



RON ROBERTS
SUPERVISOR, FOURTH DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: October 20, 2009

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: AGREEMENT WITH SAN DIEGO GAS & ELECTRIC FOR AERIAL
FIREFIGHTING EQUIPMENT (DISTRICT: ALL)

SUMMARY:

Overview

Year after year, San Diego County is threatened by wildfires. Our dry climate mixed with the lack of moisture and Santa Ana winds is a recipe for disaster. Within the last decade, San Diego County has been the victim of multiple devastating wildfires.

Last year, at the recommendation of Supervisor Horn and me, the County of San Diego had approximately \$3.2 million available in one time dollars for fire prevention and protection. This allowed the County to lease two Bombardier CL-415 Superscooper™ fixed-wing amphibious aircraft for a three-month period using this one time funding source. During that three month period, these extraordinary planes were put to the test, fighting fires all around our region. As fires know no boundaries, neither did these aircraft. They made drops on fires on Camp Pendleton, in the city of San Diego and elsewhere.

At the conclusion of this program, the County had approximately \$250,000 left over. On May 12, 2009, at the recommendation of Supervisors Jacob and Horn, our Board unanimously approved the use of these funds to implement the Unified Disaster Council's plan for a supplemental Aerial Fire Protection Program. This program is geared to provide a "tool box" approach by identifying specific aerial firefighting resources that can be utilized on a "call when needed" basis, either prior to a forecasted major wind event or immediately after a wildfire has started.

Recently, San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) has acquired an S-64E Helitanker to perform heavy-duty work. Being that these helicopters are also very effective in fighting fires, SDG&E has offered to not only allow us to utilize them during fires, but also cover up to two hours of flight time per fire incident. Today's action will permit the County of San Diego to enter into an agreement with San Diego Gas & Electric which will allow us to utilize its S-64E Helitanker during fires beyond the first two hours of service. Through this agreement, the County will fund up to 20 hours of flight

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time for fires. The County will make this helicopter, known as the “Incredible Hulk,” available to all local agencies, cities and fire districts, at no additional cost should the fire event last longer than two hours. Where possible, the County will seek reimbursement from the State of California or the Federal Government for those expenditures.

Recommendation(s)

SUPERVISOR ROBERTS

1. Waive Board Policy A-87 and authorize the Director, Purchasing and Contracting to enter into negotiations with San Diego Gas and Electric to utilize its S-64E Helitanker for a maximum of 20 hours of flight time, and upon successful negotiations and determination of fair and reasonable terms, award a contract.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to integrate the San Diego Gas & Electric S-64E Helitanker into the County’s Aerial Fire Protection Program and take any additional actions necessary to award this contract.

Fiscal Impact

No additional appropriations are necessary as a result of this action. Funds for this request are included in the adopted Fiscal Year 2009-2010 Operational Plan under the County’s Aerial Fire Protection Program. If approved, it is estimated that this request could result in a maximum of \$150,000 in current year costs, depending on flight time and reimbursements from the State of California or the Federal Government.

Business Impact Statement

N/A

Advisory Board Statement

N/A

BACKGROUND:

Year after year, San Diego County is threatened by wildfires. Our dry climate mixed with the lack of moisture and Santa Ana winds is a recipe for disaster. Within the last decade, San Diego County has been the victim of devastating wildfires multiple times.

In October of 2007, our region was ravished by its second major firestorm in four years. Approximately 368,000 acres were blackened, 1,700 homes were destroyed and, most tragically, 10 lives were lost. While similar in size to the October 2003 firestorm, our region witnessed major improvements to its fire response. Fewer homes were destroyed and, though still awful, fewer lives were lost.

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Since 2003, our board has worked unilaterally to further improve our region's readiness. Following the October 2003 firestorm, we have allocated more than \$130 million for fire preparedness and response, which, for example, was used to purchase two firefighting helicopters, clear hundreds of thousands of dead, dying or diseased trees, purchase a Reverse 9-1-1 system, purchase a new Mass Notification System known as Alert San Diego, upgrade our communications system, as well as for brush clearing and management.

Last year, at the recommendation of Supervisor Horn and me, the County of San Diego had approximately \$3.2 million available in one-time dollars. This allowed the County to lease two Bombardier CL-415 Superscooper™ fixed-wing amphibious aircraft for a three-month period using this one time funding source. During that three month period, these extraordinary planes were put to the test, fighting fires all around our region. As fires know no boundaries, neither did these aircraft. They made drops on fires on Camp Pendleton, in the city of San Diego and elsewhere.

At the conclusion of this program, the County had approximately \$250,000 left over. On May 12, 2009, at the recommendation of Supervisors Jacob and Horn, our Board unanimously approved the use of these funds to implement the Unified Disaster Council's plan for a supplemental Aerial Fire Protection Program. This program is geared to provide a "tool box" approach by identifying specific aerial firefighting resources that can be utilized on a "call when needed" basis, either prior to a forecasted major wind event or immediately after a wildfire has started.

A major piece of this program is the pre-positioning and use of helitankers. But as would be expected, these are extremely expensive machines. Under the County's current agreement, it would cost roughly \$60,000 to position a helicopter similar to the S-64E Helitanker in advance of high wind scenarios, whether it is flown or not. The cost of a helitanker, which includes a four hour minimum, is approximately \$15,000 per hour.

On October 8, 2009, San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) announced that it will be allowing local agencies use of its S-64E Helitanker. SDG&E has agreed to make this helicopter available during daylight hours to fight fires throughout our region. SDG&E will cover staffing costs and up to two hours of usage per fire incident. After that, local fire agencies will have to pay the \$7,500 per hour cost, roughly half of the hourly cost under our current "Call When Needed" agreement. Plus, there are no minimum hours to be purchased.

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By having this agreement with SDG&E in place, the County will not have to pay to stage a helicopter in the event a fire does not break out, thus saving taxpayer dollars. This will also allow the County to pre-position a second helitanker if necessary during extreme fire conditions.

The S-64E Helitanker can carry and unload more than 2,600 gallons of water per trip. It is estimated to need less than a minute to refill its tank for its next drop. It also can stay airborne for 2½ hours before needing to refuel. Depending on the location of a water source in proximity to the fire, this helicopter can potentially drop between 20,000 and 30,000 gallons of water per hour, and 70,000 to 80,000 gallons on a single fuel load.

Given the potentially-dangerous fire season ahead, it is important that we act accordingly to expand existing firefighting resources in San Diego County.

I urge your support.

Respectfully submitted,

RON ROBERTS
Supervisor, Fourth District

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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

CONCURRENCE(S)

COUNTY COUNSEL REVIEW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	
Written Disclosure per County Charter Section 1000.1 Required	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
GROUP/AGENCY FINANCE DIRECTOR	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Requires Four Votes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
GROUP/AGENCY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
COUNTY TECHNOLOGY OFFICE	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

Other Concurrence(s): N/A

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Ron Roberts, Supervisor, Fourth District

CONTACT PERSON(S):

Jason Farran

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AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE: _____