



Santa Cruz County Fire County Service Area 48

Fact Sheet

Working to Maintain Lifesaving Fire Protection and Emergency Services.

INTRODUCTION: The Santa Cruz County Fire Department serves specific areas of unincorporated Santa Cruz County known as “County Service Area 48” (CSA 48). CSA 48 includes the communities of Bonny Doon, Davenport, Loma Prieta, Corralitos, Las Cumbres and the wider South Skyline area.

The County Fire Department operates in CSA 48 with five year-round volunteer fire stations in cooperation with five State fire stations. The County contracts with CAL FIRE to keep these State fire stations open during the non-fire season to ensure year-round fire protection and emergency response services.

Our Challenges:

Santa Cruz County Fire cannot maintain the current level of service in CSA 48 to protect you, your family and your property without additional funding to restore paid firefighter staffing levels to meet State recommended standards and to replace aging fire engines and lifesaving emergency and rescue equipment.

- **FACT:** We have 25% fewer firefighters on staff today than we did 10 years ago and a declining number of volunteer firefighters (down from 110 to 60). Meanwhile, our number of emergency calls has grown steadily – approximately 22% since 2010.
- **FACT:** For the safety of the public and first responders, the State recommends at least three firefighters per engine. **Currently, Santa Cruz County Fire has a budget for two paid firefighters per engine.**
- **FACT:** To enter a burning structure or rescue a trapped victim, the law **REQUIRES 4 firefighters:** two firefighters to enter the structure and two outside for backup (the law has an exception to this rule in the event there is a known rescue). **Funding for a 3rd paid firefighter means that, along with one volunteer firefighter, we would have the 4 firefighters required to quickly enter and perform a rescue or put out a fire.**
- **FACT:** Local fire stations are so short-staffed that when multiple emergency calls come in, we don’t have the staff to respond. **More than 56 times in 2018, ALL County Fire firefighters were out on emergency incidents, leaving no one available to respond to the next emergency call.**
- **FACT:** **The American Heart Association states that brain deterioration begins between four and six minutes after a person stops breathing.** The average 9-1-1 response time for Santa Cruz County Fire - CSA 48 area is approximately 10 minutes. A third firefighter and reliable equipment allows your fire department to provide faster patient care and reduce response times.
- **FACT:** With climate change and drought, wildland fires are getting larger, faster and deadlier. We need to make sure we have the resources and staff to respond quickly to structure fires, wildland fires, and medical emergencies when they happen.
- **FACT:** **Without additional funds to address appropriate staffing levels and needed safety equipment, the County could be faced with closing a fire station and redeploying resources to remaining stations, resulting in slower 9-1-1 response times in many areas of rural Santa Cruz County.**

Identified Solution:

To maintain the quality of local fire protection services, ensure quick response times to 9-1-1 emergencies, repair, upgrade, or replace aging fire engines and lifesaving emergency and rescue equipment, and restore the number of firefighters needed to keep our community safe, Santa Cruz County has been diligently working towards a solution that would provide a sustainable and reliable fire and emergency service delivery model.

Santa Cruz County Fire protection funding comes from local property taxes, including the CSA 48 fee shown on your local property tax bill. These critical funds pay for all of our fire engines, rescue vehicles, and firefighter protective gear, as well as training and administrative support provided by CAL FIRE. These funds also ensure continuous staffing at CAL FIRE stations in each of our five areas during the winter (non-fire) season.

Due to the increased level of fire and emergency calls, the critical need is to meet industry safety standards by restoring the number of firefighters to three per engine to be better prepared for large-scale wildfires and emergencies. Additional funding is required in order to meet this need.

Currently, Santa Cruz County Fire is considering seeking community approval for funding through a Proposition 218 ballot proceeding, where property owners are the “voters” who decide on the measure. A Proposition 218 ballot measure requires a mail-in ballot for any proposed new or increased assessment. This would give all property owners within CSA 48 boundaries the opportunity to vote on the proposal. Prop 218 Ballot Measures require a weighted ballot. Each ballot is weighted by the amount of assessment it represents. In other words, if one property owner of two homes receives a ballot for \$303.56 in proposed assessment (\$151.78 per home times two) and another property owner of one home receives a ballot for \$151.78 in proposed assessment, the first property owner’s ballot will count for twice that of the second property owner because the first property owner’s ballot is for twice the proposed assessment amount. When you receive your ballot in the mail it will have your tax amount on it.

Passage of a measure would raise the public funding necessary to:

- **Maintain** the quality of local fire protection services
- **Ensure** quick response times to 9-1-1 emergencies
- **Repair, upgrade or replace** outdated fire engines and lifesaving emergency and rescue equipment
- **Restore** the number of local firefighters needed to keep our community safe

Without additional funds to address appropriate staffing levels and needed safety equipment, the County could be faced with closing a fire station and redeploying resources to remaining stations, resulting in slower 9-1-1 response times in many areas of rural Santa Cruz County.

For more information, visit our website at: www.santacruzcountyfire.com or email Chief Larkin at: csa48feedback@gmail.com.

