



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

NORA VARGAS
First District

JOEL ANDERSON
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Third District

NATHAN FLETCHER
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND
Fifth District

DATE: September 27, 2022

20

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

SAN DIEGO COUNTY FIRE – ESTABLISHING ADDITIONAL HELI-HYDRANTS AND HELOPODS TO SUPPORT WATER-DROPPING HELICOPTERS IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

The San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) has supported aerial fire protection in the region by taking numerous efforts to ensure firefighting helicopters are available to provide air support and water drops during local fires. On October 5, 2021 (4), the Board took action to increase the availability of reliable and accessible water sources for the region's firefighting helicopters by directing a feasibility study to identify potential locations and partnerships and to develop a cost analysis and strategy for the implementation of helicopter firefighting technology. Strategic placement of water hydrants can help firefighting helicopters refill with water more quickly and reduce the travel time to refill locations, allowing more frequent water drops in areas that lack water sources. As a result of the additional support, our firefighters' efforts to contain a fire early and mitigate property damage and loss of life are supported.

On January 25, 2022 (1), San Diego County Fire (County Fire) returned to the Board with an update on the general locations within the unincorporated area that would benefit from an additional water source based on criteria that includes helicopter travel times and wildfire risk assessments. Since then, County Fire has developed an ongoing implementation strategy that utilizes two types of hydrant systems, Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods, and interagency collaboration to provide additional water sources for the region's water-dropping helicopters.

Today's request is for the Board of Supervisors to approve the necessary actions to establish additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods in San Diego County, including an agreement with the San Marcos Fire Department and the Vallecitos Water District for the shared Santa Fe Hills Heli-Hydrant site. The actions will also provide authorization to procure additional hydrants and establish agreements for future locations.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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1. Find that the proposed actions to establish additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods in San Diego County are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines pursuant to Section 15269 of the State CEQA Guidelines.
2. Receive an update on establishing additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods in San Diego County.
3. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer, or designee, to execute an agreement or agreements with the San Marcos Fire Department and/or the Vallecitos Water District for the transfer of \$50,000 to partially fund the construction of the Santa Fe Hills Heli-Hydrant site.
4. Approve in principle the lease of property for future Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods.
5. Authorize the Director, Department of General Services, to negotiate lease(s) for the use of additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods in the future and return to the Board for approval of the agreement(s), if necessary.
6. In accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, subject to successful negotiations and a determination of fair and reasonable price, to execute a single source contract with Whaling Fire Line Equipment Inc. for Heli-Hydrant equipment, accessories and services for an initial one-year period with four additional option years and an additional six months, if needed, and to amend the contracts as needed to reflect the changes to requirement and funding.
7. In accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, subject to successful negotiations and a determination of fair and reasonable price, to execute a single source contract with Pump-Pod USA for HeloPod equipment, accessories and services for an initial one-year period with four additional option years and an additional six months, if needed, and to amend the contracts as needed to reflect the changes to the requirements and funding.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

San Diego County Fire, which administers the San Diego County Fire Protection District (SDCFPD) and delivers comprehensive fire protection and emergency medical services across 1.54 million acres of unincorporated San Diego County, is committed to assuring that equity is considered in policy development, distribution of fire protection resources, and the provision of emergency medical services in all areas where the County has jurisdictional influence and/or authority. More than 80 percent of the SDCFPD's jurisdictional area qualifies as a disadvantaged unincorporated community, based on a San Diego Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) report on the funding, administration, and performance of the former County Service Area No. 135 (now SDCFPD). Furthermore, 79 percent of the unincorporated area in San Diego County is designated as a High or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. Today's actions to establish additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods in San Diego County to support aerial

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firefighting capabilities will help protect vulnerable communities and the entire region from the impacts of wildfires.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today's proposed actions to establish additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods to support aerial firefighting capabilities will contribute to the County of San Diego's sustainability goal to protect the health and well-being of everyone in the region, with a focus on collaborating with community partners and advocating for environmental justice for communities that have been disproportionately impacted. Partnering with agencies to provide additional water sources for the region's firefighting helicopters will support the safety and sustainability of communities by building resiliency and ensuring the capability to respond and recover immediate needs for individuals, families, and the region.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year 2022-23 Operational Plan for San Diego County Fire. The funding source is existing General Purpose Revenue. If approved, these actions will result in estimated costs and revenue of \$50,000 in Fiscal Year 2022-23. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years as a result of today's actions.

There may be additional fiscal impacts associated with any future purchases of additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods in San Diego County. Costs and funding sources for contract option years and additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods will be included and identified in future Operational Plans for County Fire.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

On September 12, 2022, with six advisory board members being present, the San Diego County Fire Protection District Fire Advisory Board received an update on establishing additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods in San Diego County and voted unanimously in support of the plan presented in today's recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

BACKGROUND

The San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) has supported aerial fire protection in the region by taking numerous efforts to ensure firefighting helicopters are available to provide air support and water drops during local fires. On October 5, 2021 (4), the Board took action to increase the availability of reliable and accessible water sources for the region's firefighting helicopters by directing a feasibility study to identify potential locations, partnerships, cost analysis and strategy for the implementation of Heli-Hydrant technology.

Firefighting helicopters are key resources in responding to wildland fires and preventing significant damage to life and property in our region. Currently, firefighting helicopters must sometimes travel long distances to refill for water drops. By placing refill stations in rural areas of

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the County, we can provide our firefighting personnel the opportunity to make additional water drops and reduce the likelihood a small fire becomes catastrophic.

On January 25, 2022 (1), San Diego County Fire (County Fire) returned to the Board with an update on the general locations within the unincorporated area that would benefit from an additional water source based on criteria that includes helicopter travel times and wildfire risk assessments. Since then, County Fire has developed an implementation strategy that utilizes two types of hydrants and interagency collaboration to provide additional water sources for the region's water-dropping helicopters.

The table below provides an overview of the locations and hydrant types that are anticipated to be operational in the following months. The type of hydrant utilized is based on several factors, including cost and available water source. In general, Heli-Hydrants are installed as stationary water tanks connected to a municipal water source and HeloPods are portable, tactical helicopter dip sources that can hold approximately 5,000 gallons of water.

| Table 1: Potential Hydrant Locations in San Diego County | | | |
|---|--|--------------|------------------------------|
| Location | Landowner/Partner | Hydrant Type | Anticipated Operational Date |
| McCain Valley Conservation (Fire) Camp #21, Boulevard | California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) | HeloPod | Fall 2022 |
| Santa Fe Hills, San Marcos | San Marcos Fire Department and Vallecitos Water District | Heli-Hydrant | Fall 2022 |
| Rainbow Fire Center, Fallbrook | California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) | HeloPod | Fall 2022 |

This fall, County Fire will establish two HeloPods and one Heli-Hydrant. The HeloPods are purchased by CAL FIRE and will be located in McCain Valley and the Rainbow Fire Center. County Fire will partner with the San Marcos Fire Department and the Vallecitos Water District on a Heli-Hydrant located in Santa Fe Hills, San Marcos.

Moving forward, County Fire will continue to evaluate the potential locations for installation, with the goal of reducing wildfire risk by providing a dependable water source to regions of the County with a limited water supply. As future locations are identified, the recommendations for single source authority included in today's action will allow the Director of Purchasing and Contracting procure the necessary equipment. In addition, County Fire will establish an agreement with the San Marcos Fire Department and the Vallecitos Water District for the shared Santa Fe Hills Heli-Hydrant site and will continue to coordinate with potential partners throughout the unincorporated areas of the county to establish agreements for cost sharing, water supply and/or land use and continue to research available grant programs to pursue funding for the costs associated with installation and operation.

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Justification for Single Source Procurement:

In accordance with Board of Supervisors Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, County Fire requests approval for single source procurement of Heli-Hydrant equipment, accessories and services from Whaling Fire Line Equipment Inc. and HeloPod equipment, accessories and services from Pump-Pod USA.

Goods or Services, Term and Estimated Value

Items to be procured are Heli-Hydrant and HeloPod equipment, associated accessories and services through multi-manufacturers' single source authorizations for up to a five-year period plus an additional six months, if needed. Whaling Fire Line Equipment Inc. has patented the Heli-Hydrant and is the only manufacturer and distributor. Pump-Pod USA is the only manufacturer and distributor of HeloPod. The costs to procure, install, and the on-going annual maintenance for both the Heli-Hydrant and HeloPod have not yet been determined due to defining needs and current supply chain challenges.

Benefits to the County of San Diego

Many of San Diego County's rural communities are located within high and very high fire hazard severity zones with limited water sources. The backcountry's topography and lack of water sources make it difficult for firefighting helicopters to efficiently drop water during a wildfire. The proposed procurement of Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods will provide additional water sources to support the region's aerial firefighting helicopters.

Qualification for Single Source Exemption

Pursuant to Board Policy A-87, competition is precluded because of the existence of patent rights, and no equivalent goods or services are available. Whaling Fire Equipment Inc. and Pump-Pod USA are the only manufacturers and distributors for Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods, respectively. Whaling Fire Equipment Inc. has patented their Heli-Hydrant resulting in no other products on the market that are available for procurement that meet County Fire's needs.

Fair and Reasonable Price

Fair and reasonable pricing will be determined by market research, pricing information from previous purchases by partner agencies, competitive procurement, and negotiations with authorized vendors.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

The proposed actions to establish additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods in San Diego County are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines pursuant to Section 15269 Emergency Projects as it involves specific actions necessary to prevent and mitigate for wildfire emergencies in San Diego County. The Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods are necessary to maintain wildfire response services essential to the public health, safety, and welfare of San Diego County residents. These actions would improve wildfire response times and reduce potential damage to property and open space.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

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Today's proposed actions to establish additional Heli-Hydrants and HeloPods in San Diego County supports the Community initiative of the Fiscal Years 2022-2027 Strategic Plan by increasing the availability of reliable and accessible water sources for the region's aerial firefighting helicopters and supports safety for communities most vulnerable to the impact of wildfires.

Respectfully submitted,



HELEN N. ROBBINS-MEYER
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A – Map of Current and Proposed Hydrant Locations