



City of Hemet

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City of Hemet The FACTS about the Change in Hemet Fire Service Providers Official Statement

On September 9, 2014, after nearly two years of competition, negotiations and comparative analysis, the City Council, by majority vote, acted to change Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Response Services (“Fire Services”) from the Hemet Fire Department (“HFD”) to Riverside County Fire (“RCF”) also known as CalFire. This difficult decision was made after diligent reflection and numerous public meetings and is intended to secure the best Fire Services at the best value for Hemet’s citizens now and in the years to come. As often happens with difficult decisions, controversy and misconceptions spread faster than the facts. This open letter addresses those misconceptions head-on with the facts.

- **Why did the City Council Change Fire Service Providers?**

- Best Use of Tax Dollars. The City Council consistently demanded that the successful Fire Service Provider would deliver the Best Services at the Best Value to ensure Hemet tax dollars were spent in the most prudent and efficient manner. RCF offers the Best Service for the Best Value.
- Need for Long-Term Fiscal Stability. After four years of cuts, the City continues to suffer from structural deficits (having more expenses than revenue each year), while responding to a high demand for services. In the competitive process, RCF demonstrated the best history of budget management and efficiency and the highest level of Fire Services.
- Need for Enhanced Emergency Medical Services. Hemet has a very high volume of emergency medical aid calls. RCF provides fully licensed and experienced paramedics on every fire engine. RCF has proven experience operating a paramedic program. Riverside County’s Emergency Services Agency is responsible for the certification of paramedics and paramedic programs. RCF provides Emergency Medical Dispatch delivering critical pre-arrival medical instructions over the phone while paramedics are in route.
- Best Fire Protection Services. RCF demonstrated the best ability to provide all types of Fire Services and the greatest capacity to handle large scale disaster response. RCF maintains an extensive communication network, skilled disaster preparedness planning staff, and a variety of vehicles and equipment that is not feasible for a local fire department to maintain.

- **Isn’t the Hemet Fire Department less expensive than Riverside County Fire?**

- RCF is Less Expensive Over the Long-Term. Comparing apples to apples – highest service level to highest service level – RCF is less expensive and has a better track record of budget management than the HFD. If you only compare HFD’s current reduced level of service to RCF’s higher level of service, it mistakenly appears that HFD

is cheaper. The problem with this comparison is that it doesn't take into consideration the cost of elevating HFD's existing service level to what the community needs and what RCF can already provide.

- Riverside County Fire's Employee Compensation Cost is Lower. The uncomfortable fact is that HFD firefighters get paid more per hour and enjoy a generous benefit package, but work 800+ hours less than RCF firefighters. With the cost of the City's pension and retiree medical benefits escalating, the City needs the efficiency and cost effectiveness RCF can deliver.
- **Doesn't the Hemet Fire Department have better response times than Riverside County Fire?**
 - Common Misconception. HFD has not been meeting the General Plan response time goals for several years. Currently, HFD is only meeting the goals 55% of the time instead of the target of 80%.
 - RCF is better able to Improve Response Times. RCF is required to match or exceed HFD response times. Also RCF must report response times every quarter, and if they do not meet the General Plan goals for two consecutive quarters, then RCF must propose methods to meet those goals and assist Hemet in preparing a Fire Master Plan. HFD has no Fire Master Plan to improve response times.
- **Is the City giving away its Fire Engines to Riverside County Fire?**
 - Free Transfer means Lowest Possible Replacement Costs. The City is not selling its fire engines to Riverside County Fire. Instead, most of the vehicles will continue to be used in the City for their remaining useful life, and RCF will bear the burden of replacing them. Hemet will continue to own the ladder truck. Rather than receive payment for used vehicles now, this transfer allows the City to avoid the full replacement cost of several vehicles that would need replacing, for an immediate savings of over \$600,000, and the City can get the vehicles back without cost in the future if need be.
- **Won't the City lose its local control over Fire Services?**
 - The City Will Retain the Ability to Set Local Fire Service Levels. Under contract with RCF, the City will retain the ability to increase or decrease the level of service, on reasonable notice, as it determines necessary. The RCF Fire Chief will work closely with the City to match the level of service to the needs of the City.
 - Costs Will Fluctuate. Whether the City obtains Fire Services from HFD or RCF, the costs of labor, benefits, fuel, vehicles, equipment and other operational costs will fluctuate over time. Under contract with the City, RCF would be able to pass on operational cost increases, but this is no different than the City having to react to cost increases from HFD. Regardless of the provider, you either have to pay the costs or reduce the services.