion ensued regarding the individual fire commission boards for each district and what their responsibilities (fiscal or otherwise) might be. Chief Reble described the fire department budgets as exercises in futility as the monies are collected, verified and delivered to the departments, but no follow-up ever occurs. Mr. Haniford explained that since the fire departments do not know how much money they would receive when they are asked to prepare their budgets it is impossible to hold them accountable.

Public Comments and Questions

Richard Collins, 8600 Chumuckla Hwy, Pace, FL
In 2001 only 5 of 10 MSBU fire departments submitted budgets according to Mr. Haniford's department. The budgets are required per county ordinance #90-23.

Questioned Chief Reble whether he is involved when a new subdivision is developed within the city limits. Chief Reble is involved immediately as a member of the city's Technical Review Committee. Mr. Collins stated that he asked Chairman Salter whether or not the Pace VFD was informed of an impending development of 1,200 homes in the Wallace Lake area and Chairman Salter informed Mr. Collins that they were not required to do that. Mr. Collins is concerned with the lack of notification to the emergency services groups and resents that the emergency services have to play catch up when these things occur.

Suggests that the ECC dispatchers generate a notice to all water suppliers at the end of each month indicating locations of each fire call. Chief Reble responded that the dispatcher's records would not have information regarding water usage at each site, as water is not necessarily used at each fire call.

Confirmed with D. Ling that the GIS program for locating water hydrant is on going.

Suggests that the water purveyors and the rural fire departments be included in early planning for development just as they do in the City of Milton. Mr. Collins informed the committee of a 1,800 home subdivision developing in the area north of the 5 points at Quintette Rd. and Chumuckla Hwy. And believes that the VFD should be included in the planning stages of development.

Additional Comments
Chief Reble added that within the State of Florida Administrative Code it states that by 09/21/05 all water suppliers or purveyors who supply more than 350 persons will maintain a map showing all water mains, hydrants, valves, storage tanks, etc. Consequently all of that information will be published and available.

C. Rucker summarized from Santa Rosa County ordinance #90-23, Section 8 that indicates that the Volunteer Fire Departments are not subject to control or direction by the county and that this is drawing a clear boundary between the county and the fire departments. Section 9 is regarding revenues collected and indicates that the fire departments will execute an agreement with the county agreeing to utilize the revenues pursuant to a budget submitted to and approved by the BOCC and that the departments will be subject to audit.

C. Rucker stated that the ordinance indicates that the BOCC is responsible for approving the budgets and that the fire departments are responsible for submitting them.

Chief Reble stated that the Budget Director informed this committee that this is not taking place.

R. Collins pointed out that there are conflicting statements within the ordinance.

G. Goldstein stated that there is no conflict because Section 9. Revenues Collected, insinuates "except in the case of…" The different sections of the ordinance separate them.

J. Diamond suggested that this committee submit a letter to the BOCC advising them of the hydrant and water supply situation. Chief Reble agreed and suggested that this committee prepare it at a later date.

Meeting adjourned at 4:05 PM

Next meeting is Wednesday, May 26, 2004 at 2:00 PM

Field trip to City of Milton Fire Dept. will immediately follow meeting