

SAFE: MORE BANG FOR THE BUCK

SUMMARY

The 2007/2008 San Diego County Grand Jury conducted a study of the County of San Diego's Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE). SAFE is an agency formed in San Diego County in 1986 to establish and maintain a network of call boxes to enable motorists to obtain emergency assistance if they become stranded on the County's Interstate and State highways. The authorizing legislation for the agency is the California State Streets and Highways Code, Sections 2550-2559. The program is funded by revenue generated from a \$1 fee assessed on vehicle registrations collected by the Department of Motor Vehicles from San Diego County motorists.

The Grand Jury undertook this study because there was some question as to the need for the continued existence of SAFE. The proliferation of individual cell phone use has reduced the need for fixed call boxes. This observation is supported by program statistics, which show a decline in the total number of calls from a high of 170,511 in 1990 to a low of 27,416 in 2007. (See Appendix A) During the course of the study, we discovered that, in addition to upgrading the call box system, SAFE has funded other motorist aid projects over the past ten years, as authorized by section 2557(d) of the Streets and Highways Code. We have examined these projects and have concluded that the expenditures made on them by SAFE have been beneficial to motorists. They are a related use of the fees collected for motorist aid. In that regard, we feel that motorists associate the \$1 fee exclusively with call boxes and should be informed about the totality of SAFE motorist aid programs.

PURPOSE

This report will examine the structure, operations and budgeting of the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies. We will report on how the call box program works, both for traditional call boxes and the newly implemented mobile call box program (511). We will review SAFE's role in funding two regional helicopter programs, in funding an enhancement to the Freeway Service Patrol program operated by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), and in providing grants to County fire/rescue departments for motorist rescue equipment. We will also examine the financial structure of the agency.

PROCEDURES

- Reviewed log of previous Grand Jury reports to determine if a study of SAFE had ever been done;
- Studied the California State Streets and Highways Code, Sections 2550-2559;
- Reviewed SAFE financial documents for 2006 and 2007;

- Reviewed contractual agreement between SAFE and TeleTran Tek Services (or its predecessor RMSL Traffic Systems) and its 12 amendments for the provision of engineering and management consultant services;
- Reviewed pertinent SAFE Board agendas and minutes 1997-2007;
- Attended bi- monthly SAFE Board meetings in September 2007, November 2007 and January 2008;
- Interviewed various persons with relevant information;
- Reviewed documentation supporting awards of Motorist Aid Grants to three rural fire and rescue departments;
- Visited two of those rural departments and inspected equipment purchased with SAFE grants;
- Visited the SAFE call center in Los Angeles and interviewed managerial, supervisory and line staff and observed handling of some incoming calls for assistance; and
- Reviewed training manuals used by operators handling incoming calls for assistance.

DISCUSSION 1 SAFE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The State of California's enabling legislation, which went into effect on January 1, 1986, makes the establishment of a SAFE a county option. SAFEs have been formed which cover 34 of California's 58 counties. Two of the SAFEs are multi-county operations: the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in the Bay Area covers nine counties while the Sacramento Area Council of Governments manages the Capitol Valley Regional SAFE covering six counties. The remaining SAFEs each cover one county. Each county also has the option of deciding on one of three organizational structures:

- Its SAFE agency can be part of a county transportation commission (as in Orange and Riverside Counties);
- As part of a county association of governments (as in San Bernardino and Kern Counties); or
- As an independent authority (as in San Diego and Los Angeles Counties).

In accordance with Section 2553 of the Streets and Highways Code, the San Diego SAFE is composed of seven members, with two members from the County Board of Supervisors and five members from city councils of cities within the County. Current SAFE Board members include two San Diego City Council members and one each from the City Councils of Carlsbad, Santee and Imperial Beach, thus providing representation from diverse regions within the County. Per Section 2551.5 of the Code, SAFE Board members receive a stipend of \$100 plus mileage to attend each bi-monthly Board meeting. The same elected officials also serve as the Board for the Abandoned Vehicle Abatement Service Authority, which usually convenes immediately prior to the SAFE Board meeting and which is funded by a separate \$1 assessment on vehicle registrations. This report addresses only SAFE.

Since September 1998, SAFE has had no staffing drawn from the ranks of County staff or other public employees, with the exception of its legal counsel whose services are purchased by SAFE from the County. Prior to that time, operational management of the call box program was performed by the County Dept. of Public Works and the County Controller handled financial management. In 1998, the Department of Public Works opted to discontinue many of its ancillary operations and as a result SAFE solicited bids for the provision of management and staff services. TeleTran Tek Services, Inc. was awarded the contract over SANDAG and other bidders.

TeleTran Tek services had held a contract since September 1994 to provide technical assistance for the operation of the call box system. Its new scope of responsibility to act as total program management and administrative services contractor was memorialized in a 27-page amendment (No.7) effective September 18, 1998 to that existing contract. Five additional sole source amendments have extended the agreement through June 30, 2010.

Major responsibilities of TeleTran Tek Services include:

- 1) Provision of the SAFE Executive Director and supporting secretarial and technical staff;
- 2) Contract negotiation, management and performance review with SAFE vendors, including vendors that provide call answering, call box maintenance and cellular phone services;
- 3) Preparation of agendas, reports and minutes for SAFE Board of Directors meetings;
- 4) Preparation of SAFE budget and monitoring the status of budget revenues and expenditures;
- 5) Solicitation and evaluation of applications for Motorist Aid Grants and recommending approval or denial of awards to the SAFE Board;
- 6) Management of ongoing special projects, as directed by the SAFE Board;
- 7) Coordination of public information efforts;
- 8) Provision of technical assistance, as required;
- 9) Coordination with motorist aid programs in other counties and states;
- 10) Representation of San Diego SAFE at quarterly meetings of the California SAFE Committee (CalSAFE); and
- 11) Exploration of emerging technology to enhance motorist aid programs.

The current agreement between SAFE and TeleTran Tek Services for the 2007/2008 Fiscal Year is for a fixed fee of \$363,576.00. This represents an increase of \$29,249.00 (8.75%) over the previous fiscal year.

DISCUSSION 2 STATIONARY CALL BOXES

The rationale for the creation of the SAFE program was the installation of a network of solar-powered cellular call boxes to connect motorists stranded on Interstate and State Highways with the Department of the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and other sources of motorist aid, such as the American Automobile Association (AAA). In

November 1989, San Diego was the first county in the State to have its call boxes up and working.

The number of call boxes reached a maximum of 1770 by 2004. At that time SAFE was engaged in a project to retrofit the call boxes to make them accessible to wheelchair users and the hearing impaired, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 2557(f) of the Streets and Highways Code. For this project, completed in 2006, TeleTran Tek Services negotiated a price of \$579 per call box upgraded, as compared with the \$3300 per site spent by Los Angeles County. However, 307 call box sites did not lend themselves to retrofitting resulting in a reduction in the total number of call boxes to the approximately 1400 which exist today. There are no plans to install call boxes on the State Route 125 Toll Road, which opened in November 2007.

The work of installing, maintaining and repairing the call boxes is contracted by SAFE/TeleTran Tek Services to Camarco Wireless Technologies, Inc. based in Orange County. Camarco staff is contracted to perform regular maintenance inspections of all call boxes in the network, as well as to repair all defective call boxes within 48 hours. Defective call boxes are identified by a self-reporting mechanism programmed into each call box. Call boxes automatically call Camarco every third night. Those for which no call is received are earmarked for repair. Camarco also completed the upgrade from analog to digital cellular call boxes in 2006, under a cost saving three-county agreement that also covered Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

The amount budgeted for maintenance and repairs in the fiscal year 2007/2008 are \$600,048.00.

The SAFE call center operation is now contracted to CDSNet, Inc, based in Los Angeles. Prior to November 2001, the call box response function was handled by CHP. Privatization has not only resulted in cost savings, but also in improved response time to calls for assistance. It also has reduced the number of non-emergency calls having to be handled by CHP. Under CHP, SAFE call box calls had a lower priority than 911 calls, resulting in delays of 15-20 minutes in times of peak demand or less than optimum staffing. Under CDSNet, SAFE calls have first priority and go to the head of any incoming queue of waiting calls. CDSNet also handles calls for numerous commercial clients as well as for two other SAFE programs in Santa Barbara and Capitol Valley. The average response time for answering SAFE calls is 17 seconds. Even though SAFE calls constitute one percent of the total volume of calls received by CDSNet, they regard SAFE as a prestige client and prominently display SAFE on the CDSNet web site.

CDSNet staff assigned to answer SAFE calls are drawn from their pool of experienced operators, who have the increased training, expanded knowledge base and higher sensitivity required. The operators we observed were bilingual in Spanish and English. Operators also have the capability to arrange conference calls in over 140 languages through a translation service purchased from AT&T. They also have the ability to access TTY services for the hearing impaired.

The call box numbering system allows the operators to pinpoint the exact location of the motorist making the call. A blue sign marks each of the bright yellow call boxes with white lettering which includes the call box number. That number indicates both the freeway route number and the number of miles, to the nearest tenth of a mile, from its point of origin in San Diego County, running from south to north or from west to east. Odd numbers are on southbound or westbound lanes, while even numbers are assigned to call boxes on northbound or eastbound lanes. For example call box number 5-305 would be located on southbound Interstate 5, 30.5 miles north of the San Ysidro International Border; call box number 94-108 would be located on eastbound State Route 94, 10.8 miles east of downtown San Diego. The call box number appears on the responding operator's computer terminal within seconds after the call for assistance is answered.

CDSNet SAFE operators utilize procedures approved by the CHP when handling and routing calls for assistance. The software used contains prompts that appear on the terminal screen after the operator enters certain basic information and which guide the operator in the handling of the call. If the situation requires connecting the caller to a CHP dispatcher, the terminal screen data is electronically transmitted to CHP. Examples of situations requiring the operator to connect the call to CHP are reports of vehicle fires, the commission of crimes, traffic accidents, the need for free assistance from the Freeway Service Patrol in peak weekday hours (see Discussion 4) or the need for a rotational tow services available at all times at the motorist's expense.

Other services provided by the CDSNet SAFE operators include connection to the Automobile Association of America (AAA) for its members and connection to other auto clubs, including programs available from auto insurers, vehicle manufacturers and car rental agencies. Connection with a commercial towing company chosen by the motorist is also an option. The training material provided to operators includes the names and phone numbers of approximately 50 auto clubs, tow companies and related organizations prominently displayed in their cubicles. If the motorist wishes, the call can be connected to a relative or friend who would be able to provide assistance. For callers who have no access to any of the above resources, the call is connected to a CHP dispatcher.

The CDSNet SAFE operators we observed handled their incoming calls effectively and in a professional manner. They adhered to the guidelines in their CHP approved training manual and seamlessly negotiated their software screens while obtaining information from the caller.

The amount budgeted for the CDSNet call box answer center for fiscal year 2007/2008 is \$111,900.00.

The system of stationary call boxes is a vital public safety service, routinely easing traffic congestion on freeways, helping stranded motorists, and, in extraordinary situations, saving lives. One cannot assume that every motorist has a cell phone or that a cell phone is functional in all areas. SAFE staff has discussed reducing the number of stationary call boxes by as much as 20% due to the diminishing volume of calls. At least one SAFE Board member has opposed any reduction in the rural areas, where cell phone capability

is spotty. The Grand Jury supports the retention of all stationary call boxes in rural areas and a gradual 10% reduction in other areas by eliminating the least used stationary call boxes.

FACTS AND FINDINGS

Fact: The number of calls from SAFE stationary call boxes has steadily decreased over the past ten years due to the increased use of cell phones.

Fact: Not every motorist owns a cell phone or carries a phone that is operational.

Fact: Cell phones are often non-functional in many areas of the County, particularly in rural areas.

Finding: A safety net of stationary call boxes is still required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2007/2008 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the County of San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies:

08-37: Maintain the existing call box system as a Safety Net by not eliminating any stationary call boxes in rural areas and retaining at least 90% of the stationary call boxes in the remainder of the network, eliminating only those most infrequently used. We recommend that this 10% reduction be completed by June 30, 2010, at which time the need for further reductions could be evaluated.

DISCUSSION 3 MOBILE CALL BOXES

The SAFE Mobile Call Box Program became operational on February 21, 2007. It enables motorists to access the SAFE services described in Discussion 2 from their own personal cellular phone by dialing 511. This program has the advantage of allowing motorists needing assistance to remain in their vehicles, as opposed to leaving their vehicles and walking along the freeway to the nearest stationary call box. The program will also reduce the number of 911 calls coming in to CHP, insure a waiting time of less than 20 seconds, and allows callers to benefit from the expertise of the CDSNet SAFE operators. The major disadvantage of the mobile call box is the inability, at present and for the foreseeable future, of the call center software to pinpoint the exact location of the motorist. If the motorist does not know his or her location, he is told to call 911 where enhanced equipment enables the CHP dispatcher to determine the origin of the call.

The mobile call box is an option on the 511 Advanced Transportation Information System, which in San Diego County is managed by SANDAG. It is accessed by dialing 511 and activated either by voice by saying the phrase "Roadside Assistance" or by

choosing option #4 on the 511 menu. The call is then immediately connected to the CDSNet call answering center and handled in the same manner and for the same services as described in Discussion 2.

As a relatively new service, the 511 Mobile Call Box system is not as well known as it should be. Even the term "mobile call box" can bring to mind some electronic device other than a cell phone. The 511 public information put out by SANDAG emphasizes the system's capacity to provide information on public transportation and traffic conditions. These areas account for the greatest bulk of 511 calls.

SAFE has contracted with the Berkman, a San Diego public relations firm, to publicize the mobile call box feature of 511. The results have been variable. In one week in October 2007, the week of the firestorms, there were about 2500 mobile call box calls due to the high public visibility of 511. CDSNet handled this high volume by proactively re-assigning operators from other functions and by extending shifts. Many of the calls received were not true roadside assistance calls but were inquiries about road closures due to the fires.

By contrast, the following month, November 2007, saw only 218 mobile call box calls as opposed to 1517 calls from stationary call boxes. These figures are roughly consistent with those for the months of May through September 2007.

The SAFE 511 publicity campaign to date has included spot radio and television announcements, ads in business journals and community newsletters, appearances by the SAFE Executive Director at community forums and on some radio and television broadcasts, and displays on the freeway electronic notice board near the San Ysidro border crossing. These efforts are limited, both in the number of motorists they reach and in the ability of the motorists they do reach to recall the needed information when faced with a roadside emergency. The Grand Jury suggests that SAFE do a cost analysis for potential funding for one or both of these following outreach initiatives:

Initiative I: adding at each stationary call box site a sign or durable poster which would highlight "511" in bold letters and would include a brief explanation of how to access the roadside assistance feature. For example, the wording could be "Dial 511-Option #4 for Roadside Assistance." A variation of this idea was discussed at the SAFE Board meeting in September 2006, but it was not implemented.

Initiative II: developing, in conjunction with the California Department of Motor Vehicles, an informational card on Mobile Call Box availability that would be provided to all motorists in the County when they register or re-register a vehicle. This card could be kept in the glove compartment of each registered vehicle for ready access when needed. It could also be used to provide brief descriptions of the other SAFE programs described in this report, so motorists can be fully informed as to how the \$1 charge on their registration fee is being used. This initiative might well be a combined effort with the other SAFE counties in the State, through their statewide organization CalSAFE.

The current amount budgeted for Mobile Call Box public information for fiscal year 2007/2008 is \$150,000.00.

FACTS AND FINDINGS

Fact: Mobile call boxes are superior to stationary call boxes in that a stranded motorist can access help immediately without having to leave the vehicle to walk to a call box.

Fact: Calling 511 for roadside assistance results in a faster response than calling 911 and reduces the impact on the 911 system.

Finding: Statistics show that, with the exception of October 2007 when the 511 system was heavily featured as a source of assistance during the fire storms, there has not been a widespread use of the 511 Mobile Call Box Program. The Grand Jury finds that more and different publicity efforts are necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2007/2008 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the County of San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies:

- 08-38:** Publicize the Mobile Call Box Program by installing at each stationary call box site a sign or durable poster which would highlight "511" in bold letters and would include a brief description of how to access the roadside assistance feature.
- 08-39:** Publicize the Mobile Call Box Program by developing, in conjunction with the Department of Motor Vehicles, an informational card on Mobile Call Box availability to be provided to County motorists when they register or re-register a vehicle.

DISCUSSION 4 FREEWAY SERVICE PATROLS

In March 1993, Sections 2560-2565 of the Streets and Highways Code authorized counties to implement a Freeway Service Patrol program. The aim of the program is to alleviate traffic congestion by providing for the rapid removal or return to service of disabled vehicles, by assisting in traffic accidents or by removing debris from the roadway. The program is funded by a combination of State Transportation funds and a County contribution of at least 25% of the State allocation. Section 2551.6 of the Streets and Highways Code authorizes a County Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies to operate or contribute to that county's Freeway Service Patrol program.

In San Diego County, the Freeway Service Patrol is operated by SANDAG in cooperation with Caltrans and CHP and with some funding by SAFE. The Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) consists of a fleet of 25 tow trucks and, as part of a pilot program, 7

light duty pickup trucks patrolling 13 beats along the busiest sections of four Interstate Highways (5, 8, 15 and 805) and eight State Routes (52, 54, 56, 78, 94, 125, 163 and 905). FSP trucks can also be dispatched from the CHP dispatch center, which is one of the options available to the CDSNet SAFE operators. FSP operates during the peak traffic hours of 5:30 - 9:30 AM and 3:00 - 7:00 PM.

Services provided by FSP drivers include:

- 1) Changing a flat tire;
- 2) Jump- starting a vehicle;
- 3) Providing water for the radiator;
- 4) Providing a free gallon of gas; and
- 5) Towing a vehicle to a safe, pre-determined drop location, where the motorist may call for additional assistance.

All of these services are provided free of charge. SANDAG reports that the FSP program assists about 50,000 motorists a year. (Appendix C.) SANDAG statistics also have shown that 75% of the roadside assists handled by FSP do not require the full service tow trucks now required by CHP for FSP programs.

SAFE is currently funding approximately two-thirds (\$1.5 million in three annual installments of \$500,000) of the total cost of a three-year pilot project being conducted by SANDAG to test the effectiveness of the lighter Roving Service Trucks. These trucks do not have towing capacity but are capable of providing all other FSP services. The Roving Service Trucks are less costly to operate than tow trucks and, because of their superior ability to weave through traffic, take less time to reach the scene of a motorist assist incident.

The pilot project began in January 2005 and extends through June 2008, by which time SANDAG expects to have published a complete evaluation. According to an interim report provided to SAFE by SANDAG in July 2006, first year statistics showed that the seven Roving Service Trucks resulted in an annual saving of \$112,694 and had a faster average response time, 8.13 minutes as opposed to 10.6 minutes for regular tow trucks. The Roving Service Trucks were able to complete a motorist assist in 87% of the incidents without having to call in a tow truck.

Appendix C contains some of the project statistics updated through December 2007. The Roving Service Trucks have completed 22% of the FSP's total assists between January 2005 and December 2007. The cost per incident was \$34.80 as opposed to \$42.43 for the full service trucks.

Assuming that the statistics cited above are upheld in the final report for the pilot project, the Grand Jury recommends that both SAFE and SANDAG negotiate with CHP to repeal its requirement that all FSP vehicles be tow trucks. It is feasible that the number of tow trucks could be reduced from 25 to 13, one tow truck per beat, and that the number of Roving Service Trucks could be increased from seven to a minimum of 13. Some of the busier beats might require an additional Roving Service Truck

FACTS AND FINDINGS

Fact: 75% of the incidents to which Freeway Service Patrol trucks respond do not require a tow truck.

Fact: FSP Roving Service Trucks, without towing capacity, respond to incidents in less time and at less cost than tow trucks.

Finding: Roving Service Trucks would be a cost effective and efficient component of the Freeway Service Patrol after the pilot program ends on June 30, 2008.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2007/2008 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the County of San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies:

08-40: Support the San Diego Association of Governments in its efforts to make Roving Service Trucks a permanent fixture of the Freeway Service Patrol Program.

DISCUSSION 5 MOTORIST AID GRANTS

Section 2557(d) of the State Streets and Highways Code allows a county Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies to use funds exceeding those needed to operate and maintain the system of call boxes "for additional motorist aid services or support". Pursuant to the statute, SAFE began to solicit proposals for motorist aid projects from private and public sector applicants in March 1995. A proposal from the San Diego County Fire Chiefs' Association dated January 6, 1997 requested rescue vehicle accident equipment for 28 Independent Fire Protection Districts and Volunteer Fire Companies. Most of these companies are located in the backcountry and are primary responders for vehicle related emergencies on or near the freeways in their areas. Fourteen of them were identified as either having no rescue vehicle equipment or equipment that was more than five years old. As a result of this proposal, SAFE allocated \$420,000 (\$30,000 each for 14 companies) in motorist aid grants in its budget for Fiscal Year 1997/1998. In the same year SAFE allocated \$785,000 to the County Sheriff's Department as partial funding for training 8900 emergency employees on the operation of the 800MHz radio system that was intended to provide a uniform communication medium among all first responding agencies.

This began an ongoing program of Motorist Aid Grants with standardized procedures. SAFE budgets \$400,000 for these grants every other fiscal year, publishes a Request for Proposals and has established a review committee to evaluate the proposals received and make recommendations to approve or deny to the full SAFE Board. Most of the

proposals come from rural fire departments for one-time expenditures for equipment and training related to response to vehicle accidents.

SAFE applies the following criteria for awarding Motorist Aid Grants:

- 1) Relationship to transportation and/or public safety programs in the County;
- 2) Regional applicability;
- 3) Potential for use with components of the call box program;
- 4) Absence of adequate internal funding;
- 5) Improvement to inter-agency coordination;
- 6) Innovation in meeting public needs; and
- 7) Ability to complete the project and its potential for success.

Agencies are limited to total awards of \$60,000 over a four-year period, so that grant request funds can be equitably distributed throughout the County. Each request is documented on the bi-monthly SAFE Board meeting agenda, which lists the name of the agency, the purpose of the grant, the amount of the request, the amount of the award and where applicable the reason for rejection. (Agendas are available on the SAFE web site <http://www.sdcallbox.org>)

The items for which Motorist Aid Grants have recently been awarded include:

- 1) Vehicle extrication equipment, typically "Jaws of life";
- 2) Training for vehicle accident response;
- 3) Portable and hand-held radio equipment;
- 4) Power rescue equipment;
- 5) Mass casualty incident kits;
- 6) Thermal imaging cameras; and
- 7) Rope rescue training.

The Grand Jury requested and received documentation of the two most recent SAFE Motorist Aid Grants awarded to three randomly chosen rural fire agencies. The packet for each grant consists, in chronological order, of a grant proposal justifying the need for the requested item, a signed agreement between SAFE and the requesting agency after the project is approved, a copy of the invoice or purchase order, and a copy of the check for the grant award. Since no payments are issued until the invoice is received, the possibility for grant mismanagement or fraud is at a minimum. Many of the award checks are presented at SAFE Board meetings, thus giving Fire Chiefs or other grantees an opportunity to thank the Board in person.

Grand Jury members visited two of the outlying Fire Departments that received Motorist Aid Grants. We inspected the equipment purchased with the grants and verified that the receipts for the items matched the invoices submitted to SAFE. We found everything to be in order.

The amount budgeted for SAFE Motorist Aid Grants for the current fiscal year 2007/2008 is \$400,000.00.

DISCUSSION 6 REGIONAL HELICOPTER PROGRAM

By the year 2000, the revenues collected by SAFE from vehicle registration fees had so far surpassed the costs of operating the network of call boxes as to create a reserve of approximately \$10 million. In light of this surplus, the SAFE Board considered temporarily suspending the collection of the vehicle registration fee. At about this same time, local government leaders, including a long-term member of the SAFE Board, and Fire Chiefs in the region began advocating for the acquisition of helicopters to augment the available firefighting resources in the County. Since the helicopters could be used to respond to motorist aid incidents as well as to fires, SAFE became a logical choice for the partial funding of the regional helicopter program.

In March 2001 SAFE stopped pursuing suspending collection of the vehicle registration fees and subsequently created a special account into which all fees collected in Fiscal Year 2001/2002 and Fiscal Year 2002/2003, plus interest, was deposited. Money in this account was used to subsidize the initial Regional Fire & Life Safety Helicopter Program.

The first Regional Helicopter Program was a 90-day pilot project that ran from August to October 2002. The program was operated by the City of San Diego, which leased a Bell 212HP helicopter with a 375-gallon capacity for water or fire retardant foam. SAFE funded 49% of the project (\$230,000 out of \$470,000). The remainder of the funding came from the City of San Diego (\$190,000) and the County of San Diego (\$50,000). Oversight for the pilot project was provided by the Regional Helicopter Advisory Committee, which consists of fire fighting professionals appointed by the SAFE Board. Even though the program was operated by the City of San Diego, the helicopter was used as a regional resource both for firefighting and motorist aid.

A second pilot program covered 120 days, from July to October 2003, and once again SAFE contributed about one-half of the total cost. The City leased helicopter added such enhancements as a searchlight and hoist capability. The balance of the funding came from a combination of private sector donations and contributions from the City and the County of San Diego. Statistics from the two pilot programs established that 17% of the incidents to which the helicopter responded were motorist aid incidents.

The City Regional Helicopter Program that exists today became operational in 2004, at which time the ongoing SAFE funding formula became effective. The City's program, now called Copter One, became permanent with one helicopter in February 2004. SAFE funding was established at the level of the smaller of 15% of the total cost of the program or \$300,000 (\$250,000 if there were two programs in operation).

In June 2005, the County Sheriff's Department, with the assistance of an Indian Gaming grant, purchased two Bell 205A1+++ helicopters equipped with large underbelly water tanks and other firefighting equipment. These helicopters became known as the Copter 10/Copter 12 Regional Helicopter Program. SAFE funding was established at the lesser of 15% of the total cost of the program or \$250,000. Region-wide utilization is a prerequisite for SAFE funding of both Regional Helicopter Programs.

When the Grand Jury began its term in July 2007, the SAFE memoranda of understanding (MOU) with both the City and County for the funding of their helicopter programs were scheduled to expire on June 30, 2009. In September 2007, the SAFE Board was asked to consider extending those MOUs for another five years through June 30, 2014. This would assure both the City and the County of continued SAFE funding as they plan to finance their helicopter programs, which frequently depend on private sector donations as components of their total budgets. The approval of the extension was held over until the November meeting, pending an analysis of helicopter incident response statistics by the Regional Helicopter Advisory Committee. The Board required assurance that 15% is still a valid approximation of the percentage of incidents that are related to motorist aid.

Per a memorandum dated October 17, 2007 to SAFE from the Regional Helicopter Advisory Committee, motorist aid incidents include, but are not limited to, the following:

- 1) Motor vehicle accidents, vehicle fires, or motorist medical needs not created by an accident;
- 2) Vegetation fires where the fire has crossed or has the potential to cross the roadway;
- 3) Vegetation fires where smoke or ash from the fire has or is likely to obscure the motorist's view of the roadway and thereby create a hazard;
- 4) Emergencies where fire and/or emergency equipment parked at or near the scene of the emergency adversely affect the flow of traffic;
- 5) Command and control for major incidents impacting the roadways;
- 6) Incidents where the roadway is closed, or traffic speeds severely curtailed, because of law enforcement or hazardous materials operations, and the helicopter assists in mitigating traffic congestion; and
- 7) Other incidents evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

The Advisory Committee analyzed the 221 working helicopter incidents that occurred during the first half of 2007 and determined that 31 (or slightly over 14%) met the above criteria for motorist aid incidents. The Committee's report concluded that the 15% maximum reimbursement be retained for use as a reasonable estimate of helicopter motorist aid incidents. At its November meeting, the SAFE Board approved the extension of SAFE funding for both Regional Helicopter Programs through June 30, 2014. The maximum SAFE contribution was also increased from \$250,000 to \$375,000 per program per year. This assures that these critical but traditionally under-funded programs retain this source of base funding.

The agenda for the SAFE Board meeting of November 8, 2007 indicated that all three of the Regional Helicopters partially funded by SAFE participated in the overall air assault on the 2007 wild fires. The Grand Jury joins with SAFE staff in expressing our gratitude for all that the helicopter personnel did to save lives and property. It was brought to our attention that the one City helicopter flies at night but the two County helicopters do not. This deprives the region of a potentially valuable resource, not only for fighting fires but also for responding to incidents where multiple rescue attempts are required at night. Accordingly, the Grand Jury is recommending that the SAFE Board direct staff to

explore with the Sheriff's Department the upgrading of the Copter 10/Copter 12 Program to include night flying capacity.

FACTS AND FINDINGS

Fact: The chopper in the City's Copter One program responds to fire, rescue and motorist aid incidents at night. The two helicopters in the County's Copter10/Copter12 program do not.

Finding: The region needs to maximize the use of all the limited emergency response resources it has available. This includes expanding the capacity of the Copter 10/Copter 12 Program to make it functional 24 hours a day.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2007/2008 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the County of San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies:

08-41: Explore with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department the feasibility of upgrading the Copter 10/Copter 12 Program to include night flying capability.

DISCUSSION 7 SAFE FINANCIAL STRUCTURE

SAFE has been described as a "boring program with a boring budget". If that meant SAFE has a predictable income of about \$3.1 million per year, predictable expenditures of about \$3.5 million per year and a healthy reserve of almost \$11 million, then that is absolutely correct. Appendix B shows the dollar amounts budgeted for the current and the four prior fiscal years, as well as actual dollar amounts for the four prior fiscal years and the estimated actual dollar amount for the current fiscal year.

In round numbers SAFE annual revenue consists of about \$2.6 million collected from vehicle registration fees and \$0.5 million in interest on the reserves. SAFE has a Dedicated Portfolio in the low risk San Diego County Investment Treasury. Annual expenses are approximately \$400,000 for administration, a little less than \$1 million for call box operations and a little over \$2 million for other motorist aid projects.

In addition to the funded projects described in this report SAFE has set aside funds to invest in what it calls Motorist Aid of the Future: the use of new and emerging communication and transportation technologies to assist San Diego motorists. SAFE executive staff has sent a Request for Information to about 14 transportation research institutes with the goal of identifying selected pilot projects for implementation.

The Grand Jury examined the SAFE ledgers of revenues and expenditures for the three prior fiscal years and found that they provide a satisfactory audit trail for the program.

Information received from SAFE shows that no audits have been conducted over the past five years. There is no specific requirement in the Streets and Highways Code that a SAFE conduct an audit, whether internal or external. Nevertheless, at its meeting on November 8, 2007, the SAFE Board authorized a contract for an auditing firm to conduct an audit for fiscal year 2006/2007. The Grand Jury is strongly recommending that the audit be conducted as soon as possible and a copy forwarded to the Grand Jury upon publication.

FACTS AND FINDINGS

Fact: There is no requirement for an external audit of the SAFE Program.

Fact: The Grand Jury reviewed financial documents submitted by SAFE and found that they leave a satisfactory audit trail for revenues and expenses.

Finding: An external audit would result in professional confirmation of the Grand Jury's opinion and may result in additional recommendations for improved accounting practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2007/2008 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the County Diego of San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies:

08-42: Complete the external audit for the program for Fiscal Year 2006/2007 and forward a copy to the Grand Jury as soon as possible after it is published.

COMMENDATION

The Grand Jury wishes to commend SAFE management and staff for their pro-active, cost efficient and effective management of the program. We also wish to thank them for providing ample financial and historical documentation, much of which is included in this report, and for facilitating our visit to the SAFE CDSNet call center in Los Angeles.

COMPLETE RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2007/2008 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the County of San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies:

08-37: Maintain the existing call box system as a Safety Net by not eliminating any stationary call boxes in rural areas and retaining at least 90% of the stationary call boxes in the remainder of the network, eliminating only those most infrequently used. We recommend that this 10% reduction be

completed by June 30, 2010, at which time the need for further reductions could be evaluated.

- 08-38:** Evaluate publicizing the Mobile Call Box Program by installing at each stationary call box site a sign or durable poster which would highlight "511" in bold letters and would include a brief description of how to access the roadside assistance feature.
- 08-39:** Evaluate publicizing the Mobile Call Box Program by developing, in conjunction with the Department of Motor Vehicles, an informational card on Mobile Call Box availability to be provided to County motorists when they register or re-register a vehicle.
- 08-40:** Support the San Diego Association of Governments in its efforts to make Roving Service Trucks a permanent fixture of the Freeway Service Patrol Program.
- 08-41:** Explore with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department the feasibility of upgrading the Copter Ten/ Copter 12 Program to include night flying capability.
- 08-42:** Complete the external audit for the program for fiscal year 2006/2007 and forward a copy to the Grand Jury as soon as possible after it is published.

REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

The California Penal Code §933(c) requires any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the agency. Such comment shall be made *no later than 90 days* after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court); except that in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g. District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such comment shall be made *within 60 days* to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, California Penal Code §933.05(a), (b), (c), details, as follows, the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made:

- (a) As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
- (1) The respondent agrees with the finding
 - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefore.

- (b) As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
- (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
 - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
 - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
 - (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefore.
- (c) If a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with the Penal Code §933.05 are required from the:

<u>Responding Agency</u>	<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Date</u>
County of San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies	08-37 through 08-42	07/16/08

APPENDICES

- A. SAFE monthly call history (Source: SAFE)
- B. SAFE budget actual recap (Source: SAFE)
- C. Freeway Service Patrol pilot project (Source: SANDAG)

Appendix A

MON /YR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTALS
1988										Begin	3,886	5,609	9,495
1989	6,841	9,313	9,696	13,180	12,155	12,297	13,490	14,720	14,438	13,332	13,260	13,421	146,143
1990	12,641	13,209	11,796	13,723	13,908	14,900	15,665	16,549	16,222	14,170	14,498	13,230	170,511
1991	11,937	12,033	10,300	13,577	13,457	13,907	14,001	14,650	14,615	14,431	13,416	12,801	159,125
1992	12,755	13,013	12,216	13,426	14,249	13,984	14,832	15,898	15,459	14,759	13,765	13,228	167,584
1993	12,564	13,358	12,378	13,701	13,495	14,192	14,738	14,746	15,073	13,841	13,840	12,708	164,634
1994	11,450	12,636	11,520	12,976	12,598	13,898	14,636	15,214	15,351	14,087	13,500	12,551	160,417
1995	12,718	12,499	11,743	14,129	12,879	13,164	14,541	16,269	15,721	14,000	13,274	11,732	162,669
1996	11,932	11,807	11,440	13,015	12,879	13,164	14,514	14,557	14,702	12,741	12,798	13,052	156,601
1997	10,862	12,106	11,166	11,710	11,946	12,596	11,928	9,547	9,885	12,545	11,969	9,745	136,005
1998	11,521	10,685	9,598	10,713	11,175	11,417	12,441	13,660	14,951	11,065	10,755	9,761	137,742
1999	9,220	9,458	8,659	9,893	8,873	9,246	9,945	11,170	9,937	11,344	7,767	8,603	114,115
2000	8,354	8,733	8,267	9,443	9,118	9,831	10,197	9,969	8,467	8,472	7,769	7,643	106,263
2001	7,326	6,300	7,194	7,143	7,300	7,389	7,718	7,520	5,967	3,300	5,625	5,437	78,219
2002	5,198	5,138	5,499	5,376	5,427	5,960	5,975	6,006	5,584	5,372	5,208	5,277	66,020
2003	5,015	4,260	5,091	4,641	5,475	5,075	5,381	5,384	4,615	4,621	3,938	3,859	57,355
2004	3,309	3,971	4,634	4,139	4,558	4,316	4,343	4,372	3,904	3,579	3,287	3,357	47,769
2005	3,002	2,797	3,534	3,423	3,435	3,584	3,722	3,494	3,076	3,062	2,975	2,847	38,951
2006	2,386	2,519	2,597	2,410	2,429	2,579	2,747	2,354	2,222	2,160	1,899	2,071	28,373
2007	1,736	1,879	2,275	2,078	2,262	2,231	2,238	2,342	1,983	4,914	1,735	1,743	27,416
AVERAGE	8,461	8,722	8,400	9,405	9,348	9,670	10,161	10,443	10,114	9,568	8,758	8,434	2,135,407

CDSNET began answering calls in Nov 2001

Mobile Call Box Program started in Mar 2007

Appendix B

FUND RESERVES	BUDGETED FY 05/06	ACTUAL FY 05/06	BUDGETED FY 06/07	ACTUAL FY 06/07	BUDGETED FY 07/08	EST. FY 07/08
Beginning TOTALS		\$12,369,737		\$11,236,829		\$10,793,888

REVENUES	FY 05/06	FY 05/06	FY 06/07	FY 06/07	FY 07/08	FY 07/08
Vehicle Registrations	\$ 2,634,072	\$ 2,562,188	2,618,102	2,608,871	\$ 2,634,960	\$ 2,640,000
Interest Income	\$ 171,372	\$ 545,432	228,709	\$ 495,315	\$ 298,730	\$ 280,000
Collections and Others	\$ 12,360	\$ 21,971	14,693	\$ 26,341	\$ 27,131	\$ 15,000
TOTAL REVENUES	\$ 2,817,804	\$ 3,129,592	2,861,504	\$ 3,130,527	\$ 2,960,821	\$ 2,935,000
TOTAL RESERVES AND REVENUES		\$15,499,329		\$14,367,356		\$13,728,888

PROGRAM EXPENDITURES	FY 05/06	FY 05/06	FY 06/07	FY 06/07	FY 07/08	FY 07/08
Administration						
Conferences and Travel	\$ 4,000	\$ 1,681	\$ 6,000	\$ 3,160	\$ 15,000	\$ 7,000
Fixed Assets/Minor Equipment	\$ 2,000	\$ -	\$ 2,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Professional Services	\$ 6,000	\$ 3,475	\$ 4,000	\$ 3,415	\$ 4,500	\$ 2,900
SAFE Counsel	\$ 5,000	\$ 8,792	\$ 5,000	\$ 3,517	\$ 5,000	\$ 4,000
Supplies/Public Information	\$ 1,000	\$ 280	\$ 1,050	\$ 509	\$ 400	\$ 200
T-Cubed Management	\$ 310,227	\$ 304,097	\$ 329,706	\$ 334,327	\$ 363,576	\$ 363,576
TOTAL ADMINISTRATION COSTS	\$ 328,227	\$ 318,324	\$ 347,756	\$ 344,928	\$ 388,476	\$ 377,676
Operations		FY 05/06	FY 06/07	FY 06/07	FY 07/08	FY 07/08
Call Box Answer Center	\$ 123,500	\$ 88,952	\$ 140,207	\$ 71,167	\$ 111,900	\$ 107,500
Cellular Service	\$ 123,341	\$ 182,083	\$ 109,056	\$ 99,057	\$ 111,360	\$ 110,000
CHP	\$ 10,467	\$ 12,299	\$ 10,077	\$ 10,375	\$ 10,582	\$ 6,750
Insurance	\$ 22,146	\$ 24,561	\$ 25,790	\$ 24,570	\$ 25,798	\$ 26,445
Maintenance and Repairs	\$ 528,568	\$ 480,692	\$ 571,699	\$ 565,459	\$ 600,048	\$ 609,719
Mobile Call Box	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 2,500

Operations Contingency	\$ 100,000	\$ -	\$ 100,000	\$ -	\$ 100,000	\$ 11,841
Telephone and Other	\$ 263	\$ 143	\$ 150	\$ 143	\$ 150	\$ 200
TOTAL OPERATIONS COSTS	\$ 908,285	\$ 788,731	\$ 956,979	\$ 770,771	\$ 959,838	\$ 874,955
Allocated Reserve for Projects	FY 05/06	FY 05/06	FY 06/07	FY 06/07	FY 07/08	FY 07/08
Alternate Motorist Aid Service Programs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 500,000	\$ -	\$ 500,000	\$ 2,000
Mobile Call Box Public Information	\$ 50,000	\$ -	\$ 100,000	\$ 169,616	\$ 150,000	\$ 150,000
Call Answering System Upgrades	\$ 10,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 15,000
Digital Cellular/TTY/Mobility Disability Access Upgrades	\$ 3,765,382	\$ 2,544,521	\$ 1,200,000	\$ 1,332,339	\$ -	\$ -
Freeway Service Patrol	\$ 500,000	\$ -	\$ 500,000	\$ 500,000	\$ 500,000	\$ 500,000
Motorist Aide & Safety Projects	\$ 343,780	\$ 351,341	\$ -	\$ 22,437	\$ 400,000	\$ 380,000
Projects Contingency	\$ 75,000	\$ -	\$ 100,000	\$ -	\$ 100,000	\$ -
Regional Helicopter Funding	\$ 500,000	\$ 245,183	\$ 500,000	\$ 433,377	\$ 500,000	\$ 500,000
System Expansion/Reduction	\$ 14,000	\$ 14,400	\$ 14,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
TOTAL PROJECT COSTS	\$ 5,258,162	\$ 3,155,445	\$ 2,914,000	\$ 2,457,769	\$ 2,150,000	\$ 1,547,000
TOTAL PROGRAM EXPENDITURES	\$ 6,494,674	\$ 4,262,500	\$ 4,218,735	\$ 3,573,468	\$ 3,498,314	\$ 2,799,631
CALL BOX REPLACEMENT RESERVES		FY 05/06		FY 06/07		FY 07/08
Call Box Replacement Reserves (cumulative)		949,500		758,940		758,940

Appendix C

Freeway service patrol Roving Service Truck pilot
 A brief analysis of project sponsored by SAFE

Year	Assists			Hours worked		
	FSP	RST	TOTAL	FSP	RST	TOTAL
Jan-Dec 05	36,849	10,571	47,420	46,119	12,961	59,079
Jan-Dec 06	38,590	10,931	49,521	48,452	13,800	62,252
Jan-Dec 07	40,080	11,612	51,692	48,766	13,662	62,428
Total	115,519	33,114	148,633	143,337	40,422	183,759

Note: Average cost of Regular FSP trucks = \$42.43
 Average cost of RST F-150 pickup trucks = \$34.80