

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
TUESDAY, APRIL 08, 2025**

**MINUTE ORDER NO. 20**

**SUBJECT: FIGHTING CORPORATE MONOPOLIES THAT UNDERMINE FIRE PROTECTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

Every San Diegan deserves to know that when crisis strikes, our firefighters have the equipment they need to respond. But a growing corporate monopoly crisis in the firefighting apparatus industry is putting lives at risk-and forcing taxpayers to foot the bill for Wall Street greed. Over the past decade, private equity firms have aggressively bought up and consolidated fire apparatus manufacturers, creating massive corporate monopolies that put profits ahead of public safety.

This consolidation has driven prices sky-high, reduced production quality, and created years-long procurement delays. During the devastating Los Angeles fires, dozens of fire engines and ladder trucks sat idle in maintenance yards as fire departments waited-sometimes for years-for backlogged replacement vehicles. Taxpayers are being squeezed-paying more, waiting longer, and getting less. The New York Times reports that ladder trucks have doubled in cost over just a few years, now topping over \$2.3 million.

While corporate conglomerates were monopolizing the industry and eliminating competition, something curious happened-they also started cutting production capacity just as demand for fire trucks surged. When federal COVID-19 funds gave state and local governments the ability to invest in new emergency equipment, fire truck orders spiked by nearly 50% from 2020 to 2022.

Yet instead of ramping up production to meet this demand, the reports show that corporate conglomerates have actually shut down manufacturing plants, worsening procurement backlogs that have now ballooned into the billions. Despite years-long delays, these corporate giants have made little effort to expand capacity, seemingly unbothered by the fact that fire departments are left waiting-sometimes for years-for the life-saving equipment they desperately need.

Our County of San Diego Fire Protection District has experienced these challenges firsthand, seeing extensive production delays that stretch over 900 days and fire truck prices that have doubled from \$650,000 to over \$1.3 million. However, local fire districts have few alternatives as the lack of competition in the industry leaves them with no choice but to accept these inflated costs and excessive wait times-further proof that corporate monopolies are putting profits ahead of public safety.

The devastating wildfires that swept through Southern California in January 2025 underscored the critical importance of having sufficient, reliable, and readily available fire-fighting equipment. San Diego County is one of the most fire prone regions in the entire state, with over 80% of the County designated as high or very high wildfire hazard zones. Our fire protection districts cannot afford these excessive delays or inflated costs, and we must take action to hold corporate monopolies accountable and protect our communities. Fires are a fact of life-but letting a few Wall Street investors cash in on disaster is immoral and unconscionable.

This issue is a growing concern across firefighting agencies. On February 20, 2025 the California Fire Service Leadership Alliance - comprising the California Fire Chiefs Association, the California Volunteer & Combination Fire Chiefs Association, the California Tribal Fire Chiefs Association, the Fire Districts Association of California, the League of California Fire Chiefs Department, the California Contract County Fire Chief Agencies, and the California Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association - wrote a letter expressing their concern about this growing crisis and the need for more accountability.

The County has a strong track record of using affirmative litigation to hold corporations accountable and protect our communities from harmful business practices. This includes securing settlements from opioid manufacturers totaling more than \$60 million for their role in the opioid crisis, taking legal action against manufacturers of illegal ghost gun milling machines that make untraceable firearms, and social media companies for pushing addictive technology that harms youth. We have also pursued cases against environmental polluters and corporate landlords engaged in price-fixing and collusion. Challenging the monopolistic stranglehold on the fire apparatus industry is a natural continuation of this work. Enforcing antitrust laws can break up these monopolies, restore fair competition, and ensure that fire departments have timely, reliable access to the life-saving equipment they need.

Today's action directs the County to explore legal and advocacy options to take on the corporate monopolies that are driving up fire truck costs, cutting corners on quality, and making fire departments wait years for critical equipment. If we don't act, these corporate monopolies will continue to cash in while our communities burn. County Counsel will report back every 90 days with legal and advocacy options, legal strategies, and outreach opportunities to join statewide and national efforts, such as the California Fire Service Leadership Alliance, and next steps to hold these corporations accountable and ensure our fire departments get the resources they need. I urge my colleagues to support this effort to stand up for our communities and protect public safety.

## **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

### **VICE-CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER**

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer, in consultation with County Counsel, to explore legal and advocacy options related to fire apparatus antitrust and monopolistic practices under state and federal law. This may include, but not be limited to, joining statewide and national efforts, outreach to justice officials, and affirmative litigation strategies. Return to the Board in closed session on an ongoing basis every 90 days with updates on their efforts, and with options that the Board can elect to move forward with, through further direction.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Monopolistic practices disproportionately affect under-resourced and rural communities, where fire departments are already stretched thin. Ensuring equitable access to timely and quality fire trucks is crucial for the safety of all residents, regardless of income or location.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Modern and reliable fire trucks are essential for effective wildfire response and environmental protection. Addressing procurement delays aligns with the County's sustainability goals by enhancing resilience to climate-related disasters.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for this request are included as staff time in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan in County Counsel based on existing General Purpose Revenue. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years. There may be fiscal impacts associated with future related recommendations which staff would return to the Board for consideration and approval.

## **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

Delays in fire truck procurement can lead to increased property losses, higher insurance costs, and economic instability in fire-prone areas. Taking action to address these delays ensures that fire departments have the necessary resources to protect homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure, thereby supporting economic stability.

## **ACTION:**

Noting for the record that this item was heard on April 9, 2025; ON MOTION of Supervisor Lawson-Remer, seconded by Supervisor Montgomery Steppe, the Board of Supervisors directed the Chief Administrative Officer, in consultation with County Counsel, to explore legal and advocacy options related to fire apparatus antitrust and monopolistic practices under state and federal law. This may include, but not be limited to, joining statewide and national efforts, outreach to justice officials, and affirmative litigation strategies. This would also include a resolution in open session asking the public safety committee in the state legislature to take action. Return to the Board in closed session on an ongoing basis every 90 days with updates on their efforts, and with options that the Board can elect to move forward with, through further direction.

AYES: Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe

ABSENT: Desmond, (District 1 Seat Vacant)

State of California)  
County of San Diego) §

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



**Signed**

**by** Andrew Potter

