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Contact:

**David Vossbrink, (408) 277-3515
Communications Director**

Anniversary of Santana Row Fire Marks Progress for San José Fire Safety



Mayor Gonzales speaks at the press conference

San José ---- Since the big Santana Row/Huff-Moorpark fires in August 2002, the San José Fire Department has made a broad range of improvements to its communications, mutual aid, and response policies and systems to enhance the city's ability to protect the lives and property of San José residents.

The 11-alarm fire on August 19, 2002, at Santana Row construction site and the nearby residential neighborhood was the largest structure fire in the history of San José. It involved more than 200 firefighters from as far away as San Mateo County, and it caused damage estimated at more than \$100 million.

Remarkably there were no injuries or deaths associated with the fire, but more than 70 residents were displaced by damage to more than 30 homes in the Huff-Moorpark neighborhood.

“I remain very proud and gratified that not a single firefighter or resident was injured in this incredible blaze last year, and we are thankful for the courage and skill of the firefighters who fought this fire successfully,” said Mayor Ron Gonzales.

“Because our firefighters are committed to continuous improvement, they have applied the lessons from experience of this fire to make San José even better prepared to protect the lives of our residents.”

On the occasion of the anniversary of the fire, Acting Fire Chief Dale Foster reviewed major issues and progress to improve fire response, prevention, communications, and mutual aid for the future, following up on the department’s December 2002 report of the incident and its recommendations for specific improvements.



***From left to right – Councilmember LeZotte; Vice Mayor Dando;
Councilmember Yeager; Acting Fire Chief Dale Foster; Mayor Gonzales
And Jan Sweetname, VP and COO of Federal Realty Western Region***

“We have used the opportunity presented by the Santana Row/Huff Moorpark fires to upgrade our ability both in San José and throughout Santa Clara County to protect the people of community in the event of a major fire,” said Chief Foster.

“Over the past twelve months we have worked with other fire departments to take concrete steps to improve communications, acquire new equipment and technology, and develop new procedures that will allow us to manage emergencies better and faster using our combined resources more effectively.”

Some of the major measures taken since August 2002 include:

Communications/Dispatch

- Since last August, additional hand held radios have been purchased so that every San José firefighter now has one and senior staff can listen simultaneously to command and tactical radio channels.
- Three San José police dispatch workstations are being modified to handle overflow fire call processing as well as police functions.
- Two frequency acquisitions are pending FCC approval, and approval is anticipated within the next 60 days.
- A new computer-aided dispatch system has been purchased and is scheduled to go into service in June of 2004. A key feature of the new CAD is an automated vehicle locator that will allow dispatchers to identify the closest units to the fire and improve tracking of response.
- A computer software program has been developed for mutual aid call processing that will streamline the process for requesting mutual aid from other agencies. The program currently is being tested, and it will be shared with all county dispatch centers.



Fire Safety During Construction

- A new ordinance scheduled to come to the San José City Council this fall will limit the square footage of exposed combustible construction and require appropriate site security.
- Prior to the issuance of a building permit, contractors will submit construction safety plans to outline specific procedures and responsibilities to ensure construction safety.
- Fire code requirements have been clarified regarding construction staging and the installation and operation of fire access roads, fire hydrants, and standpipes. The updated code also clearly defines safety procedures for hot work and fire-watch.
- The new California Building Code, effective November 1, 2002, requires all new roofs, repairs and replacements to meet specific standards for fire resistance.

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Mutual Aid/Interagency Operability

- The fire chiefs of Santa Clara County have launched a pilot program that changes the use of mutual aid resources during an emergency. The new plan allows mutual aid to be used to provide backfill fire protection as well as for direct response to an incident. This will allow greater flexibility and speed in responding to major emergencies such as the Santana Row fire.
- To address the need for better countywide radio interoperability, a new system has been purchased and activation is scheduled to commence on September 11, 2003. The new system, called BAYMACS (Bay Area Mutual Aide Communication), allows different police, fire, and emergency medical service radio systems to communicate with each other across jurisdictions.

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