



MAYOR & COUNCIL MEMORANDUM

February 19, 2025

Subject: Discussion regarding Fire Preparedness and Risk Mitigation
in Tucson (City Wide)

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Issue – At the request of Councilwoman Lee, time has been set aside for discussion regarding water infrastructure for municipal firefighting, fire hydrant testing, and other matters related to Tucson Water’s role in providing sufficient water for anticipated firefighting needs in the City of Tucson. In addition, Tucson Fire will discuss current staffing, firefighting equipment and capabilities in both an urban setting and the wildland urban interface (WUI), and also share advice on how community members can help reduce risks (individually and collectively) to actively work to prevent situations similar to the recent tragic fires in the City of Los Angeles and Los Angeles County. Discussion may also address fireworks safety, response to warming fires, and potential changes to discourage things that can spark fires.

Background Councilwoman Lee’s memorandum dated January 27, 2025, is attached for your reference and information.

Tucson Water Department

Since the creation of the Tucson Water Company by agreement with Mayor & Council in the summer of 1882, one of the principal missions of the community water system is to be available for the community to engage in firefighting activities. Since the rapid expansion of the water system from that time, and the subsequent years after the City of Tucson’s creation of the Tucson Water Department in 1900, the community water system has been designed to meet the challenges of structure fires.

As the system has expanded over the years, the planning for proper fire suppression to handle acute fire scenarios within the community takes place during the water system design process. Tucson Water engineers, in cooperation with Tucson Fire officials, and other fire officials in the region if located outside the city, review and approve construction design plans that take into account the minimum requirements for fire protection in future developments and structures. The elements that are part of that review include, but are not limited to, duration of flow, rate of flow, resiliency and redundancy measures with infrastructure, among other items that meet or exceed standards in the fire protection industry.

Once the water infrastructure is complete for fire protection, the system becomes the responsibility of Tucson Water maintenance teams to ensure the system is managed to meet the needs of an emergency. Tucson Water has nearly 23,000 fire hydrants distributed throughout the community water system, and private structures have thousands of onsite water suppression systems as well. Throughout the course of the year, Tucson Water, as well as support from outside contract services, attend to several thousand hydrants per year. On average, approximately 1,500 hydrants per year have a full system repair or rebuild. Many more thousands per year are accessed to test for operations or used actively when flushing the water system in response to other maintenance activities.

Much of the storage of water to help with support of fire flows and pressures comes in the form a gravity flows from many of Tucson Water's storage reservoirs that are elevated along the local hillsides throughout the region. The largest being the Clearwell reservoir which holds as much as 60 million gallons of storage near downtown.

Fire protection service was a hallmark of the founding of the Tucson Water community water system, and that mission remains in full effect today.

Tucson Fire Department

The Tucson Fire Department was established in 1881 and has continuously protected the City, its residents, visitors, and businesses. Over the past 144 years, the roles and responsibilities of the department have grown along with the City's growth. Tucson Fire now provides response out of 22 fire stations located across the City, with one of those stations essentially being dedicated to 24/7 protection on the Raytheon facility near the Tucson International Airport. We operate our executive and administrative functions out of Fire Central, co-located with Fire Station 1 downtown. Our Logistics Division and Fire Fleet Maintenance are located on the Thomas O. Price Service Center Campus, and we share the Tucson Public Safety Training Academy with Tucson Police on S. Wilmot Road, south of I-10.

Today, the City is protected by 645 commissioned firefighters, all of them certified as Emergency Medical Technicians and 243 are certified as paramedics. Fire-based emergency medical services (EMS) has become the standard across the country in virtually all major and medium-sized cities, and medical responses now account for almost 85% of all incidents. We also have a dedicated professional staff of 53 City employees providing administrative services, EMS training and quality assurance, ambulance billing, Fire Fleet Maintenance, logistics support, fire code inspections, and supporting our well-known TC-3 team. We operate 23 Engine companies, 7 Ladder companies, 2 Quints, 5 Rescue trucks and 17 paramedic ambulances. In calendar year 2024, TFD responded to just under 106,000 individual calls for service, the highest number of responses in the City's history.

In addition to providing fire suppression and emergency medical services in the urban environment, plus local and regional hazardous materials and technical rescue responses, we have established a Wildland Team (Tucson firefighters who are cross-trained and properly certified in wildland firefighting) who not only support operations in the wildland urban interface (WUI) within City limits, but who are also called to respond to wildland fires across Arizona and in other western states, to include a recent deployment in support of the efforts responding to the recent fires in Los Angeles County, California.


City Manager's Office Recommendation – No Action is required at this time. Mayor and Council are asked to discuss and give their comments.

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Financial Considerations – None at this time.

Legal Considerations – None at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Morales.
Assistant City Manager

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Attachment(s): A - Memorandum from Councilwoman Lee dated January 27, 2025