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# San Diego Service Authority For Freeway Emergencies



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[www.sdcallbox.org](http://www.sdcallbox.org)

**Member Agencies**

County of San Diego  
Carlsbad  
Chula Vista  
Coronado  
Del Mar  
El Cajon  
Encinitas  
Escondido  
Imperial Beach  
La Mesa  
Lemon Grove  
National City  
Oceanside  
Poway  
San Diego  
San Marcos  
Santee  
Solana Beach

July 10, 2008

Hon. Kenneth So, Presiding Judge  
Presiding Department, San Diego Superior Court  
220 West Broadway  
San Diego, California 92101-3830

Re: San Diego County Grand Jury Report  
*SAFE: More Bang for the Buck (April 17, 2008)*

Dear Judge So:

We have attached our responses to the recommendations made by the San Diego County Grand Jury in the above-referenced Grand Jury Report. As the Report indicates, we are constantly seeking new and better ways to serve our area motorists and visitors. While the method to help them will of necessity change over time, the need to help them is unlikely to diminish.

As you can see from our responses, we have implemented or will implement the Report's recommendations in the near future, either as recommended or in another way to accomplish the same goals. We appreciate very much the thought that went into the recommendations, as well as the Grand Jury's very positive and complimentary evaluation of our Motorist Aid Program.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann J. Kulchin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A".

**ANN J. KULCHIN**  
Chair, San Diego SAFE  
Mayor Pro Tem, City of Carlsbad

**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.*

**RESPONSE:** SAFE agrees with the recommendation, with the exception of selecting least used call boxes for removal. It has not yet been implemented, since the proposed implementation date is not until 2010. SAFE will conduct further analysis, as discussed below, to evaluate the specific timing and locations for additional call box removals.

SAFE concurs with the general concept of fixed call box system reduction as we develop more convenient and cost-effective alternatives. As previously noted to the Grand Jury, SAFE already removed approximately 370 of its system of 1,770 fixed call boxes during the equipment and site upgrades performed in 2006, leaving our current installed system of approximately 1,400 fixed call boxes. Using criteria similar to those proposed by the Grand Jury, SAFE retained the vast majority of call boxes on rural highways, and selected the 370 sites that were moved primarily in urban areas where Freeway Service Patrol, higher CHP patrols and other motorists could provide service. Frequency of call box use was considered, but not used as a major factor in selecting sites for removal in order to maintain consistency of spacing between call boxes.

The SAFE Board has not as yet recommended any further call box removals, which would require further approval by CHP and Caltrans. SAFE staff intends to bring the subject of further removals before the SAFE Board for discussion around the 2010 time frame suggested by the Grand Jury, once staff has been able to evaluate such factors as:

- the growth of the relatively new Mobile Call Box Program that reduces the need for fixed call boxes where cell phones work well,
- potential new methods for providing motorist aid services as they may be identified through SAFE's new Motorist Aid of the Future Initiative, and
- growth of cellular signal availability throughout San Diego County, with particular attention to signal availability in rural areas, where it is least available.

SAFE staff projects that these important components of any removal decision will at a minimum take two years to effectively evaluate, and perhaps more for the state-of-the-art ideas that may flow from the Motorist Aid of the Future Initiative.

**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.*

**RESPONSE:** SAFE agrees with that portion of the recommendation that recommends highway signage to promote Mobile Call Box. SAFE disagrees in part with the recommendation, as placement of signs or posters at call box sites cannot be done without the approval of Caltrans, which has to date denied that approval. Placement of small signs on the call box itself would be too small to read from the highway.

SAFE has already requested that Caltrans approve placement of larger informational Mobile Call box signs at selected locations along our highways, and to have messages about Mobile Call Box shown on Caltrans-operated Changeable Message Signs, when the latter are not being used for traffic control or Amber Alert purposes. Any signage in the highway right-of-way must be approved in advance by Caltrans. Unfortunately, Caltrans has chosen to deny those requests because of its policy to limit signage in the highway right-of-way.

Given that determination by Caltrans, SAFE has begun work with Caltrans staff to determine whether Caltrans would approve replacing the current sign on the call box pole (front of the opposite-facing pair only) with a message about Mobile Call Box and 511. This could be done, by way of example, at every 10<sup>th</sup> call box location along the highway. Unfortunately, the current call box signs are only 30" wide by 36" tall, which appears much smaller when passing in a vehicle. Nevertheless, it may be possible to develop a four or five word message with letters of sufficient size to be seen while driving by. This step would take Caltrans approval through its Sign Committee. SAFE estimates that such an effort would take six months or more to obtain approval, given past experience.

SAFE will also explore with Caltrans the possibility of placing a slightly larger sign (perhaps 48" by 48") on the pole to make the message stand out more. This approach may require additional crash-testing of the call box slip base to ensure that the additional sign configuration and weight would not negatively impact the safety design of the call box installation when hit by a vehicle. Such crash tests generally cost around \$45,000 for the required pair of slow and fast speed crashes.

SAFE may, without further Caltrans approval, place information on the inside of the call box door, but not on the outside of the door. Any posters placed on the outside of the door would be too small to be read from the highway.

**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.*

**RESPONSE:** SAFE disagrees with the recommendation, because the DMV has been consistently unwilling to place information pieces from other agencies with its vehicle registration forms mailed annually to motorists.

SAFE staff has discussed this suggestion with our public information consultants at BERKMAN, who have been retained again by the SAFE Board to provide Mobile Call Box marketing services for FY 2008/2009. Similar requests from SAFE Programs in the past to get information about call boxes and our special programs to motorists through DMV mailers have been declined. Even if DMV were willing to do so, and capable of placing the documents only in San Diego County registrations, the cost to print the materials and pay DMV to mail them would easily exceed \$10,000. BERKMAN recommends that, should an additional \$10,000 be available for marketing, it would be better spent to increase the frequency of television and radio spots about Mobile Call Box.

While SAFE does not believe the DMV mailer approach to be practical, we will see if DMV would be willing to have posters on Mobile Call Box placed in its San Diego County locations. we continue our efforts to accomplish similar results through BERKMAN to have articles about Mobile Call Box placed at no cost in company newsletters and email blasts to all employees at major area employers, as well as in community and military newspapers.

**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.*

**RESPONSE:** SAFE agrees with the recommendation. It has not yet been implemented while we await the final evaluation report from SANDAG.

The SAFE Board awaits the final evaluation report from SANDAG staff on the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the Roving Service Truck Pilot Program, funded primarily by SAFE. SANDAG staff believes that report will be completed and presented to the SANDAG Board during the fall of 2008. SANDAG staff reports that it has obtained sufficient funding to continue the RST Program through the end of 2008, and plans to seek permanent funding.

Assuming that the final evaluation shows the same improvement in customer service and cost-effectiveness as interim reports have, the SAFE Board would gladly provide written support for a request by

SANDAG to CHP to increase the percentage of RSTs in the FSP fleet. As SAFE staff understands it, SANDAG would also have the support of most and perhaps all FSP Programs within California, all of whom could save money with a higher use of lower-costing RSTs. CHP is the State agency charged with overseeing the FSP 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.*

**RESPONSE:** SAFE agrees with the recommendation, and has discussed that agency's plans for making Copter Ten and Twelve night flight ready. However, such a decision is an operational and safety determination that must be made by the agency, not SAFE. The Sheriff's Office is currently involved in talks with Calfire on the subject.

SAFE agrees that having night flying capabilities available on all regional helicopters would be the optimal situation. SAFE staff has discussed with the Sheriff's Office the likelihood that Copters 10 and 12 would become equipped to allow for night flying. According to Lt. Dave McNary, the helicopter program manager, rigging a helicopter for night flight involves not only obtaining night vision equipment, but also having the cockpit configured so that its lighting does not interfere with the operation of the night vision goggles. In addition, Copters 10 and 12 are single-engine helicopters, while the City's Copter One is a dual-engine helicopter. Should a single-engine helicopter experience an engine failure, the pilot can, because of training, usually autorotate safely to the ground during daytime operations, although autorotation always involves some danger. This operation is, according to Lt. McNary, significantly more dangerous at night, when the pilot has limited visibility even with night goggles to select a safe landing area. Copter One does not have this problem, since it can operate on one engine if the other fails. Thus, using Copters 10 and 12 for night flight, while possible, involves safety issues in addition to those faced by Copter One.

A second difference between the City and County Programs is that Copter One uses Fire Captains from within the San Diego Fire Department, while the County uses Fire Captains from Calfire. Calfire has to date not been willing to have its fire captains fly at night in single-engine helicopters because of the safety concerns stated above. Lt. McNary reports that his office is discussing with County management and Calfire whether a change to this policy can be agreed upon.

SAFE would note for the Grand Jury's information that the SAFE Board, staff and the Regional Helicopter Advisory Committee created

by SAFE have focused their program oversight on ensuring that the helicopters are capable of motorist aid use and that they are used regionally throughout San Diego County. As a partial funding source, SAFE has left operational and safety decisions such as night flying to the professionals who operate the aircraft. This policy is reflected in the Memoranda of Understanding between SAFE and helicopter agency. An example of that MOU language is shown hereafter:

Neither the Committee nor SAFE will direct the County in the formulation, revision or implementation of the helicopter dispatch and operation policies and procedures. Responsibility for implementation and operation of the County Regional Helicopter Program will be solely that of the County, conditioned upon receipt of funding as described herein

**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.*

**RESPONSE:** SAFE agrees with the recommendation. SAFE will forward the Audit Reports to the Grand Jury when they are completed, which is estimated to be by the end of September 2008

SAFE is currently arranging for an external audit to be performed for both FY 2006/2008 and FY 2007/2008 by the same audit firm, as a cost-effective approach, once FY 2007/2008 ends on June 30, 2008.