

Agenda Report

DATE: OCTOBER 9, 2000
TO: PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
FROM: CITY MANAGER
SUBJECT: POLICE FIRING RANGE STATUS

RECOMMENDATION

There is no recommendation. This report is for information only.

BACKGROUND

The Public Safety Committee has been reviewing the status of fire abatement at the Police firing range in Eaton Canyon. This report provides the background on the fire incident and updates the Committee on the status of all abatement actions taken to date and anticipated in the future.

The Incident

On Friday, July 7, 2000, a fire, sparked when a bullet fired by a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agent entered dry grass, occurred at the Police Department's firing range in Eaton Canyon. The fire began at approximately 2:00 p.m. and was fully controlled an hour later by Pasadena, Los Angeles County and U.S. Forest Service personnel.

The Range

The current city shooting range is located on a 15-acre city-owned site in the hills north of the City of Pasadena. The north end of the site (approximately 6 acres) is currently used by the Police Department as a shooting range; the southern portion of the site (approximately 4 acres) is used by the Pasadena Department of Public Works as a storage/repair yard.

The Pasadena firing range has been in existence for over 70 years. Many agencies such as those listed above have used the range for training. In 1993, a portion of the range was destroyed during a major forest fire in the adjacent national forest. The site has been in disrepair since. In addition, neighbors, over the years, have moved ever closer to the range thus increasing the number of noise complaints.

In response to this and the continued threat of fire at the range the City has taken the following actions:

Landscape and Physical Improvements:

Public Works contractors have removed all brush behind all three ranges, trimmed several trees and sprayed herbicide to control poison oak. Irrigation systems have been installed on all three ranges and over 850 1-gallon plants are scheduled for planting between October 9 and October 13. The ranges have been included in the weekly parkway and median maintenance contract. Lastly, the berm, which has eroded in the past, is being rebuilt and will be at a 13 to 15 foot high level prior to the range reopening. In addition, all metal and rocks at the three ranges have either been removed or shielded by heightened berms.

Approximately six months ago (prior to the fire) Public Works also provided some deferred maintenance by painting the interior and exterior of the classroom, changing the double doors to steel doors, installing a sliding glass door, installing air conditioning and providing housekeeping services once a week. The housekeeping services were suspended during this recent closure but will resume weekly upon opening.

New furniture was purchased and is now in the classroom.

Operations

The firing range operates Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and is closed on Saturdays or Sundays. The only exceptions to this schedule are: (1) the first week of December is used for night training and is conducted between the hours of 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., and (2) the .22 caliber youth shooters who use the Southern California Edison easement on Saturdays between 9 a.m. and 12:0 p.m.

All firing is closely supervised. The City requires a one-to-three teacher to student ratio. All firing is done directly into the middle of the sand berm. Mandatory safety briefings are given prior to all shooting, and, during all-day training, are given again after lunch. All cleaning and reloading of firearms is conducted in the cleaning room, not on the range or parking lot. Large caliber rifles, shotguns, automatic guns are now fired on only two ranges which provide better sound buffering.

Only factory-grade ammunition is used on the range. No tracers, steel jacketed, steel core or any other "exotic" ammunition is permitted. The City does not allow "high power" machine guns on the ranges. All range users will continue to use only standard 38 mm, 9 mm, 45 caliber, 223 caliber, 30 caliber and shotgun ammunitions and firearms.

In addition to the Pasadena Police Department, the range is used on a scheduled basis by agents from various federal government agencies, the Pasadena Unified School District Police, Sierra Madre Police Department and the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office. All of the above mentioned operating rules and regulations are adhered to by these agencies.

Fire Inspections and Weather Closure Conditions

The Fire Department will be responsible for including the range in the brush clearance inspection program in the spring. That includes the initial inspection, notices as necessary and follow-up inspections to insure compliance. Staff will also return for a second maintenance inspection later in the summer -- typically just prior to the Santa Ana wind condition season.

Based upon history and the circumstances of the fire that raised the issue, closing due to weather does not prevent fires from occurring -- its intent is only to limit spread potential. The prevention mitigation measures in place are those that will be of the most significant value at the firing range. Extensive weather closures would primarily serve to unnecessarily limit the Police Department's use of the range, not prevent fires. Staff will add the use of another recognized standard, "The Fire Weather Watch". This is the warning that may be issued prior to the "Red Flag Warning". The initiation of this status is available from the US Forest Service. The Fire Weather Watch is issued when it is anticipated that we will be in a Red Flag Warning status within the next 48 hours. Due to changes in atmospheric conditions, there are many times when the watch does not transfer into a warning. If the watch continues, staff will evaluate the situation and may close the range for the day before the anticipated Red Flag Warning. This would add some buffer time to the Red Flag Warning, which typically is for a fairly narrowly defined period of time (several hours of one day). If a Fire Weather Watch is declared and there are Santa winds, the range will be closed. The Fire Department will be responsible for coordinating the monitoring of these conditions with the Police Department.

Proposed Firing Range

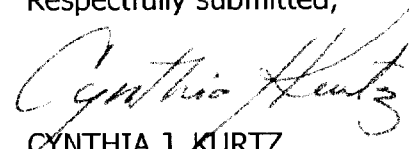
Staff is in the process of selecting a consultant that will prepare a business plan that addresses the financial viability of a regional indoor firing range. Staff has also begun preliminary designs for such a facility. It is anticipated that this business plan and preliminary design will be presented to the Public Safety Committee and the City Council before the end of this calendar year. Staff has submitted a request for \$580,000 in funding for the "technology" aspects of the proposed indoor range to the federal government and is expected to be acted on by Congress in the very near future.

Staff believes that by taking the above actions, firing range operations can continue with significantly reduced potential hazards and without further mishaps. A longer-range solution of building an indoor firing range continues to be a high priority for the City and is included in the Capital Improvement Program budget.


FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact as a result of this information report. However, staff estimates that the improvements to the range noted in this report total over \$100,000. Once costs are known, an agenda report seeking appropriations will be prepared for Council consideration. It is anticipated that an indoor firing range facility would require funding in excess of \$2,000,000.

Respectfully submitted,


CYNTHIA J. KURTZ
City Manager

Prepared by:


ROBERT K. PERSON
Assistant to the City Manager