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From: Velasquez, Maria [MVelasquez@sandiego.gov]
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To: Velasquez, Maria
Subject: Brush Management Fire Prevention Tied to Pension Deficit Funding

NEWS RELEASE:

Attachments:

News Release

Union Tribune Brush Removal Article 12/30/07, Interim Report 21, Interim Report 24

LACK OF FUNDS FOR BRUSH MANAGEMENT FIRE PREVENTION TIED TO PENSION DEFICIT FUNDING

San Diego, CA -- Money that could have been spent since the Cedar Fires in 2002 on brush management to prevent the 2007 wild fires was diverted to fund the City's illegal pension debt.

Over the past five years, Mayor Murphy, Mayor Sanders, and the City Council have shifted more than \$1.2 billion to the City's pension in a futile effort to pay for hundreds of millions of dollars in lavish and illegal pension benefits. To provide context, more than 410 City employees have retirements worth more than \$1 million.

In other words, money that could – and should – have been spent on brush management to prevent the 2007 wild fires went instead to pay City Hall insiders' million dollar pensions. In total, the City has shifted \$1.2 billion to the City's pension while its debt has grown to \$6.5 billion.

Worse yet, City officials and their colleagues in the County and State, were put on clear and definite notice that without more diligent brush management, San Diego would be struck by another devastating wild fire. Numerous reports were written and analysis conducted since the Cedar Fires in 2003.

These reports and their clear warning to local officials about the dire need for an improvement brush management program were the focus of a KBS broadcast on its former *Full Focus* new program in June 2007. The KPBS program titled, "Safeguard Your Home From Wildfire," focused on the need for active brush management and questioned whether the City was doing enough to stop the next major wild land fire.

The KPBS program began with a prophetic statement by KPBS journalist Gloria Penner, "We're hearing this could be one of the worst fire seasons in a century." (See KPBS Link is http://www.kpbs.org/tv/full_focus?id=8878)

The program's reporter, Rebecca Tolan, referred to "lots of fire-prone vegetation and surprisingly few city workers to thin it. Some say unless quick action is taken, we're setting ourselves up for a massive fire storm."

The KPBS program reporter noted the City of San Diego has more than 900 lineal miles of canyon rim but only two inspectors to manage brush in those canyons.

KPBS also reported that the City of San Diego, under its own code, was supposed to clear about 595 acres of brush every year, "But this year there's only enough funding for about 80 acres, that leaves a lot of dry, fire-prone brush."

Meanwhile, a *San Diego Union-Tribune* article pointed out, "In 1986, the year after a fire in Normal Heights destroyed 76 homes, San Diego had 11 fire inspectors watching over a city of 972,000. Today, just four inspectors are responsible for a city of 1.3 million, where an increasing number of residents live in homes that border wild land. Mayor Jerry Sanders ... this year suggested eliminating one of the three fire inspectors responsible for identifying brush

violations.”

The KPBS program also pointed out that the City funding for brush management had not increased since the 2003. Sanders told a KPBS reporter, “We think we got a program that works.”

Sanders defended his actions regarding the funding of the brush management program and stated in the *Union-Tribune* story, “Brush management is not a cheap program – \$4 million a year, \$3 million a year, \$2 million a year; that's a lot of money. If you don't have a fire for 15 years, people probably don't see it as money well spent.”

A comprehensive review of the fire study’s conducted by City, County, State and Federal agencies can be found in “City Attorney’s Interim Report No. 21 San Diego 2007 Fires, Preliminary Findings; need for brush management, timely notification of fire danger, and evacuation plan.” A comprehensive review of the growth of the City’s pension debt can also be found in “City Attorney’s Interim Report No. 24: Report to the People of San Diego Regarding the San Diego City Employees’ Retirement System.”

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