

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

January 22, 2014

TO: Honorable Members of the City Council

FROM: James G. Featherstone, Interim Fire Chief
Margaret Whelan, General Manager, Personnel Department



SUBJECT: LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT FIREFIGHTER HIRING
NEEDS ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY

On October 16, 2013, Motion was introduced (Bonin-O'Farrell; C.F. 13-0545-S3) instructing the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD), City Administrative Officer and Personnel Department to report on various issues regarding the "imbalance between firefighter hiring and attrition within the Los Angeles Fire Department." The Motion cited the recent use of the Recall System to fill field vacancies, and the exit in FY 2015-16 of 177 sworn personnel from the Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP). Following are responses to the issues raised in the Motion:

1. Limited Recall of LAFD field personnel.

The LAFD Manual of Operation, Emergency Operations/Recall states, in pertinent part,

"A recall may be initiated when in the opinion of the Metropolitan Fire Communications Section Commander the shortage of staffed fire and/or EMS resources has become or is anticipated to become critical. The MFC Section Commander may request from the Fire Chief or Deputy Department Commander a Limited Recall to meet current and anticipated staffing needs. Holding the off-going platoon shall be considered Recall."

The Department normally fills vacant field positions by members who volunteer to work overtime. However, if insufficient volunteers are available, the "assign-hire" process is followed in which members are required to work overtime. If the "assign hire" process does not produce sufficient members to fill field positions, Limited Recall is then implemented. Limited Recall was deployed on 12 occasions between June 2013 and January 2014, with a total of 346 members going off-shift being held over to fill vacancies and for High Brush Hazard pre-deployment. On each occasion, the Department exhausted its hiring procedures for members to work overtime (voluntarily and involuntarily through the assign-hire process) before resorting to the Limited Recall to ensure staffing needs were met.

2. *How the Fire Department ended up in this situation and what processes should have been in place to catch this staffing imbalance.*

As a result of the economic downturn beginning in late 2008, departments were required to implement budgetary reduction measures during Fiscal Year 2009-10. In response to Mayor and City Council Shared Responsibility and Sacrifice initiatives, the LAFD developed the Modified Coverage Plan (MCP) which reduced the Fire Department's budget by approximately \$40 million. The MCP, first implemented in August 2009, achieved budgetary savings by closing resources on a rotational basis citywide. This initiative reduced Constant Staffing Overtime by approximately \$40 million as the rotational resource closures created a pool of available sworn positions to fill the Department's daily staffing needs on a straight time basis rather than through overtime.

In Fiscal Year 2011-12, a revised staffing plan was implemented to replace the rotational resource closures of the MCP with a more structural closure configuration. Referred to as the Deployment Plan, this initiative was a three-year staffing plan that reduced 318 sworn positions (106 daily) primarily through attrition. Currently, in the third year of implementation, the last 129 sworn positions in the Deployment Plan will leave the Department this Fiscal Year through attrition.

Based upon the Department's projected sworn staffing levels at completion of the Deployment Plan, it was determined that the need for new Firefighter hiring and the reopening of the Drill Tower would be required during FY 2013-14. Accordingly, two classes of 70 Firefighter recruits were funded in the current year budget. These Recruit Training Academy classes are scheduled to begin January 27 and June 16, 2014.

However, several resource restorations and enhancements were enacted through the budget process and by Departmental action. These actions (listed below) were accomplished within existing sworn resources, without the benefit of new sworn hiring, and, as a result, have impacted the current sworn staffing levels.

- FY 2012-13 Budget: Additional 22 sworn positions approved - one Assistant Chief (LAX Homeland Security), three Captains, three Engineers, and six Firefighters (Valley Engine Company restoration), and nine Captains (Emergency Medical Services citywide).
- FY 2013-14 Budget: Additional 13 sworn positions approved – seven Captains (Quality Assurance), three Captains and two Firefighters (Dispatch Center), and one Assistant Chief (Training).
- May 2013: BLS Ambulance Augmentation Plan implemented - 66 sworn positions assigned to staff additional 11 Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulances (2 staff per unit x 11 units x 3 shifts = 66).

- October 2013: 29 sworn positions reassigned from regular field duties to commence preparation for the Recruit Training Academy class in January 2014.

In summation, since FY 2012-13, the Department has been tasked with the need to fill an additional 130 sworn positions without having a single recruit class. The cumulative effect of these actions has been the requirement for the Department to utilize overtime and to deploy Limited Recall of sworn members, as needed, to fill vacancies and for High Brush Hazard pre-deployment.

The Department will be significantly challenged in its ability to fill positions in FY 2014-15 and FY 2015-16 due to a spike in exits from the Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP), as shown in the below table.

Fiscal Year	Enrollees Exiting DROP
2013-14	60: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36 exiting between January and June 2014
2014-15	120: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 15 exiting per month • 90 exiting between January and June 2015
2015-16	175 : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 63 exiting per month • 143 exiting between January and June 2015

3. Pushing up the start date of the first Drill Tower; increasing the number of Drill Tower classes; and staffing required to open a second Drill Tower.

The last Recruit Training Academy class at Drill Tower 81 (DT 81) graduated in 2009. Therefore, significant preparation time has been required to repair or upgrade equipment (e.g., audio visual, fitness) and infrastructure for the facility to become instruction-ready. Further, the curriculum and lesson plans had to be re-evaluated, leading to significant modifications. These have included the addition of a new Leadership and Ethical Decision-Making course, and initiation of a technology-oriented training approach through a paperless instruction model with the use of iPads. The following activities must be completed for successful implementation of the new curriculum and format:

- Installing WiFi at DT 81;
- Developing a Recruit Training Website;
- Ordering and receiving the eBook training curriculum from the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA);
- Providing training to Recruit Services Section (RSS) staff on the new eBook instructional curriculum and format.

These and other preparatory activities were completed by the end of December 2013. Thus, it was infeasible to begin the first Recruit Training Academy class earlier than the scheduled date of January 27, 2014.

The Recruit Training course lasts 20 weeks to complete the minimum industry standard requirements established by the California State Fire Training Program for Firefighter I certification, and the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA). Therefore, the second Academy class at DT 81 cannot begin earlier than the currently scheduled date of June 16, 2014.

The LAFD has a smaller Recruit Training Academy facility at Drill Tower 40 (DT 40) that can accommodate 35 recruits, which, also, has not been used since 2009. To effectively implement this second training facility, similar equipment and infrastructure repairs or upgrades, and providing training to additional RSS staff on the new eBook curriculum and format must be completed. Given its recent experience to become instruction-ready at DT 81 by January 2014, the LAFD does not believe it would be practicable to complete all required activities to hold an Academy class this fiscal year at DT 40. It must also be noted that beginning an Academy class at DT 40 would require re-deploying 20 sworn staff from the field to serve as instructors and perform other required training-related functions. Such re-deployment would compound the field vacancy factor and need to backfill on constant staffing overtime.

A Recruit Training schedule beginning FY 2014-15 of the maximum five Academy classes (three classes of 70 at DT 81 and two classes of 35 at DT 40) could yield 224 new hires each fiscal year. Based on the current deployment of 2835 field position authorities, this training schedule would enable the filling of all anticipated vacancies by FY 2015-16. This projection assumes a recruit attrition rate of 20%, with 56 and 28 per class, respectively, graduating from DT 81 and DT 40 and assigned to field training as Probationary Firefighters. Three Academy classes conducted at DT 81, only, could yield 168 new hires, enabling anticipated vacancies to be filled by FY 2017-18.

The cost of five Academy classes is approximately \$21.3M; the cost of three Academy classes at DT 81, only, is approximately \$16M.

4. The need to increase apparatus resources to accommodate Probationary Firefighters in the field.

The LAFD has 106 Fire Stations comprised of the following:

Truck Company	Engine Company	Specialty Company *
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 Trucks at a Task Force • 11 Light Force Stations • 1 Truck, only (no Pump) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 Engines at a Task Force • 60 Single Engines 	4 Specialty Companies (FS 80, 110, 111, 114; Airport; Fire Boats)
TOTAL: 42 TRUCKS	TOTAL: 91 ENGINES	TOTAL: 4 SPECIALTY COMPANIES

* Probationary Firefighters are not assigned for field rotation to a Specialty Company.

With three Platoons of 42 Truck Companies and 91 Engine Companies, 399 positions are available for rotation assignment to Probationary Firefighters. Such availability is more than sufficient to meet the approximately 225 field positions required if five Recruit Academy classes per fiscal year are conducted.

Probationary Firefighter Assignments	Number of Resources	Available Positions for 3 Platoons
Truck/Light Force Company	42 Truck Companies	126 positions
Engine Company	91 Engine Companies	273 positions
TOTAL		399 positions

Probationary Firefighters serve a 12-month probationary period in the field. They are assigned to a Truck for five months and an Engine for five months. The last two months could be either, based on available vacancy. An example of a rotational assignment is shown below.

Truck Company 1st Assignment		Engine Company 2nd Assignment	
1 st Month	- Truck	6 th Month	- Engine
2 nd Month	- Truck	7 th Month	- Engine
3 rd Month	- Engine	8 th Month	- Truck
4 th Month	- Truck	9 th Month	- BLS RA
5 th Month	- BLS RA	10 th Month	- Engine

5. Personnel Department staffing needs to process additional firefighter candidates.

After Firefighter hiring ceased in 2009, Personnel Department staff involved in the selection process were reassigned within the Department to meet other urgent needs. In 2010, full time and as-needed staffing levels in the Public Safety Recruitment, Selection, and Backgrounds Sections were reduced by approximately 33% due to the Early Retirement Incentive Program (ERIP), reassignments, layoffs, and budget reductions. Staffing has not been increased to its former level; however, hiring demands have increased. For these reasons, the Personnel Department requires additional resources to adequately meet LAFD's future Firefighter hiring needs.

Processing a sufficient number of Firefighter candidates for the January and June 2014 Academy classes significantly reduced the Personnel Department's As-Needed budget, which impacted funding for Proctors and Interview Specialists for other exams, as well as Part-Time Background Investigators who were dedicated to Police Officer hiring.

Authorizing additional administrative support is critical to adequately manage processing of the high number of Firefighter candidates needed to fill future Recruit Training Academy classes. The estimated costs for the required additional staff positions (8 full time positions, including analysts, clerical support and medical support, and up to 19 as-needed background investigators) and candidate processing expenses (fingerprinting and credit checks) range from approximately \$1.14M for three Academy classes to \$1.37M for five classes.

RECOMMENDATION

Note and file this report.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Los Angeles Fire Department staff and recruit costs for three Recruit Training Academy classes would be approximately \$16M, and for five Academy classes approximately \$21.3M. The cost of additional administrative staff support and expenses for the Personnel Department to process an adequate number of candidates to hire into these Academy classes would range from approximately \$1.14M to \$1.37M.