

Board approves new countywide fire prevention effort

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Calaveras County has a new countywide fire prevention program and a new fire marshal.

The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 Tuesday to approve a memorandum of understanding with the Calaveras Fire Joint Powers Authority for the county to perform inspections and enforce minimum fire safety standards.

The joint powers authority is composed of all nine fire districts in the county. They agreed a “unified” program should be established under the administration of the county’s building department.

John Parks, a retired senior fire inspector and arson investigator for the city of Palo Alto, has been hired as the county’s fire marshal.

He has 30-plus years in the fire service and 13 of those years in fire prevention, Doug Oliver, the county’s chief building official, told the board upon introducing Parks.

Parks said it is not his intention to be a “heavy-badged fire inspector.” In all of his years of inspecting, he said he’s never shut down a business, but works to put them on a compliance program.

Mike Johnson, chief of the Ebbetts Pass Fire District and president of the joint power authority, said fire prevention has been lacking in the county and establishment of a countywide fire marshal program should “take it to the next level.”

Some of the districts had fire marshals and others didn’t.

Financing the program will come from the permitting side through the collection of fees for all fire prevention services and through case management fees.

“It’s a good thing and it’s a safe thing,” Board Chairman Gary Tofanelli, who added it was a long time coming.

“The county is providing a service to the fire districts that enhances the county services as well as the fire districts’ services,” Oliver said in summarizing the working relationship between the county and the districts, “but we are in a position where we are providing the service so we are taking some direction from them on what we are to do and how we are to do it.”

“We really need to work with the businesses,” Tofanelli said prior to the vote, “because a lot of them have not been inspected...some of them may not have any idea what’s required state wise or code wise for their business.”

He added, “It could be a big shock added on to a lot of things that are going on right now in this county as far as costs (such as) water and sewer, integrated waste increases.”

Oliver said an informational letter will be sent to all of the county’s businesses outlining the inspection process.