

Honorable Mayor, Councilmembers, Distinguished Administrators, Public Servants and Citizens,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

Fire Chief Mike DuRee has said that he is being forced by Human Resources to take fire fighting duties away from the lifeguards. In light of the fact we are in the middle of our contract term, and the stress that this plan has placed on our membership, we respectfully ask that you help us address the following questions by the following city council meeting.

1. 2012 Coast Guard Recreational Boating Statistics show that only 0.058% of boating accidents were fires. 99.4% of the incidents were not. Of the 651 deaths reported only 3 were caused by fire and one of those was a drowning at a boat fire. That puts the percentage of deaths by fire at 0.003%. The city needs trained, professional lifeguards on the boats. To respond to those few calls that do involve fire, we have the state sponsored California POST Department of Boating and Waterways Marine Fire Training that sixty agencies on the coast of California, including LA County Fire/Lifeguards and Orange County Harbor Patrol, have as their fire training. In addition, we have in-house fire training through the Long Beach Fire Department (in 2006 it was conducted by then Fire Captain Mike DuRee). Also, the California Fire Fighter 1 certificate is not a requirement for marine fire fighting and has no marine firefighting component. What data is there to show that the current model is not the most effective and cost efficient one? Can a cost analysis and service delivery study be performed prior to implementing any change to our current staffing?
2. The plan being implemented places 3 Fire Captains and 3 Firefighters on the rescue boats in place of marine safety personnel to cover 3- 24 hour shifts. The persons being replaced on the boats are Marine Safety Captains with years of ocean experience and Dive Team members who can effect subsurface rescues. Firefighters are full of potential, but they do not currently have the ability and the training to do our job. What is the advantage of training another labor group up to the standards that we already meet and exceed to provide a service we already have successfully performed for over 100 years?
3. The first question Councilmembers have asked regarding this replacement plan was, "Who costs more, a firefighter or a lifeguard." We have been assured that no Marine Safety personnel are losing their job or being demoted. What budget analysis has been done about this plan? What budget is this to be paid out of? With the proposed budget constraints in fiscal year 2016 and beyond, will any changes and increases in costs be sustainable?
4. Marine Safety and fire services have already been cut over the past several years. We have a Rescue Boat operator position that is currently unfilled. There is an active promotional list that could be used to fill it. We were told that we did not have the money in the budget to fill that position. Fire Engines and Rescues are empty at several stations. Why can't we restore services if we have extra monies for more staffing?
5. We have proudly and faithfully served and protected the waters of Long Beach for over 100 years. We are respected nationwide as innovators in ocean rescue and recognized by the surrounding agencies as professional and excellent ocean lifesavers who provide a valuable service. Please help us find answers as how this change is being paid for and why. Thank you.