



About 86 percent of last year's emergency calls to Clallam County Fire District 3 were medical related while the rest were for vehicle wrecks, hazardous spills, technical rescues and fire suppression like this brush fire last February in Carlsborg. Sequim Gazette file photo by Matthew Nash

## Fire district 3 considering levy lid lift

By Matthew Nash

Wednesday, February 7, 2018 1:30am | [NEWS](#)

For two consecutive years, Clallam County Fire District 3's call load has risen above 7,000 and thousands more than a few years prior.

In 2017, the Sequim-area had 7,224 emergency calls with about 86-percent, or 6,187 of those Emergency Medical Service-related, or EMS, reports Fire Chief Ben Andrews.

While slightly down from 2016 (7,336 emergency calls), Sequim has seen its response load increase annually since 2008 when it received 5,115 emergency calls.

In a consultant study paid for by the fire district, it revealed that in 2015, 88 percent of the district's calls were for basic and advanced life support calls with about 92 percent of those coming from within the City of Sequim.

The continued higher call load comes at a time when fire officials say the district's revenues will not be sustainable after this year.

"All our revenue is going to respond to emergency calls," Andrews said. "Personnel have no time for training, building inspections or other duties that are just as important to public safety. We also are unable to put money aside for capital needs, like replacing apparatus and equipment, maintaining facilities, or training personnel."

Fire district officials reported last November the district will likely go into deficit spending in the third quarter of 2019 unless other revenues are obtained.

Andrews and other district staff are investigating options for the district's commissioners to vote on and bring to a district-wide vote to consider a levy lid lift for its general levy sometime this year.

In 2004, voters approved the general levy of \$1.50 per \$1,000 on assessed property values but fire district staff said since then, it has gone down to \$1.26. It's one of two property tax levies the district receives a majority of its funding.

If a general levy lid lift does go before voters to bring the rate back to \$1.50, fire officials report it would cost about \$60 more per year to homeowners with a \$250,000 home.

Andrews said the fire district has been limited by state law to increase its tax base by one-percent, which they and other agencies say is not keeping up with inflation.

Additional funds from the levy lid lift would go towards to maintaining emergency service levels, improving staffing where possible, training personnel, and funding some facility and apparatus needs.

"We need to be able to meet the demand for service and have enough funds in reserves to weather any storm that may be ahead of us," Andrews said.

Due to the concern for future finances, fire commissioners turned down a three-year federal grant to add six full-time firefighters to the workforce last September. It would have given the district about \$1.007 million over three years to cover 75 percent of wage and benefit costs in 2018 and 2019 and 35 percent in 2020. However, it would have cost the district about \$1.1 million over three years.

The SAFER, Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, grant would have been the first time the district added to its workforce since 2008.

Fire District 3 has 47 full- and part-time employees.

Along with EMS calls, firefighters and paramedics respond to fire suppression, technical rescue, hazardous material spills, and vehicle wrecks.

“EMS is the service our community relies on most, but we are really an ‘all hazards’ response agency,” Andrews said.

He said the fire district is now directing all its resources into responding to calls with no funding available for new staff, apparatuses or to improve or expand facilities.

In preparation for possible levy lid lift discussions, fire district staff anticipates holding informational meetings and speaking with community groups.

Andrews seeks input via email at [bandrews@ccfd3.org](mailto:bandrews@ccfd3.org) or via mail at “Clallam County Fire District 3 Fire Chief Ben Andrews, 323 N. 5th Avenue, Sequim, Wash. 98382.”

To reach the fire district, call 360-683-4242 or visit <https://ccfd3.org>.

Reach Matthew Nash at [mnash@sequimgazette.com](mailto:mnash@sequimgazette.com).



Officials with Clallam County Fire District 3 are considering a general levy lid lift for voters to consider this year to prevent deficit spending in 2019. Emergency calls to fires like this shed fire last March near Taylor Cutoff Road make up about 14 percent of calls for the fire district along with vehicle wrecks, hazardous spills, and technical rescues. Sequim Gazette file photo by Matthew Nash

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