2025

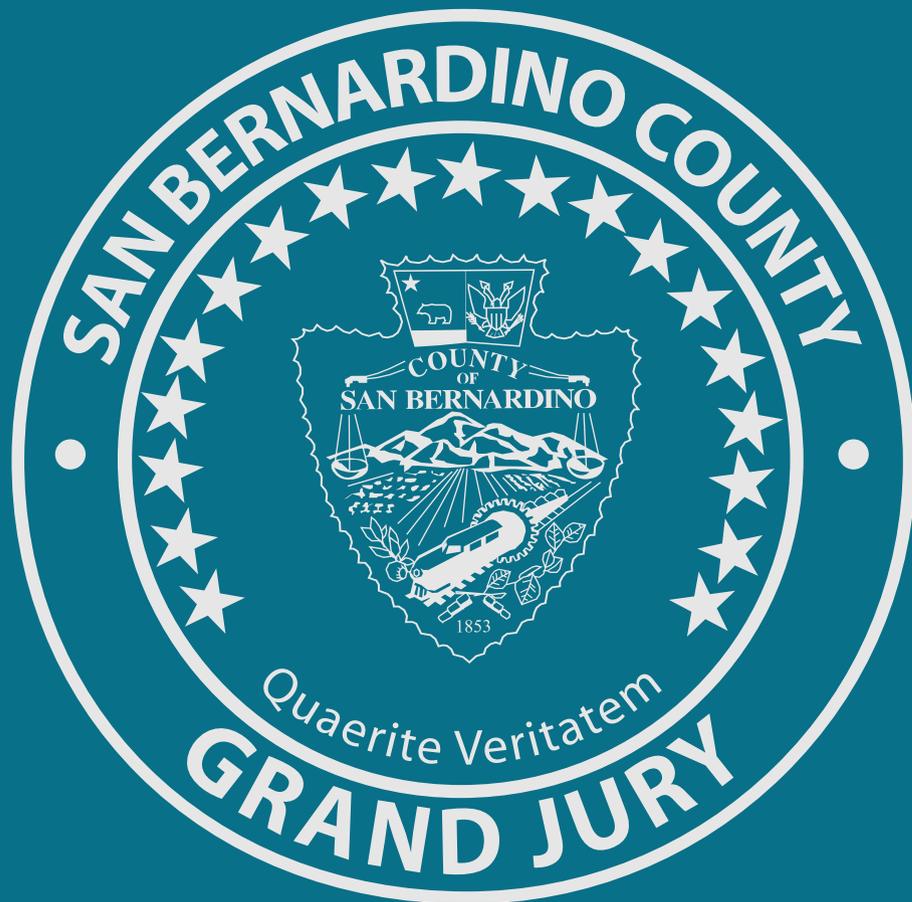# FINAL REPORT

San Bernardino County

Quaerite Veritatem

GRAND JURY

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
CIVIL GRAND JURY

December 12, 2025

Honorable Lisa Rogan, Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California, County of San Bernardino
247 West Third Street, 11th Floor
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0302

Dear Honorable Judge Rogan,

It has been my honor to serve as the Foreperson for the 2025 Civil Grand Jury. I would like to thank the jurors that accepted and embraced the Officer roles of The Foreperson Pro Tem, The Seargent at Arms, The Seargent at Arms Pro Tem, and two Secretaries. Amongst our Jurors there are several Military Veterans, including three that served in the Vietnam War. From our very first official meeting together, the Grand Jury made the decision to conduct every General Meeting in person at our beautiful state-of-the-art office that is provided for us by the County. The Grand Jury came from as far East as Yucaipa, as far West as Chino Hills, and as far North as Barstow.

In the month of May, sadly the Grand Jury suffered the loss of one of our own. Juror Edward Jabo. Ed was our most seasoned juror and was serving his seventh term on the Grand Jury this year. Many of us served on multiple juries with Ed and had become friends. He had a wealth of knowledge and experience and was a kind soul who loved being part of what the Grand Jury represented. He will truly be missed. May he rest in peace.

I would like to thank all the County Officials who took time out from their extremely busy work schedules to meet and greet the Grand Jury in person. I would like to extend additional gratitude to Judge Rogan and Court CEO Anabel Romero for offering their support and appreciation for what the Grand Jury does. On behalf of the Grand Jury, I'm here to say your words were inspiring and very motivating to us as Jurors.

Our Legal Advisor Deputy District Attorney Mary Ashley was invaluable to the Grand Jury from the first day we came together as a Grand Jury until our last day together. She always made herself available day or night for questions, answers, and guidance. Always approachable, professional, patient and kind. Having worked with Mary for the last three years may make me biased, but I believe our County has the very best Legal Advisor in the State of California.

I would like to thank and recognize our Grand Jury Coordinator Dulce Zuniga who just completed her first full year of service in her position. With the support of Chief Administrator Officer Gina Mendoza, Court Services Manager Erika Villarreal, and Mary Ashley, Dulce worked quickly, demonstrating strong time management, focus and adaptability to complete tasks effectively. She will truly be an asset for years to come.

In conclusion, I would like to thank every member of this year's Grand Jury for their dedication, commitment, and passion. Jurors put in numerous hours of training, research, interviews, documentation, off-site visits, writing, and editing to make a positive impact on County, City, and special district government. On behalf of the Grand Jury, I am pleased to present the Court, the Board of Supervisors and the citizens of San Bernardino County the Final Report with its findings and recommendations.

Sincerely,

David Ceballos
2025 San Bernardino Civil Grand Jury Foreperson

In Memory of…

Edward "Ed" Jabo

Ed was a well-educated mechanical engineer, who traveled the world. He had a good sense of humor and was dedicated to his family, friends and faith.

Ed was a seven-year veteran of the San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury.

We'll remember you fondly, you see,
Our friend, our colleague, you'll always be.
We'll miss your smile and your gentle grace,
And cherish the memories you leave in this place.

"We thank you for your service"

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
2025 CIVIL GRAND JURY

OFFICERS:

DAVID CEBALLOS	*	FOREMAN
THOMAS GAFNEY	*	FOREMAN PRO TEM
INGA TALBERT	*	SECRETARY
ROSALIND JONES	*	SECRETARY
EDWARD BROWN JR	*	SERGEAT-AT-ARMS
MELINDA FERGUSON	*	SERGEANT-AT-ARMS PRO TEM

MEMBERS:

ULYSSES ALERT JR	*	NONIE KLEINHANS
WILLIAM ARNETT JR	*	BRUCE MCGUIRE
WILLIAM CHAPMAN	*	LAURIE MOONEY
JAMES GOODRICH JR	*	JAMES SANDLES
RONALD HODGES	*	DAMEDA SCOTT
EDWARD JABO	*	DAVID VAN BUREN
DONNA KENNEY-CASH	*	JAMES ZIMMERMANN JR

ADMINISTRATION:

PRESIDING JUDGE	*	LISA M. ROGAN
LEGAL ADVISOR	*	MARY ASHLEY, DDA
GRAND JURY COORDINATOR	*	DULCE ZUNIGA
AUTOMATED SYSTEM ANALYST	*	BRIAN PARCUTELA
GRAPHIC DESIGNER	*	PATRICIA LIN
PRINTING SERVICES	*	MIRANDA GUERCY

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
2025 CIVIL GRAND JURY

Back Row (left to right): William Arnett Jr., William Chapman, Ronald Hodges, David Van Buren, Thomas Gafney

Middle Row (left to right): Nonie Kleinhans, James Goodrich Jr., Laurie Mooney, James Zimmermann Jr., Edward Brown Jr., Bruce McGuire

Front Row (left to right): Donna Kenney-Cash, James Sandles, Ulysses Albert Jr., Dameda Scott, David Ceballos, Inga Talbert, Rosalind Jones

Not Pictured: Melinda Ferguson, Edward Jabo

Honorable
Lisa M. Rogan

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SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY
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Established April 26, 1853

Named in 1810 by Francisco Dumetz

20,105 Square Miles

2020 Population was 2,181,654

24 Cities

5 Native American Reservations

7 National Forests And Parks

35 Official Wildness Areas

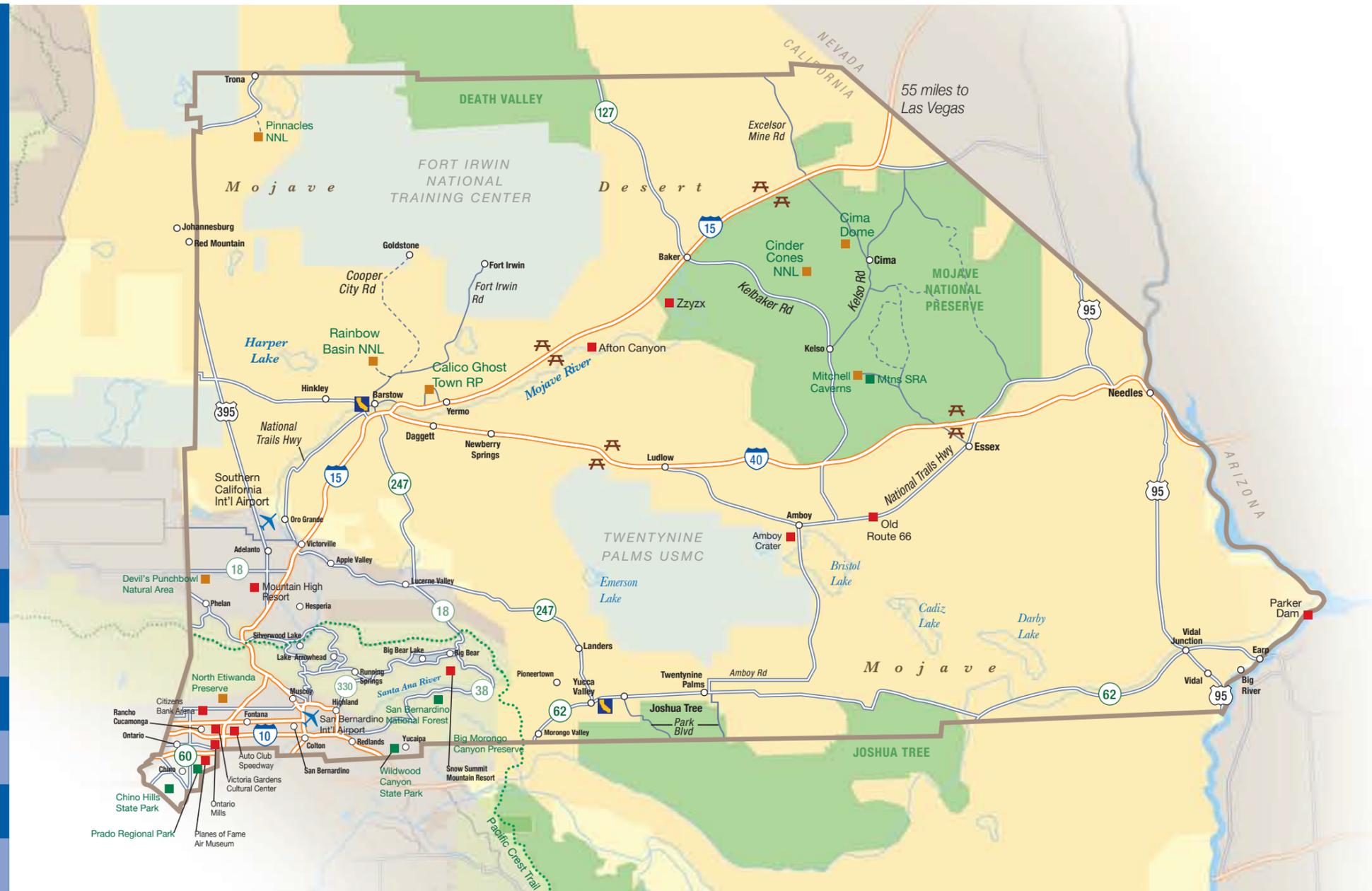**8684 Acres of County Regional Parks**

12 Airports (2 International)

12 Colleges and Universities

33 School Districts

50 Public Libraries

34 Museums

2500 miles of roads and 300 bridges

1 President Lyndon B Johnson at the age of 17 (1925) worked as an elevator operator in the San Bernardino's Plat Building

2 Home of the first McDonald's restaurant in 1940 at 1398 North E Street

3 The Rolling Stones first US concert tour started in San Bernardino on June 5, 1964 at The Swing Auditorium

4 The City of Colton's first Marshall (1887-1889) was Virgil Earp, the older brother of Wyatt and Morgan Earp

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RESPONSE AND ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

The 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury is an independent group of 19 citizens appointed by the court who study the operations of the county government, cities, special districts, and other local government agencies.

SUMMARY

The 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury examined the responses to the Final Report published by the 2024 Civil Grand Jury. This article follows up on the responses to that Grand Jury's three reports and their recommendations. Those reports were:

- *When is a Pothole a Pothole?*
  Looking at Potholes in the City of Upland

- *Snowmageddon 2023:*
  Disaster Preparedness and Response

- *Mistaken Identity*
  Arrested and Booked for Another's Crime

THE LAW

Penal Codes §933(c) and §933.05(b):

Responses §933(c)

(c) No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the

governing body, and every elected county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.

§933.05(b)
(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

(1) The respondent agrees with the finding.

(2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.

(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.

(3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

METHODOLOGY

The 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury reviewed the responses to the three reports published in 2024 for compliance with the law.

RESULTS

After reviewing the responses, the 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury found the responses were timely and compliant with the law. We would like to commend all the responding agencies for their compliance and comprehensive consideration of the recommendations.

The full record of the responses can be found here:

Responses-to-2024-Final-Report.pdf (sbcounty.gov)

https://wp.sbcounty.gov/grandjury/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/Responses-to-2024-Final-Report.pdf

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COMPLAINTS

The San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury receives numerous citizen complaints throughout the year. The 2025 Grand Jury received a total of 42 complaints. Every complaint is carefully reviewed by the Grand Jury for issues regarding appropriate jurisdiction and importance of the complaint topic.

After completion of the initial review of a citizen complaint, the Grand Jury may approve the complaint and assign it to an appropriate committee. The committee will conduct an investigation with appropriate oversight by the full Grand Jury. A written report of the committee's findings and recommendations regarding a specific complaint may or may not be included in the year-end Grand Jury's Final Report.

The process of submitting a citizen complaint is to obtain a Confidential Citizen Complaint form from either the Grand Jury's website or by calling the Grand Jury's office at (909) 382-3971. The website is http://wp.sbcounty.gov/grandjury/file-a-complaint/. Once the complaint form has been completed and signed, it can be returned to the Grand Jury's office for processing. Although the Grand Jury usually does not investigate anonymous complaints, it may conduct an investigation depending on the issue.

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The City of San Bernardino's Complaint Process:

A Failure to Communicate

Photo #1 (on Title Page) The statue in front of the Feldheym Library, the main library in San Bernardino. This is where the city council meets. (courtesy of the 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury)

Photo #2 Entrance to the Feldheym Library
(courtesy of the 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury)

SUMMARY

The 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury (GJ) reviewed concerns that the City of San Bernardino failed to respond to complaints lodged by citizens about city services and conditions. The Grand Jury began an investigation into the city's complaint system.

The Grand Jury found that:

- The City of San Bernardino has various methods which enable residents to lodge complaints about city services.
- The city records most complaints received, but these complaints are not centralized into one single database; they are received and dispersed among different departments depending on the nature of each complaint.
- Because not every complaint received goes to a centralized log location, neither the city nor the complainant can always track a complaint's progress through the city system.
- Once a resident lodges a complaint, the city often fails to communicate further with the complainant: it does not always acknowledge receipt of the complaint; it does not provide updates about the complaint's progress through the city system; it does not inform the complainant about any resolution reached; it does not inform the resident of the reason for delays in completing a remedy, if applicable.
- The City of San Bernardino's failure to communicate leaves residents frustrated and with little confidence in the city's ability to respond to citizen concerns.

This report suggests ways in which the City of San Bernardino can improve its complaint process and thus help gain its residents' confidence in the city's ability to provide better service.

BACKGROUND

When referring to the beginnings of San Bernardino, one does not need to look any farther than the seal of the city (See below). In the center of the seal are

four windows that depict different periods of time and major contributions to the creation of the city.

The first scene is a view of the mountains. These mountains represent the many nations of Indigenous Peoples who were in the area first. Their history is important to the culture of the San Bernardino area historically and still today.

The second picture is of covered wagons. It gives recognition to the Mormon immigrants who created a settlement here in the mid-1800s. They were from the Salt Lake City area and led by Captain Jefferson Hunt (San Bernardino.gov); it could also represent the settlers and prospectors who came to the San Bernardino Mountains searching for gold in the 1860s.

The third scene is a train. It represents the railroad industry and its importance to the continued growth of the area. These locomotives came into the area around 1886 and were partially responsible for the boom of growth in the valley.

The last scene depicts an orange grove – an important market to Southern California especially to the San Bernardino area, which was also known as the Orange Empire during the early 1900s.

The date at the bottom of the seal is contested by some people; however, many think that 1810 represents the date that the area was given its name. Several people had gathered to celebrate the San Bernardine de Sienna feast day on May 20, 1810. They created a settlement and named it after the festivities – San Bernardino. (San Bernardino.gov)

Today the City of San Bernardino has grown to approximately 62 square miles with a population of 225,000. (Census.gov 2024) The ethnicity of the area is mostly Latino/Hispanic, followed by White, Black, Asian, and other. The median value of a home is $384,900 and the average income per household is $63,000. Seventy-four percent of the residents in the area have a high school diploma. (Census.gov 2024). The largest employers for the residents of the city of San Bernardino are Amazon, Burlington, California State University - San Bernardino, Dignity Health Care, San Bernardino Unified School District, San Bernardino County Sheriff and Stater Brothers Markets. (Labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov)

The City of San Bernardino is governed by a Council-Manager form of government. The city council members are elected and the city manager, who handles the everyday operations, is appointed by the council members. The city is divided into areas known as wards. There are seven wards (see Glossary and appendix). Each ward is represented by a city council member. These members are voted into office by residents in the ward in which they reside. The council members are led by the mayor, who is elected by a majority of all the voters in San Bernardino.

In 1977, the City of San Bernardino was honored with the award of being an "All American City" by the National Civic League. How does a city get this prestigious award?

> "The…award honors communities that are reinventing how they come together to make decisions and solve problems."
> (https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/america-city-award/past-winners/)

It is interesting to note that "solving problems", as mentioned above, is exactly why the Civil Grand Jury is writing this report. Some residents feel that the city has an inefficient response to complaints and problems that are lodged with the city.

The Civil Grand Jury's purpose is to improve local government agencies, so that they better serve their constituents. The Grand Jury can do little to improve a city's political, economic, or social divides, but it can recommend ways to improve its operations and government inefficiency. Improving the City of San Bernardino's complaint system would go a long way towards this goal.

METHODOLOGY

The 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury read articles about streetlights in an area of San Bernardino where it took the city about two years to solve the problem of darkness in that neighborhood. The GJ also read minutes in city council meetings where citizens were repeatedly asking when the computers in the city libraries would be working again. Based on this article and these minutes, the GJ decided to investigate San Bernardino City's complaint process.

The 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury used several methods to investigate the citizen complaint process of the City of San Bernardino:

- The GJ reviewed multiple documents, websites and articles including the City of San Bernardino (SBC) website.

- The GJ researched the background of the SBC and its method of government.

- The GJ read the new city charter.

- The GJ observed multiple San Bernardino City Council (SBCC) meetings, virtually and in person and read the minutes of several meetings.

- The GJ interviewed residents of San Bernardino about complaints made.

- The GJ interviewed some officials and staff of the City of San Bernardino.

- The GJ observed the computers at the four city libraries in the City of San Bernardino.

- The GJ observed the new solar lights in some areas of SBC.

The Grand Jury wrote the following report after all these means of investigation.

DISCUSSION

San Bernardino's Complaint Process

San Bernardino is a large city. It has an area of more than 62 square miles and a population of about 225,000. It has approximately 63,000 households, with an average of more than three people per household. (US Census, 2024)

It has a lot of big-city municipal problems, including crime and blight. Residents complain about conditions and services, and the city provides options for lodging these:

- Using the *GOSBCity* cellphone application (see glossary). The app is free and easy to download.

- Filling out a complaint form online.

- Calling the service center.

- Speaking personally with a ward representative (a city council member), the mayor, the city clerk or the city manager.

- Attending a city council meeting and participating in the public speaking section of the meeting.

- Going in person to the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) desk, also referred to as the Call Center. (see Glossary)

The city receives approximately 35,000 external complaints per year. Communication alone won't stem the flood of complaints, and it won't solve every problem, but it may help the residents feel that the city's leaders are listening.

San Bernardino provides several methods for residents to lodge complaints about city services. What it doesn't provide is effective communication with resident complainants after they file complaints. The city doesn't always acknowledge receiving complaints. It doesn't provide updates about complaints' progress through the system. It doesn't provide estimates about the time needed to remedy the condition. It doesn't notify residents when the remedy is completed. Evidence shows that some citizens feel unheard, frustrated, dissatisfied with their government

and concerned that San Bernardino is a city which does not respond to complaints in a timely manner.

Code Enforcement Complaints

Most complaints in San Bernardino involve city code violations. The city's Code Enforcement Division has a vision statement:

> To build trust and improve the quality of life on a daily basis for the residents of the City of San Bernardino through timely responses, visible reduction in blight and collaborative justice.
>
> (sanbernardino.gov/231/code-enforcement-division)

The city lists typical code violations on its website and offers ways to submit a complaint. There are several categories which include the following:

- Cars/Trucks

- Fences

- Garage/Yard Sales

- Garbage, Trash, and Bulky Item Pick-ups

- Illegal Dumping

- Graffiti

- Streets or Alley-Ways

- Unlawful Property Nuisances

- Unsightly or Deteriorating Structures

- Weeds

- Yard Areas

- Other City Neighborhood Services

There are multiple ways to report a code violation. Code enforcement cases can begin in several different ways. Typically, a complaint is called into the Code Enforcement Division by a resident. (https://www.sanbernardino.gov/231/Code-Enforcement-Division)

Another way that a grievance can be reported is online. The program is easy to use and directs the user through a series of questions. Alternatively, an email can be sent to: cityofsbcodeenf@sbcity.org.

Regardless of which path is chosen to file a complaint, callers leave their name and other information so that they can be contacted in the future, or they may remain anonymous if they so choose. Case progression can vary depending upon the nature of the violation or several other variables. The following is a general outline of how case progression is supposed to occur according to the San Bernardino City Website:

- A complaint is received by the Call Center or the Code Enforcement Division.

- The property owners who are in violation are then notified about the violation(s) and given a reasonable time period in which to correct the violation(s).

For the Code Enforcement Division, the complaint system seems straightforward. However, the department offers no method for notifying the complainant about the complaint's progress through its system. Other departments in the city suffer from the same notification deficiency.

Code Enforcement complaints/requests are supposed to be input into CRMS, but Code Enforcement uses a separate system for service requests.

Other Departments' Complaint Systems

Some city departments keep a log of the service requests/complaints that they either received through Customer Relationship Management System or received directly. Most departments use their own spreadsheets. They may also use CRMS, but consistency is a problem, as the progress and/or resolution of the complaint may not always be sent to CRMS.

Methods to File a Complaint

There are many ways to file a complaint (also known as a service request) in the City of San Bernardino:

- ***GOSBCity* Application**

  A complaint may be made on a cellphone app called *GoSBCity*. Not only is the app free, but it is also easy to download onto a cell phone. Maneuvering through the program is simple. The app works by a user finding the type of complaint on a drop-down menu. The plan is that all the information given, including a photo, if desired, is forwarded to the appropriate department that will assess the problem, fix it and then notify the complainant when the problem has been corrected. (https://www.sanbernardino.gov/1610/Report-an-Issue)

- **Call Center**

 For people who prefer to speak to a person, residents can telephone into a call center. The resident speaks to a representative who takes the information from them over the phone. The representative gives a reference number, takes the person's name (or that person can choose to be anonymous), and inputs the problem into the system. The plan is that the problem is routed to the appropriate department which assesses the situation, fixes it and closes the case. Again, the person who files the complaint is supposed to be notified when the problem is completed. If the complaint has not been resolved within a few weeks or if the person has not heard back from the call center, it is the resident's responsibility to call back and find out the status using their reference number.
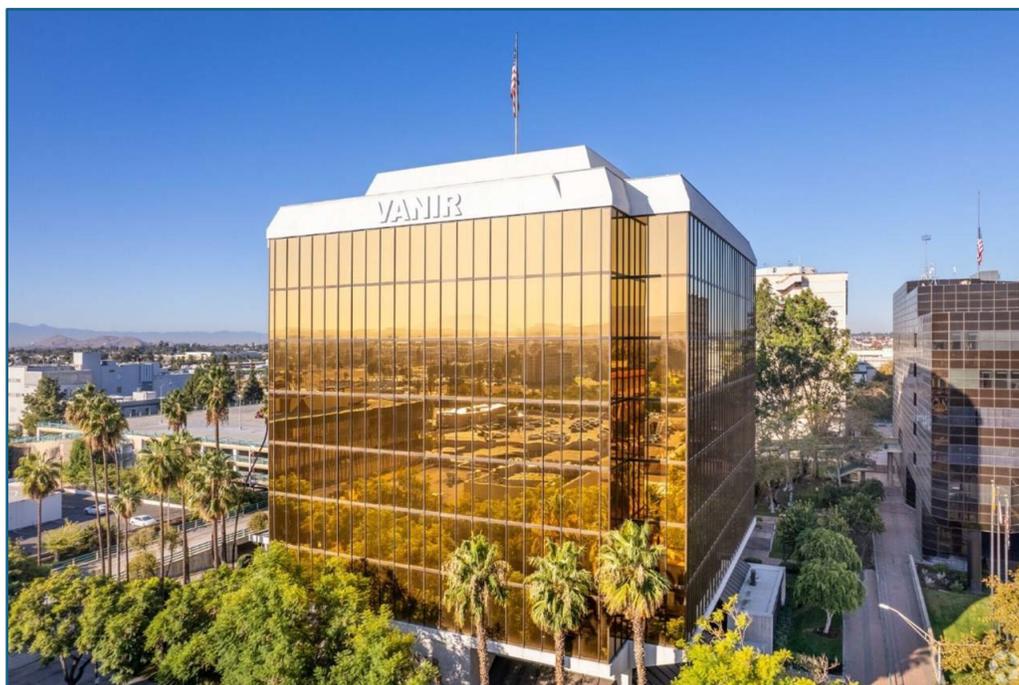

Photo # 3: The Vanir Building in San Bernardino

This building houses the call center and its employees. The city manager's office is also in this building.

(https://www.google.com/search?q=venir+building%2C+san+bernardino%2C+images&rlz=1C1GCEB_enUS1144US1144)

- **SB Access Online/Virtual City Hall**

A resident may choose to go online using a computer and type in sbcity.org/sb to access the website. There are easy instructions on how to file a service complaint. The complainant types in the general reason for the problem. There are drop-down menus to assist the resident throughout the process. And like the above methods, the plan is for the city to investigate and remedy the problem. (https://www.sanbernardino.gov/1011/SB-Access-Online-Virtual-City-Hall)

- **Go In Person**

A resident may also visit Vanir Towers (see Appendix) to lodge a complaint. The representative will ask for all the information. The plan is that it will be logged into the CRM system and forwarded directly through the system to the correct department which will assess and correct the problem.

All four ways mentioned above will put the claim into the CRMS. Approximately 50,000 total claims are lodged each year. Unfortunately, with so many numbers, a claim can get lost or left unresolved. Additionally, there are other ways to lodge a complaint which are less efficient. Other ways mentioned to lodge a complaint are offered on the SBC website and are explained below.

- **Contact the City Manager**

If a person contacts the city manager first, the city's plan is that their office will forward the call directly to the call center. In case a complaint is not resolved, the city manager's office may contact the Call Center and identify the status of the claim in the same way a complainant can get the same information. However, this investigation through the city manager's office may take some time. The city manager's office contact information can be found online under the San Bernardino Government Directory. (https://www.sanbernardino.gov/Directory.aspx?did=74)

- **Contact a Council Member**

San Bernardino is organized into seven wards. Each ward is run by a council member who has been voted into office by the constituents within that ward. If a resident is having problems getting a complaint resolved, the website gives the means for constituents to contact their city council members, whose representatives might be able to expedite the complaint through the call center. The information is found in the San Bernardino Government Directory online. (https://www.sanbernardino.gov/directory.aspx)

- **Contact the Mayor**

San Bernardino is run by seven elected city council members and is headed by a mayor and staff. The San Bernardino website (https://www.sanbernardino.gov/Directory.aspx?did=42) advises complainants

how to contact the mayor directly. The plan is that the mayor and/or staff will then forward it to the appropriate destination.

- **Speak at a City Council Meeting**

City council meetings start for the public at 5:00 pm at the Feldheym Library on the first and third Wednesdays of each month. Each speaker is allotted three minutes to present their case (one and one-half minutes if there are too many speakers). The city's procedure requests that a speaker sign in providing contact information on a card. Hopefully the residents will be contacted at the meeting; or their card is given to the Call Center to begin an official log of the issue spoken about at the meeting. Below is an example of the speaker card provided at the San Bernardino City Council Meetings:

**MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
SPEAKER REQUEST CARD**

Name: _____

Are you a City of San Bernardino resident?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Are you a City of San Bernardino Business Owner?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Are you a City of San Bernardino Group or
Organization?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Is your comment regarding an Agenda Item?

☐ Yes, Agenda Item No.: _____

☐ No. Subject: _____

Position on Agenda Item/Subject:

In Favor: ☐   In Opposition: ☐   No Position: ☐

Address: (Optional)

_____

_____

_____

Phone Number: _____

Date: _____

While there is no formalized complaint response process, often residents will request to speak at a city council meeting. They must complete an information card with their name and contact information prior to speaking. These cards are collected by staff. When the speaker makes a complaint, staff are supposed to prepare a list with the contact information for possible input to the CRMS. Evidence shows this is often not happening, as many

complainants are not notified after the meeting. A speaker sign-in list may be helpful to contact the speaker.

On the San Bernardino City website, the city urges complainants to:

- Write down the reference number so that it can be used to find that complaint later.
- Realize that there are often multiple calls on the same complaint. If that is the case, then the work may be completed, but only the first complainant may get an update on the progress of the issue.
- Know that contacting the department directly will not get the order done sooner. It is important to go through the Customer Relationship Management System if possible.

Although numerous methods are available, the website encourages residents to register complaints through two primary methods, the mobile *GOSBCity* app or the online site. No matter which method the resident uses, the GJ found evidence that the city's process remains ineffective.

The Neighborhood Customer Services Operations Center or the "Call Center" (see Glossary)

In the Neighborhood Customer Services Operations Center, the complaint, reported via *GOSBCity* App or an e-mail online, is registered by a Customer Service Representative (CSR). This Call Center in the Vanir Building, established in 2008, employs four customer service representatives. The CSRs also assist with city mail

operations, as well as provide administrative support for the Neighborhood Association Council, a non-profit organization which operates in the same building.

The city manager's office is also located in the Vanir Building. The city manager's staff is responsible for overseeing the Call Center. The data system into which the CSRs input the complaints is called the Customer Relationship Management System, or CRM System (CRMS). A representative receives requests from residents and internal sources and inputs them into the system. Internal sources also lodge complaints (internal sources are other city staff and departments). The template has a field titled, "message to customer" to send a response, if desired. This response can be typed freestyle or pulled from a drop-down menu.

Photo #4: An example of the CRMS input screen

External Requests: City Process

When the CSR receives the service request or complaint, the representative inputs the details into the system. Residents (external requests) may remain anonymous if they choose or may share their contact information. Residents are encouraged to submit a photograph of the issue.

Once the data is entered, the system automatically delivers it to the appropriate department. The exceptions are complaints about homeless encampments and illegal dumping. In those cases, the CSRs sort them out before sending them to the correct department because some will be on city property and some will be on private property. The system will then generate an email to the complainant that their request has been received. Although this seems satisfactory, the problem is there is no way to notify all the residents who complained about that issue. The complaints are not bundled, so only the first person complaining about a certain item is notified that the complaint is received. The other residents receive a "this has been closed" notification even though the issue may not be closed. This is a problem because residents are puzzled when they receive a "this has been closed" notice, yet the issue has not been resolved.

The city also has no policy to respond to the complainant if there is no email provided. The system does generate a service request number, and the caller may be able to follow up on their request with that number. If the complainants have not received an update about progress, they should contact the city again to follow up.

Code Enforcement has its own logging system which is linked to the CRM complaint system. This may be problematic because some information may not be transferred to CRM system.

Evidence shows that the Code Enforcement Division has twenty-one field employees and five employees to handle paperwork in the office. Twenty-six employees would be sufficient if the operational crews were issued laptops or tablets in the field to record progress electronically. If these could be linked to the CRM system, then progress could be monitored in real time.

There were approximately 33,000 service requests/complaints from residents which were input into the CRMS in 2024. These are the external complaints (see Glossary). If you include the internal complaints (see Glossary), the total was over 50,000 complaints.

Internal or Transferred Requests: The City System

Internal, or transferred requests, are requests that are transferred from one department to another department within the city. When the city manager's office receives a service request/complaint directly, they are supposed to send the information to the Call Center for input into the CRMS. Evidence shows that this is not happening consistently.

When the mayor's office receives a service request directly, some of the staff submits the information to a special internal email address, "MCCupdates" (see Glossary), which is supposed to be monitored by staff in the city manager's office for input into the CRMS. Only a few staff members are still using MCCupdates email. The problem with using this email is that the complaint may never be entered into the CRMS. Alternatively, the staff could enter it into the CRMS log directly.

When a city department (such as Code Enforcement or Public Works) receives a service request directly, staff are supposed to transfer the call to the Call Center for input into CRMS (see Appendix). (CRMS, courtesy of City San Bernardino)

There were approximately 20,000 internal complaints/service requests in 2024. These may be attributed to Information Technology (IT) issues; facilities or building maintenance issues or other city staff complaints. Even though these complaints are internal (within the city), it would be helpful if all of these were also

logged into the CRMS because there would be one central database where all complaints are logged. Evidence shows this is not always happening.

Another problem with the city's current complaint system is when a duplicate complaint is received through the CRMS, the second and subsequent complaints are deleted, with the notation "case closed" or "duplicate complaint". Only the first complainant receives the status email, if at all. It would be less confusing and frustrating to the residents, if all duplicate complaints were "bundled", so that every complainant would receive proper notification.

A city official compiles the CRMS log or delegates the duty to the Call Center. Generally, all calls expressing dissatisfaction with results are transferred to the city manager's office. These complaints are not logged or monitored.

Departmental open/closed reports are generated weekly and sent to each department director and to individual city council members. This report includes:

- How many days has the request been open
- The status of the complaint
- To whom it was assigned
- The expected completion date

Long-term projects are expected to be followed up routinely every 90 days. However, evidence shows that this is not the case.

Department Actions after Complaints are Received

The complaint is sent to the department selected by the CSRs or the CRMS. The representative will sometimes call the receiving department ahead of time if the

complaint is time-sensitive or a matter of safety, for example, a sewage complaint or a fallen tree. The department will give that complaint a Priority One designation.

One problem is that each city department has its own system for receiving and processing complaints. Since there are nine departments, the process for notifying complainants is inconsistent. This makes it difficult for city staff to monitor whether all complaints are being addressed. This can be confusing to staff and residents and may cause frustration.

A more efficient method would be that each department send every complaint to the one centralized complaint center. A single log, with tracking numbers, means less confusion and more efficiency as everything would be in one place and can be followed, monitored and hopefully resolved.

Problems with San Bernardino's Complaint Process

The Grand Jury obtained evidence that speakers expressing complaints at city council meetings are inconsistently contacted by staff after speaking. Some speakers have not been contacted regarding concerns, even though the same complaint may have been expressed for months or years at multiple meetings. Some complainants believe that their concerns fall on deaf ears.

Evidence shows that a study concerning the number of representatives at the Call Center may be helpful to determine if more employees are needed. There is no indication that a study has been done about the workflow by each CSR to determine timeliness or efficiency regarding complaint volume and disposition. A study could determine if CSRs should also be handling the citywide mail and providing administrative support to the Neighborhood Association Council (a non-profit which meets in the same building).

The city manager/directors/department heads' meetings have been held each year in December to inquire as to open service requests/complaints/projects. However, there was no such meeting in 2024. The evidence shows that SBC has gone through multiple city managers in the last few years. (San Bernardino City Website, minutes of City Council meetings) This lack of stability at the top of the city government hinders the city from being efficient, consistent and stable. Relationships are broken, and work is interrupted frequently by a high turnover of city managers.

San Bernardino would benefit from a procedure manual describing how to handle complaints. Employee turnover is high in the city and there are unfilled positions, so a formal written manual would help employees understand the steps for handling complaints or service requests. A procedure manual that provides the process for handling complaints should be written so that all complaints can be tracked to determine what procedures have been taken. Additionally, since there is turnover within departments and there is not always communication between departing and new employees, the new employees would have a resource to enable them to handle in-process complaints.

Changes Needed

The residents of San Bernardino are not the only ones frustrated with the city's complaint process. Evidence shows that there are needed changes to the complaint process, including:

- Changing the follow-up process to ensure that directors of different departments are responsive if there is a lack of job completion in a timely manner.

- Ensuring prompt notification with the complainant about the complaint's status every ten working days according to their procedures.
- Enhancing technology for an alert system for service requests that are still open after 30 days.
- Merging duplicate complaints rather than eliminating or "closing" them.
- Providing field staff with laptop computers with wi-fi so they may upload a photo when they complete a job.

Lack of Communication

All complaints, no matter how received, are supposed to be entered into the CRMS. The CRMS is supposed to represent the city's log of the initial complaint received on an issue. This works if the complaint is initially received in the app, online, walk-in or by phone call to the Neighborhood Service Center. It also works if the complaint is received by other methods such as direct phone calls to the individual department, city council and other staff but ONLY if that department transfers the complaint to the CRMS. Evidence shows this is not always happening.

While it has been indicated that there is supposed to be follow-up with complainants regarding their complaints via e-mail, evidence shows that in multiple cases there has been no such follow-up. Additionally, in the case of the computers at the library, the city failed to explain to residents the actions being taken to resolve the problem. This lack of transparency is causing frustration among some residents of SBC.

Improving the Incoming Complaint Process

The following are examples of the suggested changes that should be incorporated into the complaint process in the City of San Bernardino:

- Complaints should go into one centralized data system and nowhere else, so that there is one complete log of every complaint coming into the city.

- All complainants should to be notified that the complaint has been received with an updated status of the complaint and assigned a reference number for verification.

- There should be no limit on how many duplicate complaints have been filed. Duplicate complaints should be bundled and logged into the CRM system and given a reference number. Every citizen who lodges concerns about that issue should be notified.

Solutions

In the City of San Bernardino, some complaints go unanswered or unresolved. This can be frustrating, especially for the residents who file the complaints. People may become angered by the city's seeming lack of response. Occasionally, they speak out at city council meetings because they are dissatisfied with the complaint response system that is now in place.

This section of the report discusses ways that the city can improve its complaint system to provide transparency to its residents.

In general, it is intended that most complaints take about two weeks to resolve. However, regarding long-term complaints, this is not always the case. For example, the computers in the four San Bernardino libraries (Feldheym, Lowe, Ingraham, and

Villaseñor) took over a year to repair. Observations have shown that most of the computers are now operational at the Feldheym Library. However, the other three city libraries do not have working computers at the time of this report. The community was not only without public computer services, but also no information was given to the public regarding the reason for the computers being down, nor did the city ever specify the time required to repair them. The public had to find other means for their computer needs without the support of the city and without knowing what was happening. There was a lack of openness with the public.
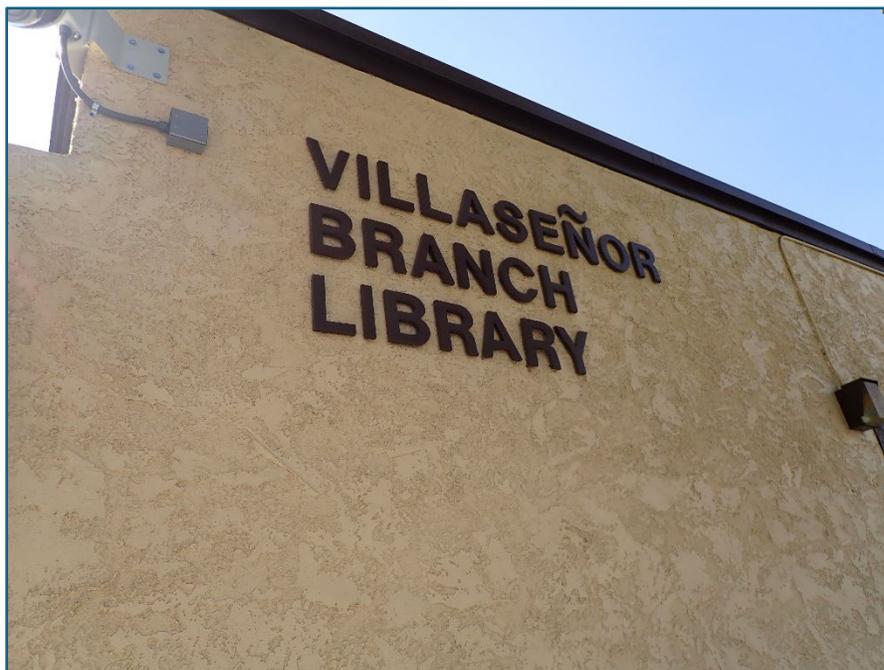

Photo # 5 Paul Villaseñor Branch Library in San Bernardino
(Courtesy of the 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury.)

Howard M. Rowe Branch Library in the City of San Bernardino
Photo # 6 (Courtesy of the 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury)

Photo # 7 Dorothy Inghram Branch Library in San Bernardino
(Courtesy of the 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury.)

Evidence shows the complaint system in the City of San Bernardino failed the community by having non-working streetlights in several areas. This problem took over two years to resolve and the work is still not completed at the time of writing this report. People had to call in several times about the unsafe situation of not having streetlights in their neighborhood. Many streetlights in the downtown area are still out, and the residents are at a loss as to the reason at the time of writing this report. The complainants were not made aware of what the problem was.

The reason the streetlights were not working was due to theft of the copper wiring. The city had to find a way to repair the lights without the expensive wiring.

It took two years, but San Bernardino opted for solar lights which provided the area with light at night. Unfortunately, the solar panels were the next items to be stolen. However, during this entire situation, people were not informed. We commend the city's willingness to remedy the situation. However, people need to be informed.

Photo # 8: A streetlight in SBC that uses solar power.
SolarLight (https://www.google.com)

Another issue that concerns some of the residents of San Bernardino is a piece of land on Palm Avenue that has been an eyesore in the community for years. It is known as Oxbow (See Glossary). People have often requested that this area be cleaned up to make way for a new building, but nothing has been done. Evidence shows that residents have not been given any updated information as to where the large amount of concrete debris came from nor when it will be cleaned up. No information is being given by the City of San Bernardino about this site. At a recent city council meeting in September 2025, one city council member asked that Oxbow

be brought up in sixty days. The city council voted down the proposal. (City Council Meeting minutes)

Photo # 9: The oxbow pile of debris in the City of San Bernardino
(https://www.sbsun.com/2021/04/08/san-bernardino-sets-date-to-begin-clearing-oxbow-site-of-broken-concrete/)

The grand jury hopes that the city will want to help make the residents' lives better. Helping residents solve their complaints quickly and thoroughly to avoid any further stress should be a priority.

What can San Bernardino do now to rectify some of these problems? There exists an adage that says, "Where there is a will, there is a way." Here are a few ways that the grand jury would encourage the City of San Bernardino in the complaint process:

- **Shorten the timeline for the complaints to be resolved**.

    One year, two years or undetermined (as in the case of Oxbow) is too long for a resident to receive a reply about a complaint that has been filed. Ten days seems to be a reasonable time frame, according to evidence. At the end of ten days the residents should either see that a claim has been completed and

closed, or they should receive some type of status update of their complaint until it is resolved.

- **Better utilization of workers to correct the complaints.**

  San Bernardino is not understaffed when it comes to repairs of complaint issues. The city has an adequate number of employees to resolve issues. The problem isn't a shortage of workers, but a workforce utilization issue. For example, the workers must return to the office to do paperwork on incidents. What if laptops or computer tablets were assigned to these workers so that they would not need to come into the office from the city? They could finish one job, take a photo of the completed work, log in the progress into the system and move on to the next job. This is just one solution that could keep the workers out of the office and in the city to complete more service calls.

- **Have one centralized complaint system for the entire city.**

  All complainants need to utilize the CRMS. All complaints should be processed through one network, so the complaints aren't lost in the quagmire of service calls.

- **Merge duplicate complaints.**

  Evidence shows that the city has started looking at ways to merge or bundle duplicate complaints. The GJ commends the city for that. If implemented it would enable all residents to receive notifications, regardless of whether they were the first person who filed the complaint or the fiftieth person. Every person deserves to know the status of the complaint. The system is already set up to do regular notifications.

- **Monthly Complaint Progress Report at City Council meetings.**

  A formal report should be given during city council meetings once a month, especially if the complaint is a long-term project. For example, the administration should have let the public know about the computers in the

libraries being unavailable and why it was, and is, taking so long to resolve. Most computers are working at the Feldheym Central Library but are still unavailable at the other three city libraries at the writing of this report.

The residents should have been informed that streetlights were being vandalized, and what the city was doing about it. Similarly, the new solar lights recently installed as a remedy to copper wiring being stolen should have been reported to the public. The city needs to improve its transparency and communications and trying to make the complaint system work for their residents.

- **A Log of All Complaints**

    The CRM computer program system that is being used for the complaint system logs the calls in by name of the resident (or a person can opt to be anonymous). The type and location of the problem and the status of the complaint is also logged into the system. This information needs to be available online on the SBC website monthly so that everyone can see the status of issues. There is power in information.

    No city is perfect, and the City of San Bernardino has had many trials and tribulations over the years. Fixing the complaint system is one small hurdle for the residents and decision makers. However, it is a very important and needed task. It is the coming together of the voices of the people – the residents and the leaders. Without the people, there would not be a city. Bill Gates once said, "Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning." The City of San Bernardino should learn the lesson of the people and the importance of their voices.

COMMENDATION

The 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury thanks and appreciates the participants from the City of San Bernardino for coming in promptly for interviews and answering requests for documents.

Officials, staff, and residents do love the city in which they live and/or work and are supportive of improvements. The GJ appreciates the many residents who speak at city council meetings. The grand jury commends the residents' willingness to comment about problems in the city and ask for needed changes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury found that the city does have an efficient way to centralize and log complaints (CRMS). However, not all residents and staff use the current complaint system consistently. This provides for the potential of complaints never entering the system and/or lost complaints. Additionally, there is not enough communication with the public and transparency is lacking.

Complaints come to many different departments and individuals. The departments and upper management have no consistent way of acknowledging the progress to every complainant.

A major problem is not everyone in SBC consistently uses the one single complaint system from which all complaints/concerns are received, answered and eventually closed out. Residents become frustrated, thinking that there is no progress on the issue. Evidence shows there is a lack of consistent communication and transparency from San Bernardino City to its residents.

If the city council of San Bernardino considers and implements the civil grand jury's recommendations at the end of this report, it may help improve communication and transparency in the complaint system in the City of San Bernardino.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings:	Recommendations:	Implementation Date:	Required Responses:
F-1: The City of San Bernardino has one single central database (CRMS). Not all complaints go through that system causing confusion and inconsistencies among residents and city employees.	**R-1:** The GJ recommends that the City of San Bernardino use one single, central database only.	06/01/26	**San Bernardino City Council**
F2: The City of SB does not currently keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaint. Thus, there is no	**R2:** The GJ recommends that the City of San Bernardino keep resident complainants apprised of the progress on every logged complaint. The	06/01/26	**San Bernardino City Council**

consistent method of informing all complainants of receipt and progress of the complaint, leaving residents with the thought that nothing is being done.	city needs to report to all complainants every ten days 1) the receipt, 2) the progress, 3) the outcome or resolution of the complaint and 4) an explanation of why it may be taking longer, if applicable.		
F3: The City of San Bernardino has no consistent system for ensuring that every speaker at the city council meetings is contacted, with the complaint logged into the centralized log, causing frustration among residents and the appearance that the city does not follow through on speakers' concerns.	**R3:** The GJ recommends that ALL complaints from speakers at City Council meetings are logged into the city's one central database and assigned a tracking number for further reference.	**06/01/26**	**San Bernardino City Council**
F4: Many complaints are reported	**R4:** The GJ recommends that all staff enter	**06/01/26**	**San Bernardino City Council**

directly to a variety of individuals and may not be logged into CRMS leading to frustration among complainants.	complaints directly into the CRMS.		
F5: The CRMS data is not available on the city website, nor reported to the city council and the public at meetings, causing a lack of transparency and frustration among some residents.	**R5:** The GJ recommends that the city council direct the Call Center to publish the CRMS monthly reports online and report it to the city council quarterly at its meetings.	06/01/26	**San Bernardino City Council**
F6: As of the writing of this report, the City of San Bernardino has not completed a study to determine if the Call Center has an adequate number of employees to consistently handle and process all the	**R6:** The GJ recommends that the city council authorize and implement a separate study to see if more employees are needed to work at the Call Center.	06/01/26	**San Bernardino City Council**

complaints that are lodged which can cause uncertainty among some residents.			
F7: The GJ has found that the city does not have a formal written policy and/or procedure manual for handling complaints, causing inconsistency in the handling of residents' issues.	**R7:** The GJ recommends that a formal written procedure manual be produced to ensure that there is consistency across departments for the handling of all complaints.	**06/01/26**	**San Bernardino City Council**

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GLOSSARY

Customer Relationship Management System (CRMS): a licensed computer information system into which complaints are entered, assigned a tracking number, delegated to the appropriate city department to handle and follow-up communications are made with the complainant.

Call Center: refers to either the physical location where employees who handle complaint calls are located (Vanir Towers) or the phone number listed on the San Bernardino city website and flyers to use to make complaints.

City Charter: a legal document that establishes municipalities and provides a framework for its local government and defines the organization, powers, functions and essential procedures of the government.

City Council Member: an individual elected to the city council which has legislative power to enact ordinances, resolutions, policies, enforcement and funding actions to enhance the social and economic well-being of the city's residents. (sanbernardino.gov)

Departmental Open/Close Reports: weekly reports generated by the CRM System which include the complaints and dates received, the status of the complaint, to whom it was assigned and the expected closing date of the complaint. Reports are distributed to department heads and to individual city council members.

GJ: 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury

GOSBCity: the app provided by the City of San Bernardino to register complaints. Complaints are then entered into the CRMS.

Manager-City Council Form of Government: a form of government characterized by a city council that oversees the general administration, makes policy, sets budgets and appoints a professional city manager to carry out day-to-day administrative operations.

MCCUpdates: an intranet email account managed by personnel in the City Manager's office to report complaints received by the Mayor, City Council members or departments other than the Neighborhood Customer Services Operation Center.

Neighborhood Customer Services Operations Center: located at Vanir Towers, 290 N. D St, San Bernardino, it is the physical location where Customer Service Employees work. They serve as initial contact for visitors to City Hall as there is a

front counter and it is also where they answer all complaint calls made to the city. Also known as the Call Center.

Oxbow (Site): Concrete removed from a warehouse fire in Redlands in 2020 and transported to the North Verdemont District of San Bernardino which was to be used in a planned residential development. However the project faced numerous obstacles, the concrete remains at its location, and the project is still a subject of discussion within the community and city council.

Pulling a complaint: downloading the information regarding a complaint.

SBC: City of San Bernardino.

Service Requests: formal request for service to be provided. Requests can be either external (such as city residents or visitors) or internal (such as one city department requesting assistance from another department).

Transfer request: the City of San Bernardino's title for requests initiated by one department for services to be provided by another department.

Ward: an administrative division of the city that elects and is represented by one city council member.
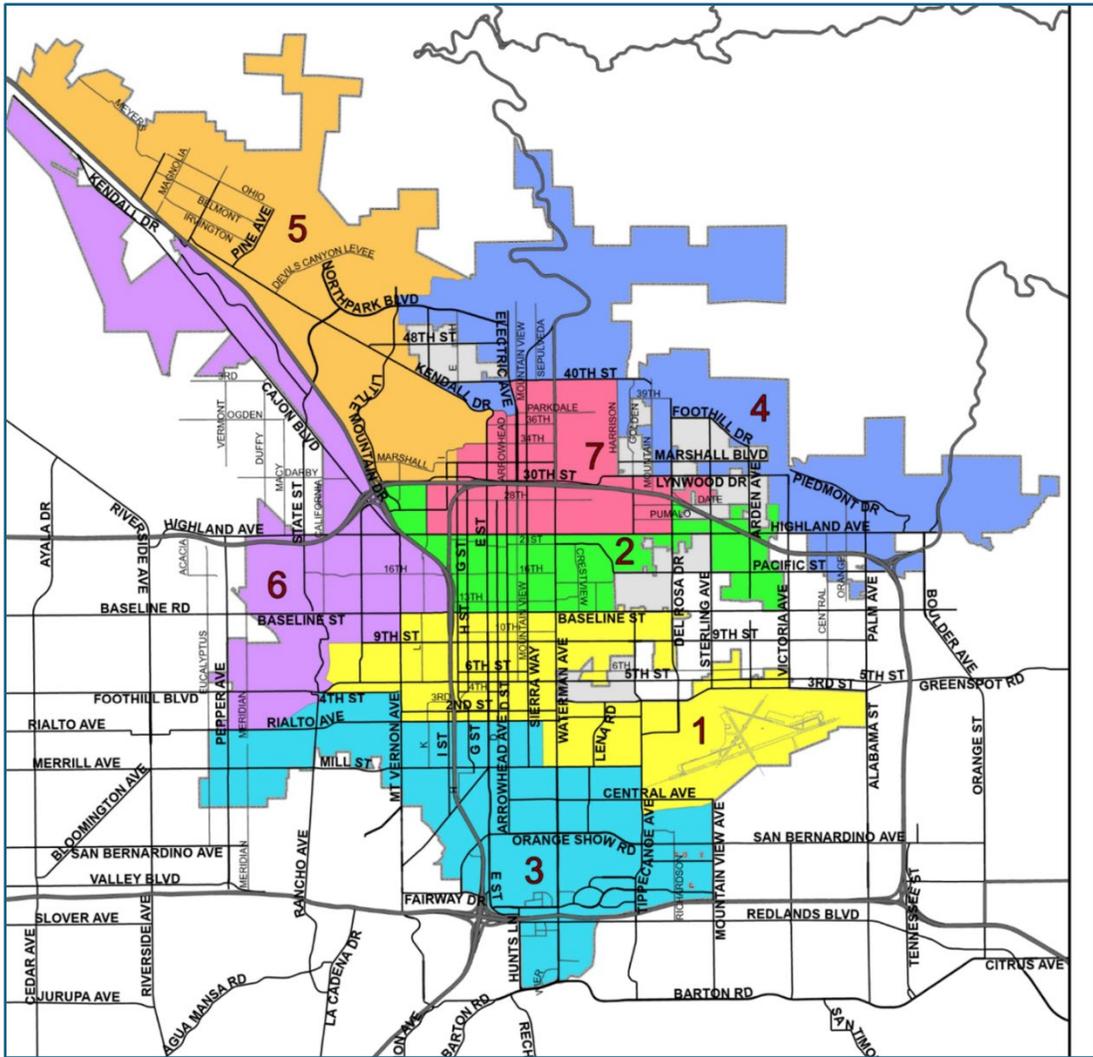
APPENDIX

Call Center Hours of Operation: Monday through Thursday, 7:30 to 5:30, and Friday, 7:30 to 4:30. Its physical location is in the Vanir Towers, 290 N. D Street, 1st Floor, San Bernardino, CA 92401.

Phone number is (909) 384-7272 for city services.

www.sanbernardino.gov/236/CodeComplaints:

(Code Complaints from San Bernardino City Website)

Map of San Bernardino City Wards

Map of Wards of San Bernardino City (Courtesy of San Bernardino City website)
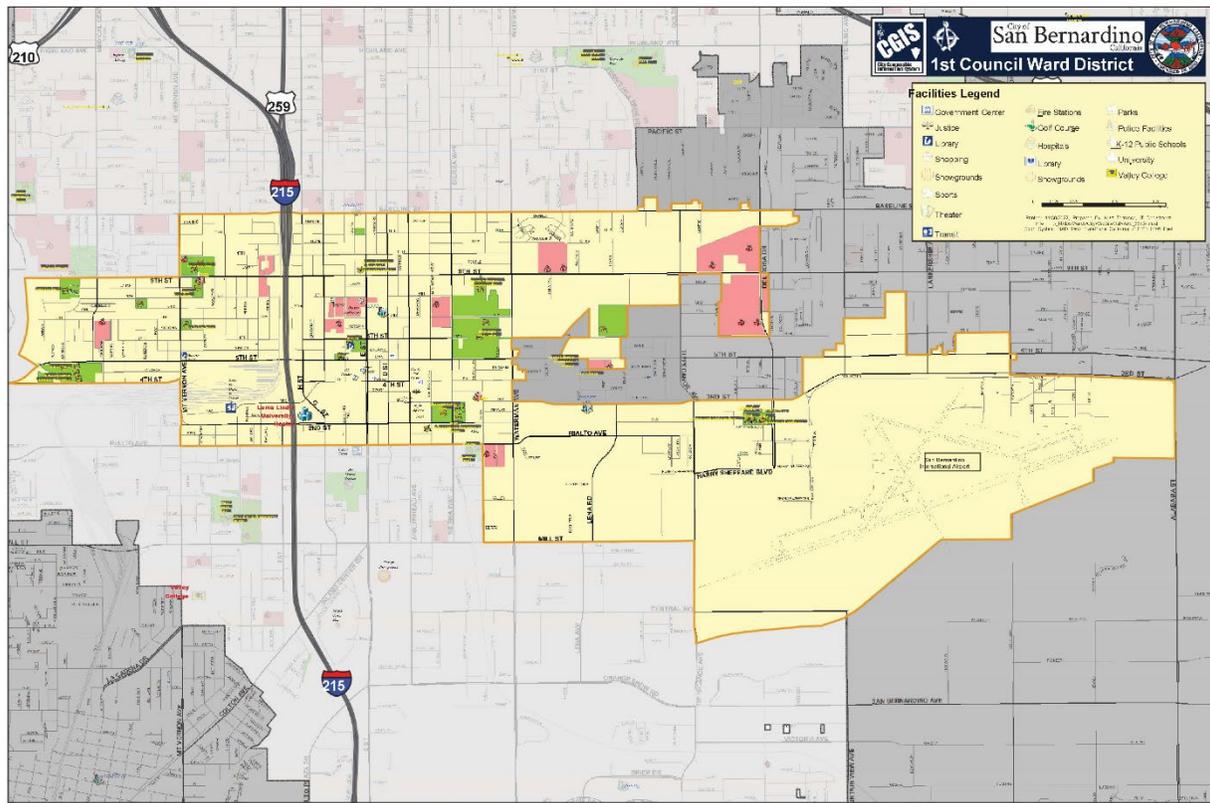
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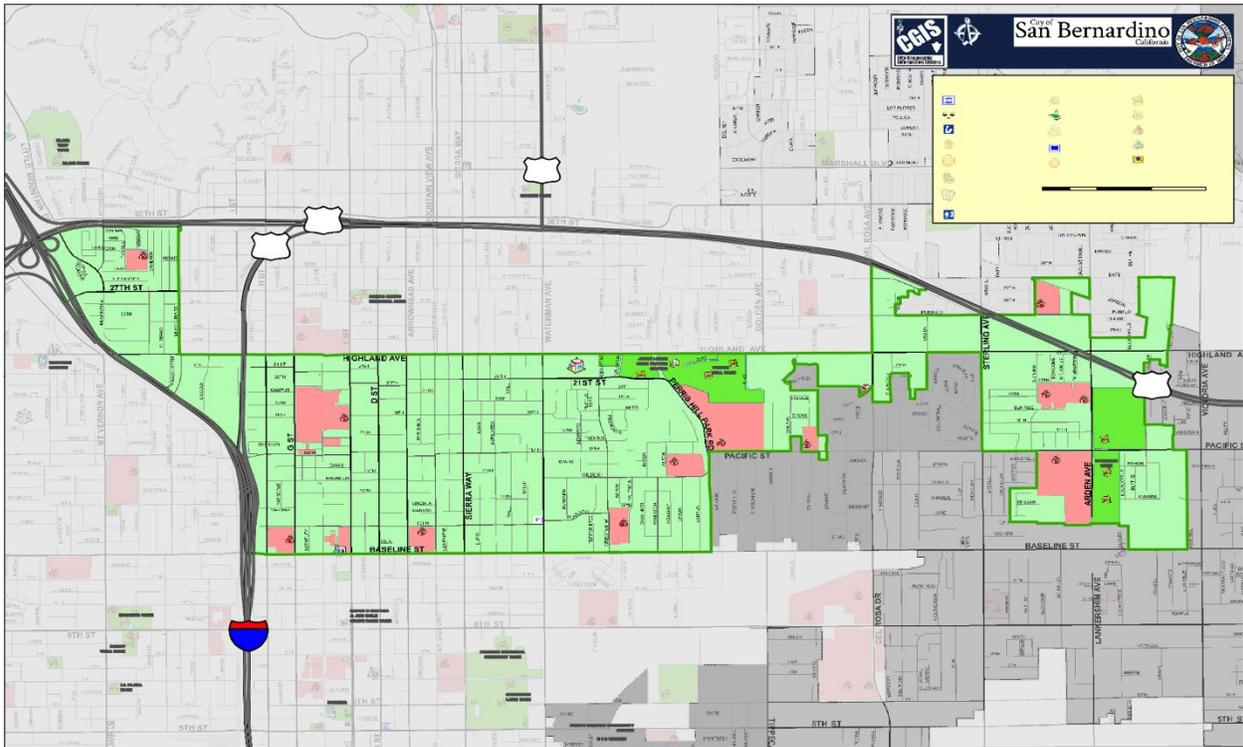
Map of Ward 2 (Courtesy of San Bernardino City website)

Map of Ward 3 (Courtesy of San Bernardino City website)
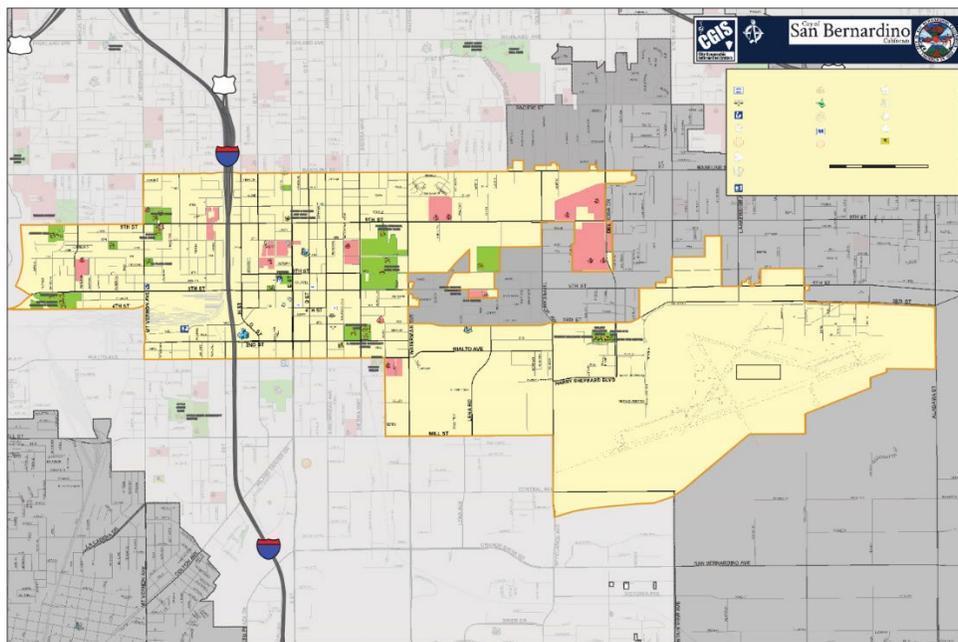
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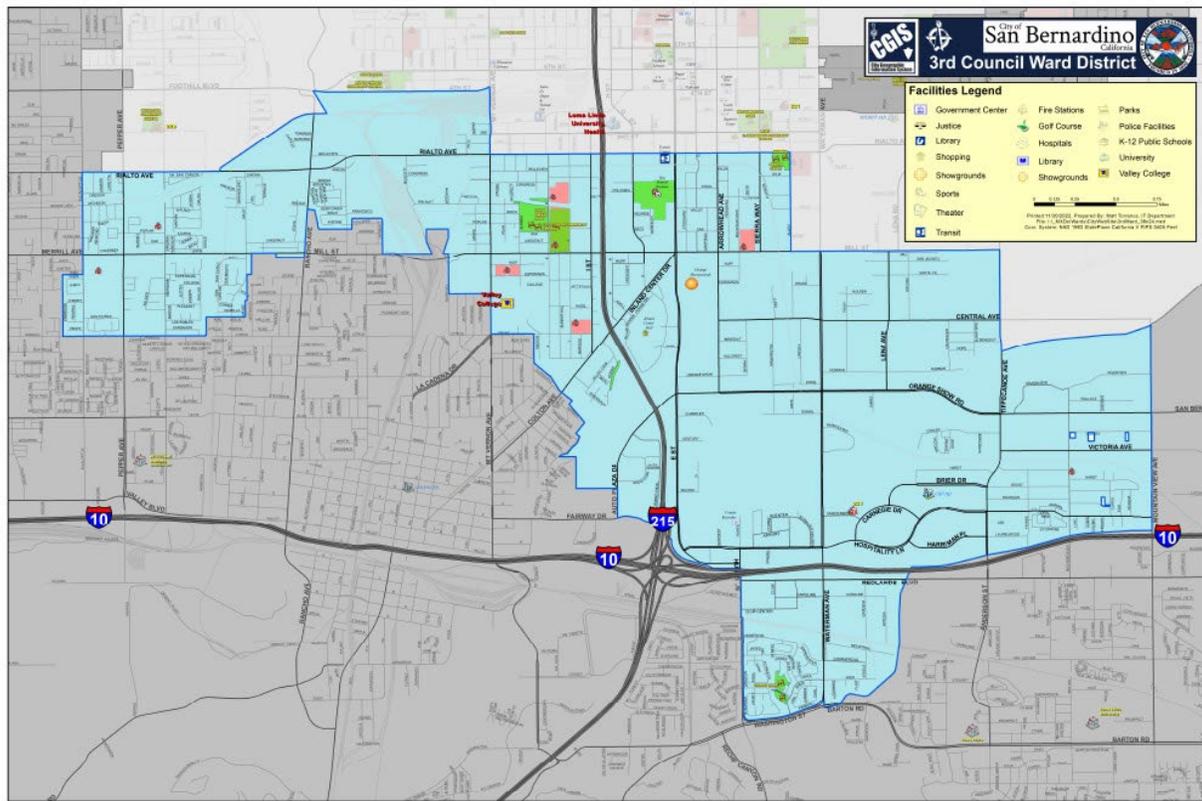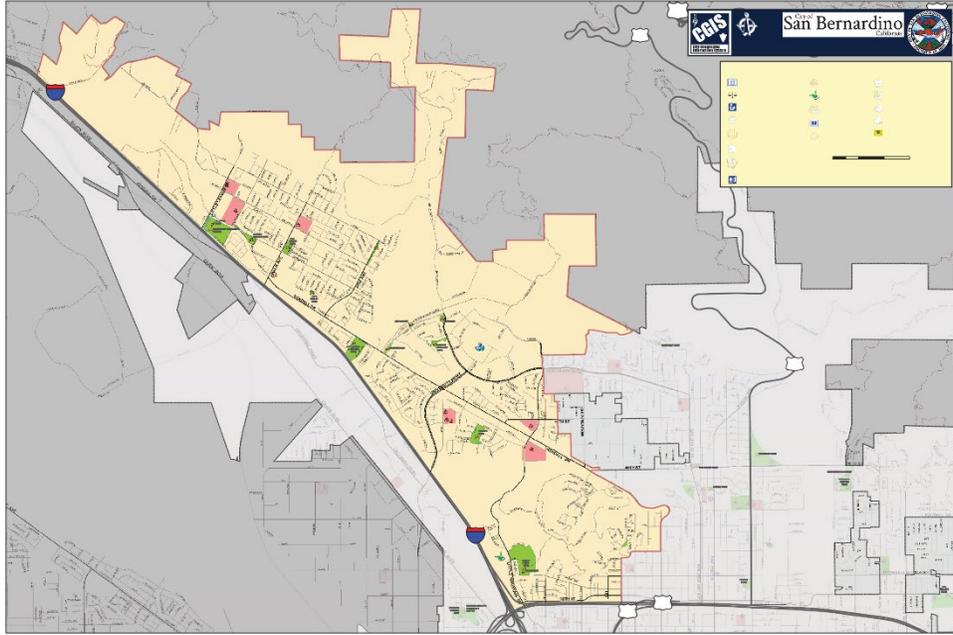Map of Ward 5 (Courtesy of San Bernardino City website)
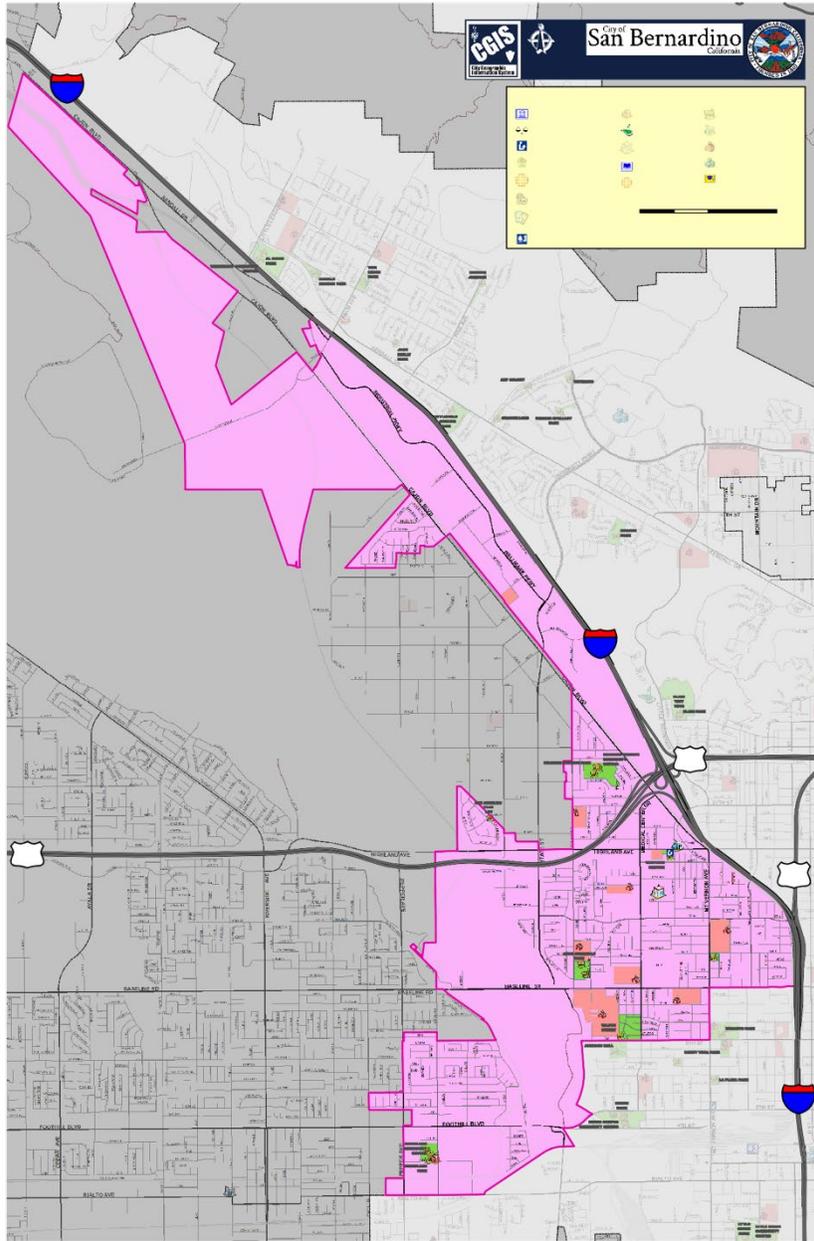
Map of Ward 6 (Courtesy of San Bernardino City website)
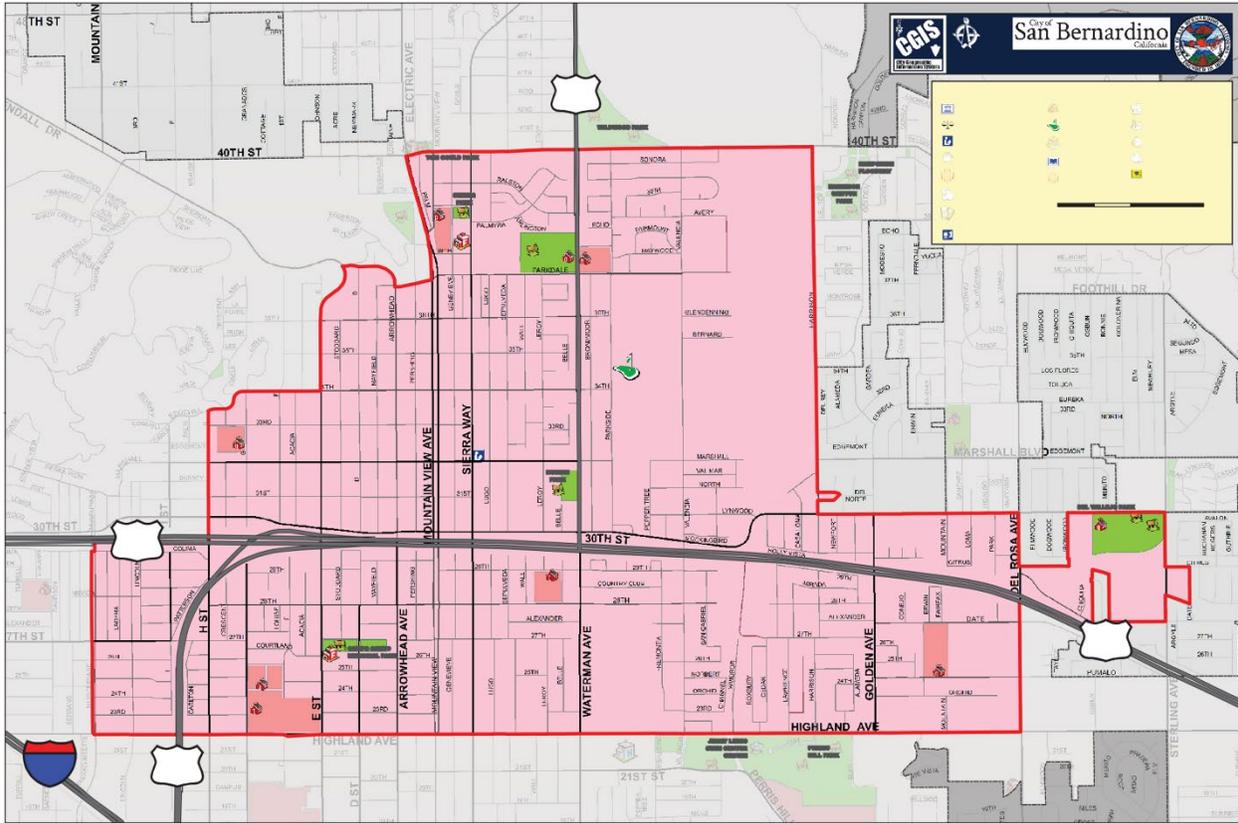
Map of Ward 7 (Courtesy of San Bernardino City website)

How to file a complaint in the City of San Bernardino (See flyer below)
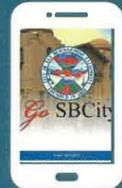
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Are They Ready?

An Investigation into the Readiness of the

San Bernardino County Fire Protectction District

SUMMARY

Wildfires devastated Los Angeles County during 2025. They destroyed neighborhoods, consumed homes and scorched the earth. Media criticized both the Los Angeles County Fire and Los Angeles City Fire Departments; they were not prepared to fight such conditions. After the review and initial investigation, it was determined that the wildfires were the result of a "perfect storm": low humidity, dried vegetation and gale-force winds. Neither LA County Fire nor any other responding agencies could have prevented the fires' spread or the destruction that ensued.

San Bernardino took note, and the Civil Grand Jury wondered, is San Bernardino County prepared to fight not only devastating wildfires, but also the routine fires that occur every day?

The San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury investigated and found that overall San Bernardino County Fire Protection District is well-prepared. It did uncover some deficiencies:

- San Bernardino County Fire Protection District (SBCFPD) maintains fire apparatus and firefighting equipment. Its two maintenance shops and its parts warehouse are situated in three locations, approximately four miles from each other. To effect efficient repairs and maintenance, mechanics must travel among locations, often causing delays in returning vehicles to online service status.

- SBCFPD has introduced drones and robotics into its firefighting arsenal. Drones provide real-time data on the fire spread and on other developing problems, which helps coordinate firefighting efforts. SBCFPD has developed a drone and robotics program, and has offered off-site training

in operating, maintaining and monitoring the equipment. At the time of this writing, SBCFPD has one supervisor/operator, and three firefighters who are Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) licensed operators. Such a minimal staff is insufficient to take advantage of this crucial new technology.

- The Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) requires that a minimum of two firefighters remain outside a burning structure while two other firefighters enter the building to fight the fire (the "two-in/two-out" policy). SBCFPD does not comply with the rule. Instead, it deploys only three firefighters per engine: one firefighter/paramedic, one engineer and one captain. The lack of an additional person creates delay in fire-fighting capability and victim rescue.

- SBCFPD trains its new recruits to meet the qualifications necessary for certification. Many complete their training and then leave SBCFPD for positions with other fire agencies.

<u>BACKGROUND</u>

San Bernardino County (SBC) is the largest county geographically in the contiguous United States. SBC has approximately 1,000 square miles of residential environments and approximately 19,000 square miles of desert environments that are managed by five different entities: SBC, the State of California, the Federal Government, Indigenous Peoples tribal lands and the United States military. Its sheer size, combined with a mix of densely populated cities, rural communities and vast wilderness, creates a unique set of challenges for San Bernardino County Fire Protection District (sbcfire.org/about).

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 2025 National Risk Index and the 2024 Office of the California State Fire Marshal (osfm.fire.ca.gov/), created a set of maps showing the Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ) which rate most of SBC as a very high fire risk. This high level of risk requires the SBCFPD to approach the fire district's work with humility and an unwavering commitment to innovative solutions, ensuring fire services provide the best possible service to our citizens and the countless visitors the protective district serve (sbcfire.org/about).

The service area for the SBCFPD is bordered on the:

- North by the Kern, Inyo and Los Angeles Counties
- South by Riverside and Orange Counties
- East by Nevada and Arizona state lines
- West by Los Angeles County (sbcfire.org/about).
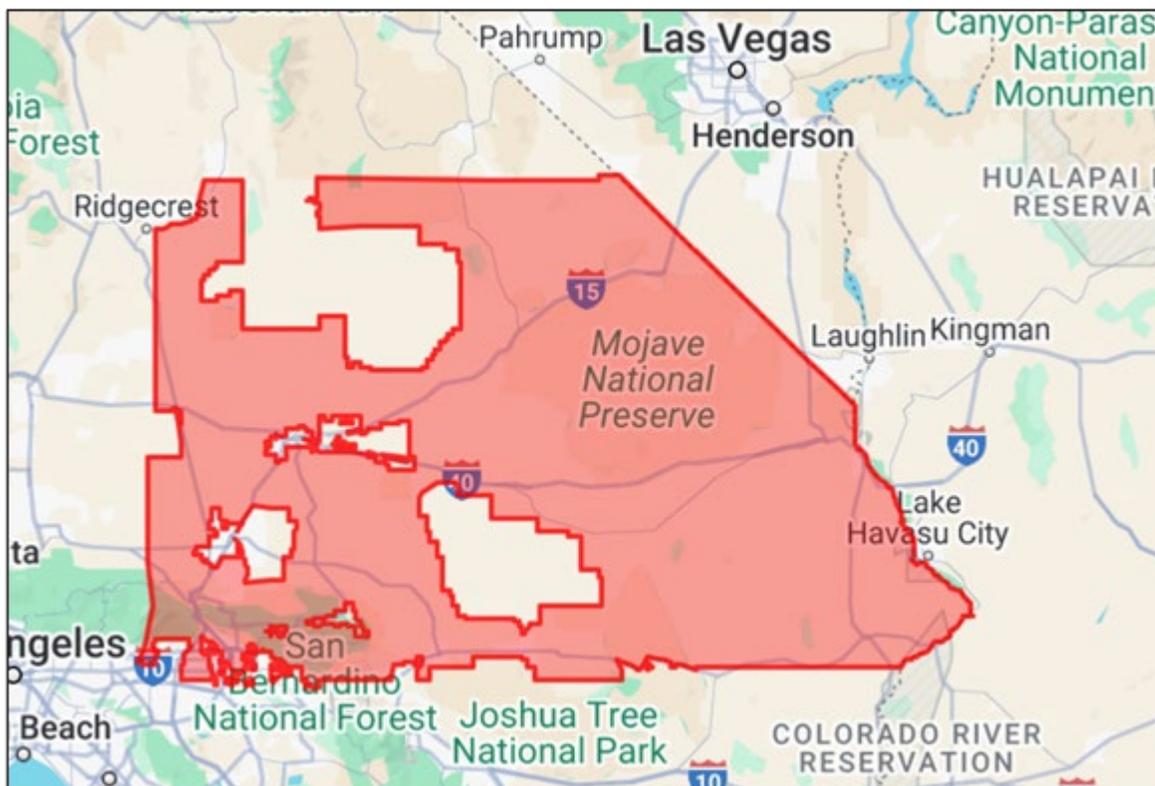
Map 1: SBCFPD service area (sbcfire.org/about)

SBCFPD protects a county with a population of over two million residents, and its goal is to serve the communities with the best in fire protection and offer a professional and dedicated response when citizens of SBC call for help. Over the course of a year, the fire district responds to tens of thousands of calls.

Photo 1: Deluge Hose Company Number 2 circa 1894 (sanbernardino.gov/601)

In December 1890, a second station was built in the north part of town at 9th and "F" Streets. Instead of just being called Station 2, it was called "Deluge Hose Company Number 2". It only consisted of the "Rumsey" hand-drawn hose cart that was previously "Pioneer Number 1". This company was in existence until May 1894 when it closed for unknown reasons.

The history of SBCFPD is rooted in local fire departments, and joint ventures which began with the formation of individual fire departments.

The first fire company in San Bernardino was organized on June 26, 1865, at a meeting of citizens at Pine's Hotel. The first fire station was located on Third

Street, at the foot of "C" Street (now known as Arrowhead Avenue) in San Bernardino. The company was in existence until 1871 when the property was sold. (sanbernardino. gov/884/Fire-Department).

The present fire department was founded on October 3, 1878, when members of the old company formed a volunteer company. The funds from the sale of property and equipment in 1871 were used in the formation of the new company. The volunteer department was in operation until December 3, 1889. At that time, the department was reorganized under Chief D. H. Wixom and became a partly paid department (sanbernardino.gov/884/Fire-Department).

Some of the key milestones in fire department's history:

Time Period	Milestones
1865	Formation of San Bernardino area's first fire company
1878	Formation of the present fire department as an all-volunteer station
1889	Volunteer department became a partly paid department
1928	Formation of Fontana Fire Department
1973	Muscoy and Bloomington join Fontana to form the Central Valley Fire Protection District.
1982	Chino joined the Central Valley Fire Protection District to form the West San Bernardino Valley Fire Agency.
1985	Chino became an independent department, and the San Bernardino County Fire Agency was formed.
2008	The Fire Reorganization Plan was finalized, merging 27 separate fire districts into the current SBCFPD. This created four regional service zones and unified administrative functions.
2022	The SBCFPD opened its first dedicated headquarters building marking a historic moment in its 94-year history.

Chart 1: Created by SBC 2025 Civil Grand Jury (iafflocal935.org/history)

The SBCFPD is an agency that has evolved into one of the most technologically advanced firefighting and emergency services organizations in the country. The fire district relies on cutting-edge technology, strategic resource deployment and highly trained personnel to keep its 2.2 million residents safe. The district employs over 1,060 people, of which 760 full-time suppression personnel staff the 51 fire stations across the county. Additionally, there are six paid-call stations that rely on part-time firefighters to provide emergency services.

These paid-call stations are typically located in more remote or less-densely populated areas, ensuring comprehensive coverage and timely response throughout the county (sbcfire.org/about).

SBCFPD is divided into five regional divisions: West Valley, East Valley, Mountains, South Desert and North Desert, each covering a different geographic and demographic area. These divisions ensure resources are strategically placed for optimized response, whether in high-density neighborhoods or remote rural communities (sbcfire.org/about).

Due to the diversity of the areas that the fire protection district covers, fire personnel operate on a wide range of apparatuses, including but not limited to: engines, squads, trucks, ambulances, helicopters, snowcats and boats. What truly sets SBCFPD apart from other fire agencies is its innovative approach to using technology in firefighting, emergency medical services and disaster response (sbcfire.org/about).

Technology has revolutionized modern firefighting and this fire district has been at the forefront of adopting and implementing advanced tools to enhance safety and efficiency. The SBCFPD's *Technology Plan 2030* outlines a strategic roadmap to integrate current and emerging technologies aimed at enhancing hazard mitigation, risk reduction, life and property protection, firefighter safety, operational efficiency and service levels (sbcfire.org/Technology-Plan-2030.pdf).

Offering services beyond fire suppression and protection, the county Office of Emergency Services (OES) provides disaster assistance to all 24 cities and towns in our county as well as support to the county. The OES staff has ensured the county is officially "Storm Ready" as well as organizing the county's participation in the multi-agency disaster response exercise "Golden Guardian." The OES also leads the county's participation in the "Great California Shake Out", the largest earthquake preparedness exercise in U.S. history, since its kickoff in 2008. Exercises like these are designed to better prepare the department, the county and the citizens for a major disaster. (oes.sbcounty.gov).

The Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM) includes not only the Fire Marshal, but also: fire prevention, fire investigations, public education, planning and engineering, hazardous materials emergency response, household hazardous waste and records retention (sbcfire.org/ofm).

The Administration Division includes vehicle maintenance, warehouse services and facility maintenance (sbcfire.org).

The Training Division provides a variety of training courses and includes an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) section which is staffed with two registered nurses and a paramedic as certified trainers. The Training Division is also responsible for the department safety programs. Located a mile to the west is the Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting (ARFF) training center which is where firefighters are trained in all aspects of FAA approved aircraft firefighting (sbcfire.org/emsspecialoperationsandtraining/).

San Bernardino County firefighters are dedicated to protecting communities from a variety of threats, including wildfires, hazardous materials incidents and medical emergencies.

METHODOLOGY

In 2025, Los Angeles County (LAC) and some of its population ere the victims of two 100 mph wind-driven fires, the Palisades and Eaton Fires. The television and print media reported on these fires, and in the process, a story emerged about the number of fire engines that were parked in a Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) parking lot. Running with this story, the press wanted to know, "Why are these fire engines not being used in the fighting of the two current fires?"

The 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury (CGJ) gained knowledge of this story from both television and print media releases. This raised a question for the CGJ, "Is the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District prepared to fight a wind-driven fire of this magnitude?" The CGJ investigated the preparedness of SBCFPD to suppress fires.

The methods used by CGJ to gather evidence were:
- Obtained and reviewed official SBCFPD documents, statistics and reports
- Gathered information from the SBCFPD's and other websites
- Interviewed several current SBCFPD employees and associates:
    - Fire Administrators
    - Maintenance personnel
    - Fire Captains
    - Firefighters
    - Associates allied with the SBCFPD
    - Emergency Services (OES) personnel
- Toured various SBCFPD worksites
- Reviewed Water Districts' documents

The CGJ used some of this data to create charts and graphs to clarify the interpretation of this data.

DISCUSSION

With the threat of wildfire within San Bernardino County, it takes more than the fire department to be ready to fight the threat, including individuals, community fire departments and political representatives. Everyone is involved and responsible. The CGJ will focus on the SBCFPD's readiness to fight such fires and the tools needed to mitigate loss.

Workforce Breakdown

OSHA revised its Respiratory Protection Standard issued on January 8, 1998. Now it contains a section requiring a minimum of two firefighters that must be available outside a structure while interior firefighting operations are conducted inside by at least two other firefighters (osha.gov/ laws-regs/regulations).

OSHA's "two-in/two-out" policy for firefighting is a safety measure requiring a minimum of two firefighters equipped with Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) to enter an Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health (IDLH) atmosphere, while at least two other firefighters remain outside and ready to assist in case of an emergency. These outside firefighters are often able to perform other duties, but they must be able to readily assist or rescue those on the inside. The objective is to provide backup and rapid intervention in case of an emergency during interior firefighting operations (osha.gov/ laws-regs/ regulations).

Evidence shows that many of the county's fire stations have only three personnel assigned to each engine company: a captain, a firefighter/engineer and a firefighter/paramedic per shift. If, for instance, an IDLH occurs, this responding apparatus must wait for a second apparatus to arrive on the scene of the incident before firefighters can enter the burning structure.

The San Bernardino County Fire Protection District responds to 12 different types of calls: Structure Fires, Vegetation Fires, Vehicular Fires, Medical Aid, Rescues, Hazardous Materials, Traffic Collisions with Extrication, Investigation/Alarms, Public Service, Other Fires and Miscellaneous. The San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury used data from the SBCFPD's county website and created the two following graphs. They represent only a portion of these calls, which are structure fires, vegetation fires, vehicular fires, rescues and medical aid, from the past six fiscal years, July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2024. The data on the remaining types can be found on the SBCFPD website (sbcfire.org).
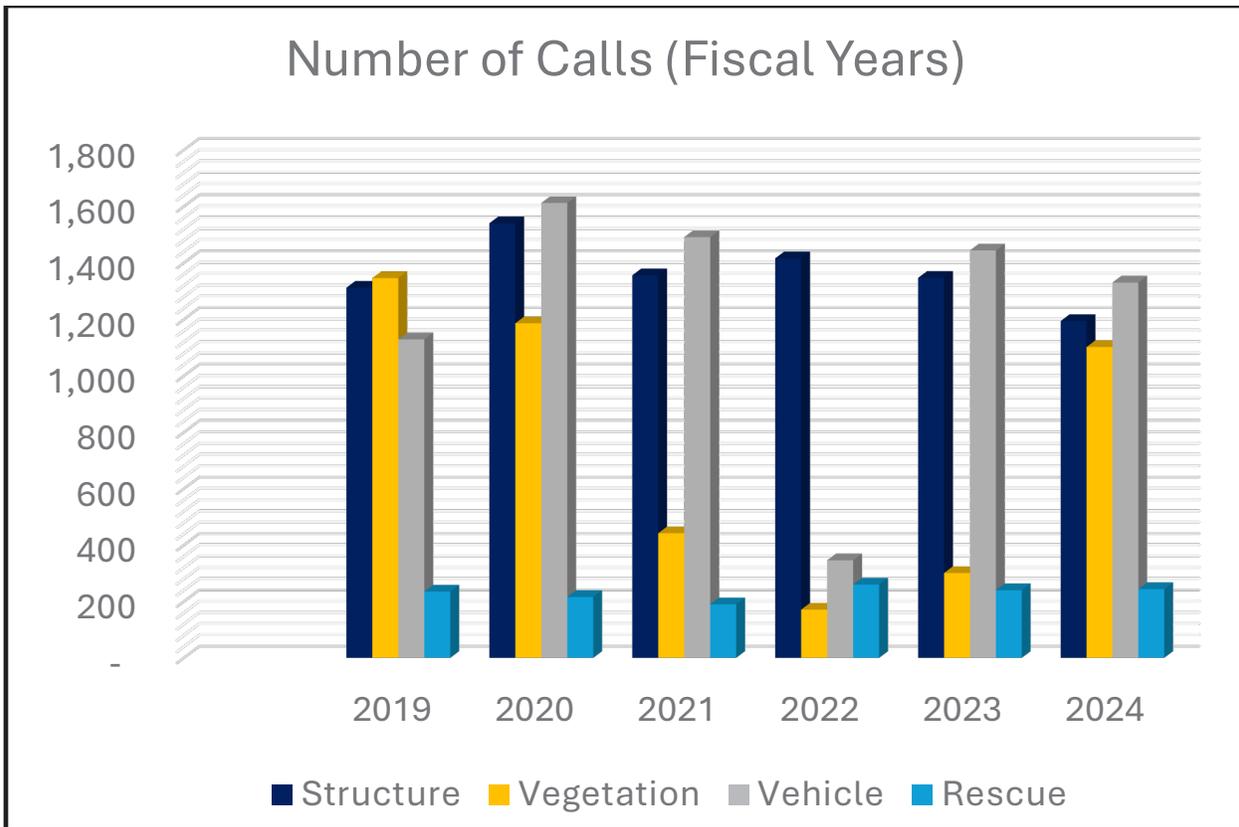
Chart 2: Chart created by SBC Civil Grand Jury using data from sbcfire.org
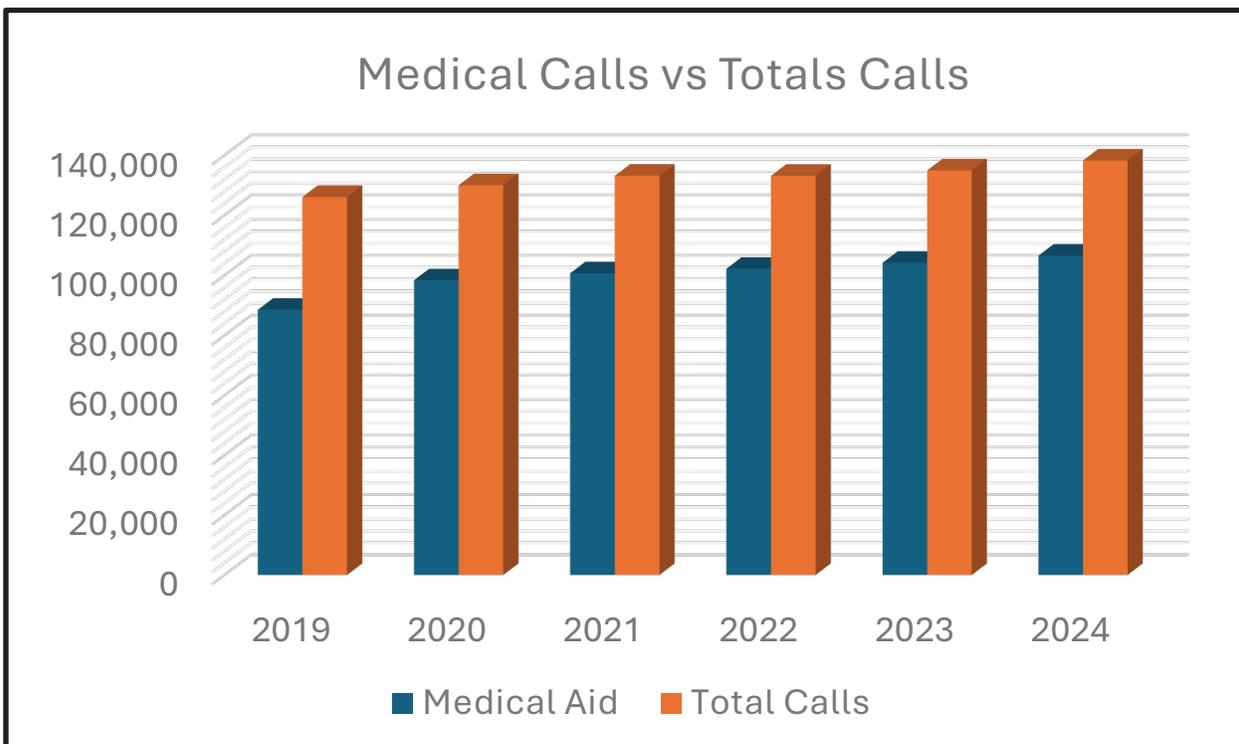
Chart 3: Chart created by SBC Civil Grand Jury using data from sbcfire.org

The Medical Aid calls refer to any call dealing with a health issue or concern. On average most SBCFPD calls are medical aid in nature. Once the call is received, the SBCFPD dispatcher will assign a severity level based on information from the caller and then notify the appropriate unit to respond. These are the categories:

- Alpha - Non-Life Threatening - Basic Life Support
- Bravo - Possibly Life Threatening - Basic Life Support
- Charlie - Life Threatening - Advanced Life Support
- Delta - Serious Life Threat - Advanced Life Support
- Echo - Imminent Life Threat - Closest available unit

Employee Retention

Employee retention refers to the methods agencies use to retain employees. It is important to maintain a high retention rate, as high turnover can be costly for the organization and impacts employee morale. Some of the incentives used for employee retention are competitive benefits, pleasurable and challenging work environment and opportunities for advancement within the department.

Evidence shows the SBCFPD possesses many positive aspects which have aided in employee retention. Some examples are newer firefighting equipment, proactive ideas and resources to aid firefighting, the challenge of a variety of terrains within the county along with a positive attitude workforce. Training the employees in new techniques and updated regulations is also a valuable tool. The most prominent negative points that were discovered through investigation were employee salaries and demanding work schedules. The CGJ learned that the scheduling issues are being addressed.

The CGJ learned that retention of trained and qualified firefighters and paramedics is an issue that the district must contend with, despite the attraction of technological advances available.

The national average base salary for a firefighter is $59,606 annually (ziprecruiter.com). In California, the highest average base salary is $80,990. California is among the highest paid states for firefighters; however, it also has the most expensive cost of living (bls.gov/ocs).

In SBC, the medium range of income for a firefighter/paramedic is $60,000 to $95,000 annually (glassdoor.com/salaries). A paramedic's average salary nationwide is $47,313 annually, whereas the average firefighter/paramedic salary in SBC is $60,706 dollars annually. Further research determined that the surrounding counties, *i.e.* Los Angeles and Riverside counties average base salaries are between $94,829 and $107,920 (joinlafd.org/salary and indeed.com/career/paramedic/salaries).

At the time of writing this report, SBCFPD is advertising open positions of a Firefighter/Paramedic at a salary (with benefits) of $90,000 with built-in overtime (OT) to start (governmentjobs.com/careers/sanbernardino/jobs).

The CARE Program

Evidence shows that firefighting is a dangerous and stressful profession. What most people do not realize is that firefighters don't just fight fires, they also assist in many medical emergencies. The data shows that four out of five emergency calls per day received are medical emergencies. Firefighters are exposed to many types of medical tragedies daily.

SBCFPD utilizes the CARE Team Program to support and retain its valuable firefighters:

The SBCFPD has developed the Crisis Accountability/Assessment Response Education Team and the SBC Fire Benevolent Foundation to address the mental, emotional and financial well-being of its personnel and their families. These initiatives reflect a proactive, organized effort to provide crisis intervention, peer support, education and financial assistance to employees in need.

The CARE Team Mission

The CARE Team's goal is to reduce stigma around mental health and ensure employees have access to timely support. Its programs focus on a Triad of Care which include Peer-to-Peer Support, Spiritual/Self-Care and Clinician/Physical Support.

- Peer-to-Peer Support - trained personnel providing confidential listening and crisis intervention.
- Spiritual/Self-Care - support through chaplains, wellness approaches and non-clinical resources.
- Clinician/Physician Support - access to professional medical and mental health services.

Specialized Groups Under the CARE Team

The team uses an Incident Management Team (IMT) approach to organize specialized groups. There are nine specialized groups that play a crucial role in meeting the overall mission of the CARE Team.

- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD): provides immediate defusing and structured debriefs after traumatic events

- Chaplains: offer emotional, mental and spiritual support (without proselytizing), available for rapid crisis response
- Canine Program: certified peer support dogs and handlers providing comfort in crisis situations
- Administration/Finance: handles budgets, grants, clerical work and funding for resources
- Communication: maintains contact with injured or ill personnel, while protecting confidentiality
- Education: ensures training, continuing education and dissemination of mental health resources
- Events and Fundraising: organizes large-scale events and supports financial resources for the CARE mission
- Retirement: provides guidance on workers' compensation, injury navigation and retirement planning
- Resources: researching and vetting therapies, treatments, rehabilitation centers and alternative care options

Key Objectives of the CARE Team
- Change the stigma around seeking mental health services.
- Encourage personnel to seek help early and make use of available education and prevention resources.
- Promote open communication, mutual support, and healthy lifestyle practices.
- The CARE Team also collaborates and provides the Cordico Wellness App for online resources. (Wellness App - Cordico)

San Bernardino County Fire Benevolent Foundation

The Foundation was formed in 2017 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to provide financial assistance to employees and their families in crisis.

Key Features:

- 100% donation-funded, no salaries paid to Board members
- Managed by an internal board of fire service experienced persons
- Committed to delivering maximum assistance directly to employees

Eligibility:

- Active and Retired SBCPFD employees, both Management and Labor
- Immediate family members (spouses/partners, children, parents, siblings)

Forms of Assistance:

- Housing (temporary or permanent)
- Transportation for medical/family emergencies
- Medical or mental health expenses, including alternative treatments
- Basic living expenses (utilities, food, childcare)
- Funeral and related travel costs

The CARE Team and the San Bernardino County Fire Benevolent Foundation demonstrate a comprehensive, organized approach to crisis support for fire personnel. Together, they provide immediate peer and professional support, long-term educational and wellness initiatives and financial assistance in times of personal or family crisis. These programs reflect the department's commitment to caring for its own workforce while fostering a culture of resilience, accountability and compassion.

Mutual Aid

The CGJ learned that Mutual Aid is based upon the concept of "neighbor helping neighbor." It consists of agreements between Cal Fire (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection), and all fire agencies within California. (caloes.ca.gov).

The California Government Code §8619.5 mandates that the Office of Emergency Services in consultation with relevant local and state governments develop and adopt a state fire services and rescue emergency Mutual Aid plan.

The plan must include systematic mobilization, organization and operation of fire, rescue and hazardous material resources on a local area, regional and statewide basis to mitigate the effects of disasters among several other aspects (caloes.ca.gov).

Under this code, Cal Fire was established to coordinate the state's fire protection program (fire.ca.gov). California requires a coordinated effort from multiple agencies to effectively respond to emergencies such as wildfires, structural fires, floods, earthquakes, hazardous material incidents and medical aid. This

program brings state, federal and local agencies together through contracts and agreements (law.justia.com/codes/california/2005/gov/8615-8619).

Through these agreements, Cal Fire is named as the lead agency in providing fire, rescue, dispatch and paramedic services to cities and towns in California that are not designated as state responsibilities (fire.ca.gov/about). These agreements are renewed every five years and outline the responsibilities of Cal Fire and SBCFPD. The mutual agreement is extended with the express understanding that the Incident Commander (IC) shall remain in charge of such incident, including the direction of personnel and equipment provided through the operation of this mutual aid agreement (fema.gov/emergency-managers/nims).

Financial assistance is provided under Government Code §8654.2 through a statewide program to communities for all hazards and support of a comprehensive mitigation strategy and reduce risks and impacts of disasters (california.public.law/codes/gov.code_section_8654.2).

Photo 2: SBCFPD Mobile Command Vehicle (Courtesy of SBC Civil Grand Jury)

A mobile command vehicle is designed to replicate an agency's emergency operation center with its advanced technology and communications capabilities.

Maintenance

SBCFPD's maintenance, called Fleet Maintenance, has approximately 30 employees: administrators, shop supervisor, and various classifications of mechanics, remote mechanics, parts chasers and parts servicers. The SBCFPD mechanics specifically inspect and diagnose mechanical, electrical and electronic issues.

They also perform tasks like tune-ups, overhauls, adjustments, replacements and preventative maintenance on engines, transmissions, differentials and other components (cafiremech.com). All the mechanics, specifically those working with fire apparatus and equipment, are certified by a combination of organizations and departments. These include the California Fire Mechanics Academy (CFMA), the State Fire Training (SFT) (within the California Office of the State Fire Marshal) and potentially through Emergency Vehicle Technician (EVT) certifications (osfm.fire. ca.gov).

The Emergency Vehicle Technician (EVT) Certification Commission, Inc. is the primary organization that certifies fire department mechanics. They offer various levels of certification, including the Fire Apparatus Technician Master Level III (evttcc.org). The National Fire Protection Association also plays a role developing standards and certifications relevant to fire service vehicles (nfpa.org).

SBCFPD's Fleet Maintenance section maintains over 800 units of mobile equipment and vehicles. This number includes fire engines, trucks and specialty equipment.

The following chart gives the designation type and a description for each type of fire engine:

Type	Description
1	The fire truck that typically responds to structural fires is the most common type of fire truck in use today. It has the capacity to carry four firefighters.
2	Like Type 1 and are equipped with the same specs and tools. They are also the most common truck seen in a suburban area responding to structural fires. It has the capacity to carry four firefighters.
3	These engines have four-wheel drive to make driving over rough terrains easier. The Type 3 must be able to transport at least three crew members. Type 3 and Type 4 often look like one another. However, the biggest difference is their minimum personnel and tank capacities.
4	The Type 4 wildland engine is very similar to the Type 3 but has a few distinct differences. Type 4 is used to drive over rough terrain and sacrifices a smaller pump and less hose for a larger 750-gallon water tank. The minimum number of personnel a Type 4 must carry is two.
5, 6, 7	Types 5, 6 and 7 are customized to meet the needs of each specific department. These vehicles are typically pick-up truck with four-wheel drive. These engines are often seen in both wildland and suburban settings. This classification is designed to hold a minimum of two firefighters and carry hose diameters ranging from 1 inch to 1-½ inch.

Chart 4: Engine Types (bmefire.com/types-of-fire-trucks)

The following photos show the four most common pieces of apparatus in the SBCFPD fleet:

Photo 3: Type 1 engine (sbcfire.org)

Type 1 Engine The fire truck that typically responds to structural fires is the most common type of fire truck in use today. Three or four firefighters are usually assigned to each of these vehicles (sbcfire.org).

Photo 4: Aerial Ladder Truck (sbcfire.org).

The Aerial Ladder Truck provides firefighters with a 100' of vertical and 90' of horizontal reach and provides high-reach fire suppression and rescue operations (sbcfire.org).

Photo 5: Med Squads (en.wikipedia.org)

Med squads, based upon a pick-up truck frame, differ from ambulances in that they do not transport patients to medical facilities. (en.wikipedia.org)

Photo 6: Type 3 Engine (sbcfire.org).

Type 3 Engine (Bush Patrol) These engines have four-wheel drive to make traveling over rough terrains easier. The Type 3 must be able to transport at least three crew members and has a pump and water tank (sbcfire.org).

SBCFPD's Fleet Maintenance sections utilize two types of computer software: *Faster* and *Firenet*.

Faster is a fleet management software package that SBCFPD has been using for 15 years. The software is designed to maximize the fleet's return on investment with predictive maintenance, repair parts acquisition and vehicle optimization. Every vehicle owned by the SBCFPD is entered into the software when it is purchased and remains in software until the vehicle is scrapped. All the maintenance performed on this vehicle is reflected in this program (fasterasset. com).

Firenet is a software package that shows all the preventive maintenance schedules for each of the department's vehicles. It can automatically produce a report on each vehicle when either scheduled or requested (inspect. com)

SBCFPD's Fleet Maintenance section has five full-time mechanics stationed in the remote divisions of the upper desert area. Each of these mechanics is assigned individual pick-up based Remote Service Trucks (RST) and moves from station-to-station performing routine preventative maintenance, such as oil changes, tire changes, filter changes, etc. These mechanics also respond to minor emergency repairs. If there is a more serious problem, a reserve engine is dispatched as replacement to the out-of-service vehicle. These mechanics take their RSTs home with them at night so that the mechanic does not need to return to the maintenance yards between work orders. The only time the mechanic must return to the maintenance yards is for resupply and in cases of an emergency (firstdue.com/).

The CGJ learned that the two maintenance shops and the parts warehouse are in three different locations. One maintenance shop is located on "D" Street and the other is on Lena Road. Both locations are within the San Bernardino City limits and are about four miles apart. The parts warehouse is located on Caroline Street. This current situation presents several problems for Fleet Maintenance. Mechanics, especially the supervisors and mechanical staff, must travel from one shop to the other, several times during the workday. Consolidating these locations could be cost-effective and timesaving.

The CGJ also learned that today's fire vehicles are more electronically-controlled than mechanically controlled. Some of the mechanics within the department are able to manufacture several of the needed parts when orders are delayed. But the department must order electronics. In addition, the quality of these parts is often substandard. Evidence showed that a brand-new electronic part was installed and immediately failed. This is a common occurrence when dealing with electronics that must be imported from other parts of the world.

Not only parts, but new replacement fire equipment may take as long as 27 months to get replaced. Evidence shows, when the SBCFPD orders a new Type 1 or 2 engine, they order it bare and equip it within the maintenance shops upon its arrival. Pick-up trucks are also difficult to obtain in a timely manner, taking up to eight months for delivery.

Technology

Photo 7: SBCFPD drone and chase vehicle (courtesy of SBCFPD)

One of the popular changes to the firefighting field is the introduction of drones and robotics. The concept of using an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) also

called drones in firefighting was first presented to the public at the 2011 Fire Department Instructors Conference International conference (FDICI) (fdic.com).

Initially, drone use was limited, with fire departments primarily using drones only for aerial photography and videography. The first use to assist with a fire incident was by the Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACFD) in a 2017 wildfire, using two drones to gain crucial real-time data on fire spread to help coordinate firefighting efforts. According to several fire fighter trade publications, it has been estimated that in 2023 over 500 U.S. fire departments have now integrated drone technology. (lafra.org/lafd-drones-and-pilots)

San Bernardino County Fire Protection District is also included in this statistic and has started their own drone and robotics program known as BDC Fire Robotics (BDCFR) (the BDC is a designator assigned by the State of California). The goal is to take full advantage of the growing technology in both the drone and robotic fields. With the addition of these unmanned resources, the BDCFR can design a protection plan that will be able to support and improve the capabilities of the SBCFPD by air, land and water (sbcfire.org).

The growth of this program will require an increase in trained personnel to operate, maintain and monitor this equipment. Drone operators must become a Federal Aviation Administration licensed drone pilot/operator by completing and passing a certified testing course (faa.gov/uas/commercial_operators). As for the land and aquatic robotic units, they do not require any state or federal licenses. The CGJ encourages the SBCFPD to establish its own training and certification program for these resources.

At the time of writing this report, the BDCFR department is only staffed by one full-time manager/pilot and three other firefighters who hold FAA drone licenses (sbcfire.org).

The CGJ recommends a staffing increase in trained drone and robotic operators. A well-trained support staff is paramount. The option of using non-firefighting personnel (*i.e.* civilians) in some of the roles of trained certified drone and robot operators could help increase the workforce and keep the trained firefighters where they are needed most.

The BDC Fire Robotics department's lineup of robotics and drones is making SBC one of the leading fire departments in the country with its new and diverse resources. The following photos and descriptions show the types and capabilities of these aerial, land and aquatic robots:

Photo 8: DJI Matrice 30T – M30T (courtesy of SBCFPD)

The CGJ learned about the DJI Matrice 30T (M30T), which can fly for about 25 minutes and can reach an altitude above 10,000 feet, but it is planned to operate closer to the ground. M30T is equipped with both wide angle and zoom cameras, a thermal imaging camera and a laser range finder. The M30T drone can also be equipped with a spotlight and loudspeaker to assist with ground communications.

Recently SBCFPD received two new Vertical Takeoff and Landing (VTOL) models from Dunlevy Consulting Inc. These winged drones designated as Angel-1BPEs are designed to travel farther and faster than the smaller M30T models. With its 10-foot wingspan, it can reach altitudes of 11,000 feet with a flight speed over 53 mph with a duration time estimated at two hours. These features will be key in any district surveying, area monitoring and also may contribute with search and rescue incidents.

Photo 9: Dunley's Angel -1BPE drone (Courtesy of 2025 SBC Civil Grand Jury)

The BDCFR will soon receive the Oceanbotics SRV-8, a submersible remotely operated vehicle which will be utilized in the waterways of SBC, from the lakes in the mountains to the Colorado River. The SRV-8 is attached to a control

tether and can reach depths up to 1,000 feet. It includes eight thrusters, two lights, a multi-tilt camera and a manipulator arm. Its operating time is between six and eight hours. Its mission will be to survey waterways, assist search and rescue teams and help with recovery efforts (go.oceanbotics.com).

Photo 10: SRV-8 submersible (go.oceanbotics.com)

SBCFPD has also obtained a ground-based robot from Icor Technology, the Mini Caliber tractor rover. It is equipped with a robotic arm, an articulating camera, a thermal infrared camera as well as two-way communications. With its

rubber treads, it can climb stairs and maneuver around small obstacles. Its main job will be searching in and around structures and confined areas which are hard to reach or could pose a hazard to the fire crews and other personnel (icortechnology.com/robots/mini-caliber).

Photo 11: Mini Caliber tractor (icortechnology.com/robots)

Drone First Responder (DFR)

Drones have been used by fire departments for almost a decade. The first DFR was originally tested in 2018, when the Chula Vista Police department used a drone to respond to a 911 call (chulavistaca.gov). The program involves strategically stationed drones that can be quickly deployed to an emergency before traditional first responders arrive. The program is being utilized in other counties and states as well as in many countries (flocksafety.com).

Photo 12: Drone view on laptop and controller (Courtesy of SBCFPD)

BDCFR's plan is to utilize the M30T (or similar) model drones with their multi-functional platform. These drones would be spread out atop different stations within the fire district and be housed in a self-sustaining enclosure.

The plan for these drones is to be remotely dispatched first to the reported incident and obtain real time video and data from an aerial view. This information can be sent to the responding units which would be equipped with tablets so the responding crews can see in real time what type of call to which they are responding.

This serves a multitude of benefits because the approaching units can start to assess the situation and see if additional units are needed (or, in some cases, not needed and may stand down) and start to map out a plan of action (flocksafety.com).

Once the drone is on the scene, the drone operator (pilot) can position the drone above the incident at an altitude which will show all sides of the location. It can zoom in to any possible trouble spots or other unseen or hidden situations.

These features were proven valuable in January 2025, during a Fire-type Unknown exercise, when an unknown fire at G Street and Congress Street in the City of San Bernardino was reported. A DJI M30T drone controller, while at the top of the Caltrans building, was able to fly the drone to that location before the responding units were able to arrive minutes later.

Photo 13: Drone readout on three different devices (courtesy of SBCFPD)

The onboard thermal sensors were used to detect any hidden fire conditions inside the building before the responding units. This illustrates the immense amount

of valuable information which is critical to the responding units that would still be minutes away from the scene.

The Future

The drone and robotic technology field is growing, as is the further development of Artificial Intelligence (AI). There are numerous published reports and articles that discuss the growing integration of AI into the field of firefighting. The possible areas are in wildfire detection which could use images from satellites to detect smoke in remote areas.

The area of Fire Behavior Modeling could predict how a fire will spread and its potential hazards. AI could also assist in predictive analysis to help identify risk areas through historical data. AI could also be integrated into the tools the fire departments use, for instance, enhanced communications systems and self-driving vehicles. AI devices could be integrated into the Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) that the firefighters wear (*i.e.* helmets) (qwake.tech).

Fire helmets with Heads-Up Displays (HUDs) are an emerging technology in the suppression of fires. Systems like Qwake Technologies' *C-Thru Navigator* are being developed or tested. The *C-Thru* system uses a helmet-mounted thermal camera and AI to provide firefighters with enhanced, smoke-penetrating vision, navigation guidance and real-time communication (qwake.tech).

MSA Safety Incorporated, another company developing firefighting safety technologies, has the *Nightfighter*. The *Nightfighter* system displays crucial information like air cylinder contents directly onto the SCBA mask's facepiece. (us.msasafety.com/Supplied-Air-Respirators).

If SBCFPD had additional resources, it could cover the largest county in the country and help monitor its diverse geographical makeup. With the use of its VTOL drone and future AI mapping software, the BDCFR can survey the county's landscape for possible trouble spots, and assist in the task of Fuel Management, which refers to the removal of vegetation and other possible sources of fire.

In July 2025, a company that manufactures ultralight aircraft approached SBCFPD to demonstrate a possible addition to their BDCFR inventory. The Pivotal Aero company demonstrated a VTOL, the *Helix*, an ultralight that could either be flown remotely or be piloted by an onboard operator.

Photo 14: Pivotal Aero *Helix* (pivotal.aero.com)

This ultralight Personal Aerial Vehicle (PAV) is just under 14 feet wide and 13.5 feet long. It has fixed rotors and tandem wings and has the capability of carrying a payload of 250 pounds onboard with a range of 20 or more miles at 65mph. The

Helix vehicle complies with the FAA Part 103 Ultralight category, so it does not require a pilot's license to operate.

The proposed purchase is to utilize the Pivotal *Helix* as a rapid response vehicle to fly out an equipped paramedic to a situation to administer immediate medical aid and support. This demonstration was also broadcast on a local Southern California news channel (cbsnews.com).

Evidence shows that with all the ongoing developments in AI software and drones and robotics, the BDCFR program will benefit SBCFPD, by reducing response time and avoid sending redundant resources to answer incident calls.

The SBCFPD drone/robotic program shows a bright future. Its endless growth can provide additional support for the dedicated men and women who serve as our first responders.

Water Resources

The CGJ members viewed the January 2025 wildfire events in Los Angeles County (LAC) and the resulting concerns of many Los Angeles residents. According to some news reports, some residents expressed concern that water hydrants were inoperable in that they could not be connected to firefighting equipment. Another reported concern was that no water flowed from some of the public water hydrants when opened.

Further concerns of residents centered around news reports that a billionaire mall developer was utilizing private fire protection services in an effort to save the mall, and thereby drained the limited public water source while residential homes were ablaze (calmatters.org/housing/2025/01/private-firefighters-insurers).

The CGJ set out to assess the level of preparedness in San Bernardino County as to the availability and utilization of water resources such as hydrants and public water sources in the event of similar fire disasters.

Water Hydrants

In LAC, the public water hydrants are maintained and serviced by the Department of Public Works, a county department. After the January 2025 fires in Los Angeles County, it was reported that 1,350 fire hydrants were in need of repair at the time of the fires. Consequently, there were disagreements between the Department of Public Works and the Fire Department as to accountability and responsibility for hydrant operability. (Majority of Faulty Los Angeles Hydrants Repaired or Replaced | Firehouse)

In contrast, in San Bernardino County the public water hydrants are maintained, repaired and monitored by a multitude of separate private water district entities throughout various jurisdictions in this large county.

On March 24, 2025, Cal Fire's maps of Estimated Wildfire Risk for Southern California (Updated from 2011) was reviewed ("Inland Empire faces significantly higher wildfire risk," Cal Fire says - Riverside Press Enterprise).

A random sampling of water districts within the SBC areas with the most significant increases in fire risk were reviewed regarding hydrant readiness. The hydrant maintenance and repair records for the last six to twelve months, including outside vendor contracts, if any, for hydrant service and repair were reviewed.

The CGJ reviewed detailed water district records, which indicated where precisely each hydrant is located, the hydrant connection specifications, the testing

methods, the flow capacity, paint or rust notations, the test operator, the readiness status and the date. In some instances, there were reports of damage, vehicle stricken or leaking water hydrants, calls by the fire department to assist with a leaking hydrant and the resulting work orders for repair.

The following data was noted from the Riverside Press Enterprise:

- City of Hesperia - Fire zone risk increased from 715 acres to 15,359 acres (an increase of 14,644 acres)

- Cucamonga Valley Water District (Rancho Cucamonga) - Fire zone risk increased from 5,553 acres to 8,871 acres (an increase of 3,318 acres)

- City of Chino Hills - Fire zone risk increased from 3,666 acres to 20,923 acres (an increase of 17,257 acres)

- Unincorporated San Bernardino County - Fire zone risk increased from 5,715 acres to 26,862 acres (an increase of 21,147 acres)

  o West Valley Water District, Rialto, CA 92376 - which serves 100,000 residents.

  o East Valley Water District, Highland, CA 92346 - which serves 108,000 residents.

According to evidence, the water districts have complete control regarding the state of readiness of the public water hydrants in their respective areas. There is officially no county oversight or formal reporting to exchange hydrant information between the County Department of Public Works-Special Districts, the SBCFPD or the water districts.

Evidence indicated that out-of-service hydrants are reported informally via email or telephone from the local water districts to SBCFPD for input into the digital dashboard displayed in every fire station. If the water district calls dispatch on the weekend, after hours or for a major issue, dispatch will send out an alert to those

impacted by the outage. The display page listing the hydrants affected is real time in nature and any updates will be seen on the digital dashboards within a few minutes.

Any issues with hydrant tampering are typically reported to dispatch. SBCFPD has been conducting a trial on tamper proof hydrant caps, and, through collaboration, special tools are provided which are necessary to open hydrants in those areas with large homeless populations.

There are redundancies built in for alternative water source access if a fire hydrant is inoperable or damaged. A nearby body of water or pool can be accessed, or a Water Tender (see glossary) may be utilized. In any event, the expectation is that the inoperable hydrant is generally reported via an Incident Report or After-Action Report so that it may be repaired.

There are also hydrants that are not maintained by a water district, as well as private hydrants.

While San Bernardino County Department of Public Works (DPW) - Special Districts does not maintain fire hydrants located along the over 2,500 miles of roadways in the County Maintained Road System (CMRS), DPW – Special Districts is responsible for managing, operating and administering certain County Service Areas (CSAs) that provide water and sanitation services. As part of those services, Special Districts maintains fire hydrants located within the boundaries of those CSA water districts.

The City of Ontario Fire Department, located within SBC, issued a procedure on January 7, 2025, notably during the LA fires. Fire Protection Standard #D008, *Private Hydrant Maintenance,* specifies requirements that apply to all privately owned fire hydrants within the City of Ontario. This comprehensive standard addresses the proper functioning, inspection, connections, servicing, repair and

reporting to Ontario Fire Department of private hydrants to ensure they are ready for emergency use. There is no similar policy at SBCFPD regarding standards for private hydrants that municipal firefighters may need to access during a fire event.

Neighboring counties provide ultimate governmental responsibility for the repair or maintenance of public fire hydrants. In Orange County, there is shared responsibility between the Fire Division and the Water and Sewage Division of the County, with the various water districts conducting flow testing and routine maintenance. In Riverside County, public hydrants are maintained by the City of Riverside or County of Riverside, following specific guidelines by the Riverside County Fire Department (Guidelines, Policies, and Standards - Riverside County Fire Department).

According to Riverside County Fire Department Policy (Guideline OFM-01B), the Office of the Fire Marshal retains final authority to determine compliance with facilities to which emergency response may be necessary.

It also has authority to ensure that both privately owned water-based fire protection systems, and public fire hydrants necessary for emergency response purposes will always be available for use. The OFM retains final authority to determine compliance (RVC Access and Water Guideline).

In contrast, there is no SBC official or department with ultimate authority and responsibility to ensure that the public water hydrants are kept in a ready state of operation and that statutorily mandated standards as to distance, flow and connection capabilities are followed. There are a multitude of private water districts that operate under their own authority and rules. Yet they also have responsibility for the public water hydrants.

The CGJ recommends that the Board of Supervisors request all water districts provide regular reports to SBCFPD showing compliance with federal guidelines and standards. The report should cover compliance with standards of hydrants including those previously called in to SBCFPD dispatch as inoperable. This will increase accountability and ensure compliance with statutorily mandated standards.

Evidence was received that there is a lack of certainty that standards and guidelines are followed to ensure functionality and operability of water hydrants in the county.

The Office of Emergency Services, SBCFPD and the Department of Public Works-Special Districts operate on trust that the many privately controlled water districts are fulfilling their obligation to maintain and service the public hydrants which are utilized by all firefighters.

Riverside County oversees hydrant regulations to ensure compliance with California Fire Building Codes and local ordinances. This includes guidelines for hydrant quantity and placement to enhance fire safety and response capabilities. Additionally, Riverside County has enacted strict regulations for both residential and commercial properties to promote conservation and efficiency (RVC Access and Water Guideline).

The CGJ recommends that the Board of Supervisors make SBCFPD aware of any existing formal agreements for hydrant services or consider initiating agreements with the water districts in the county which address maintenance, operability, functionality and communication standards. Formal agreements of which all parties are aware will increase communication, expectations, certainty and consistency between the partners.

Private Fire Protection Companies

There is growing concern throughout California over limited water resources. The water intended for public use and for public good should not be usurped by private entities with special interests. There should be regulations governing when and how public water sources may be accessed by others. Certainly, the public has a reasonable expectation of water availability and accessibility, especially during a disaster event.

With the increase in wildfire events and the resulting devastation, there is an increase in homeowners' and corporations' desire to enhance their own chances for the survival of their homes, buildings and resources. Some have turned to private firefighting entities to prioritize their interests rather than depend upon the local government fire departments which serve the public at large. Further, homeowners' insurance corporations, which seek to limit their liability during a disaster, seek an advantage in fighting the elements by providing private firefighters for the homes and buildings that they insure ("Los Angeles residents hire private firefighters to save their homes. Here's what they cost." - CBS News)

(calmatters.org/housing/2025/01/private-firefighters-insurers)

(npr.org/2025/01/18/nx-s1-5265301/california-wildfires-private-firefighters)

Evidence shows that there is little knowledge of private firefighting entities in our county, although they may exist.

With climate change affecting the severity and regularity of intense wildfires, it is largely anticipated that there will be a growing demand for private fire protection services. In fact, of those known to exist in California, many employ retired municipal firefighters.

(youtube.com/watch?v=LHgBz11455E) (calmatters.org/housing/2025/01/private-firefighters-insurers/) (npr.org/2025/01/18/nx-s1-5265301/california-wildfires-private-firefighters).

The Office of Emergency Services in Sacramento has regulatory authority over private firefighters in California. Introduced out of Los Angeles County, there is proposed legislation, Assembly Bill 1075, to prevent private firefighting entities throughout the state from using public water hydrants (cbsnews.com/sacramento/news/proposed-california-law-would-prohibit-private-firefighters-from-using-public-hydrants).

The current expectation is that the government firefighting entity leads the disaster response and communications. The Incident Commander may deny access on scene to private firefighters due to safety or other concerns. The potential for conflict is increasing due to the competing desires for the resources to protect their own interest, for the public good or for the private company or wealthy homeowner who employs them. (calmatters.org/housing/2025/01/private-firefighters-insurers) (youtube.com/watch?v=LHgBz11455E)

Napa Valley area vintners are particularly concerned with increased fire dangers. They are having difficulty getting fire insurance due to the liability and costs. Therefore, they are installing private water storage and hiring private firefighting forces (sfchronicle.com/food/wine/article/napa-vineyard-winery-fire-20319743.php).

One statewide concern is the decrease in federal funding for fire mitigation efforts, and the belief is that statewide there will be a resultant increase in private firefighting companies.

The private fire protection services industry is increasing, yet there is slight to no acknowledgment by San Bernardino County, geographically the largest in the country, that these entities even exist. The potential for others to access water sources and use public hydrants, if not regulated, is setting the stage for conflict over access and costs. The pending legislation, if passed, will prohibit water access that the private sector now has, which is likely to be a source of contention. There are no guidelines establishing an amenable working relationship. There is potential for significant issues if private firefighters are denied access and claim they were prohibited by an Incident Commander.

Lithium Batteries Concerns

Throughout this investigation the CGJ has learned that for the SBCFPD to maintain its state of preparedness, it can and will face a variety of fires. It takes three elements: fuel, heat and oxygen to cause a fire to ignite. This is called the fire triangle (sc.edu/ehs/training/Fire/01_triangle).
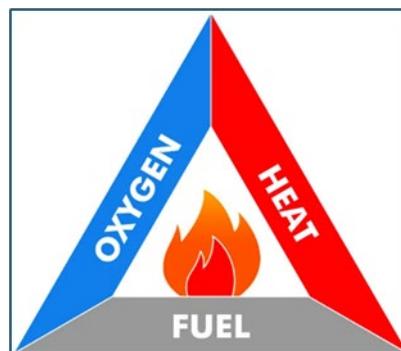
Photo 15: Fire Triangle (blazequel.com)

Once a fire starts it falls into one of the five classes listed below.
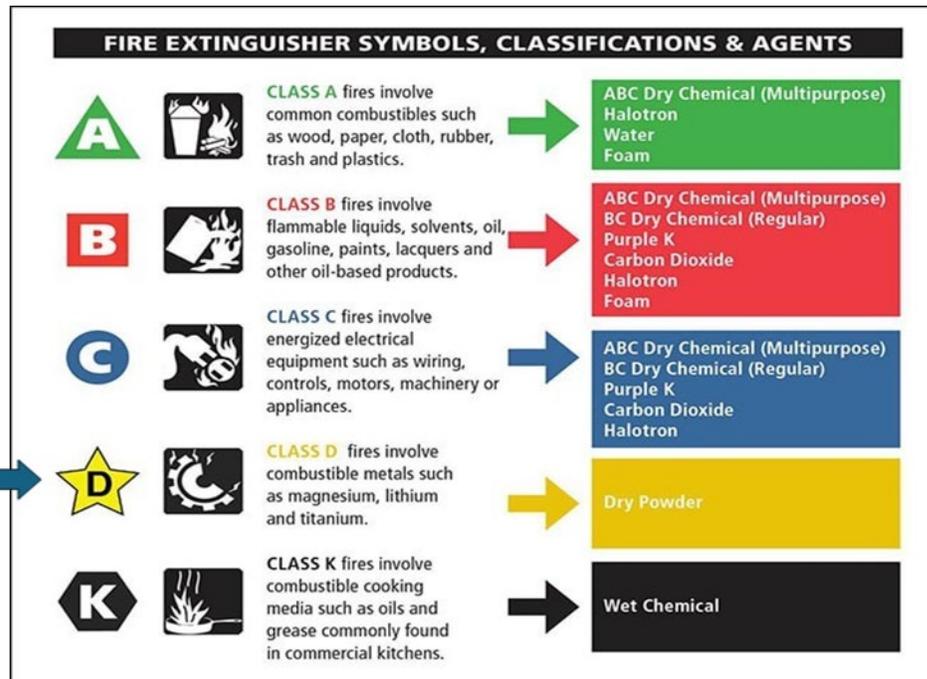
Chart 5: Fire Classes (fireextinguisherdepot.com)

With growing advancements in technology, we are now faced with one of the most challenging elements to deal with Lithium-ion fires, which is a Class D fire.

The element Lithium is found in the Lithium-ion Battery (LiB), which is rechargeable. These types of batteries are used in large numbers with a wide range of uses, such as our cell phones, computers, electric scooters and E-bikes. They also help supply solar backup power to our homes, businesses, and even to a city's power grid. One of the more popular uses of LiBs is electric vehicles (EV).
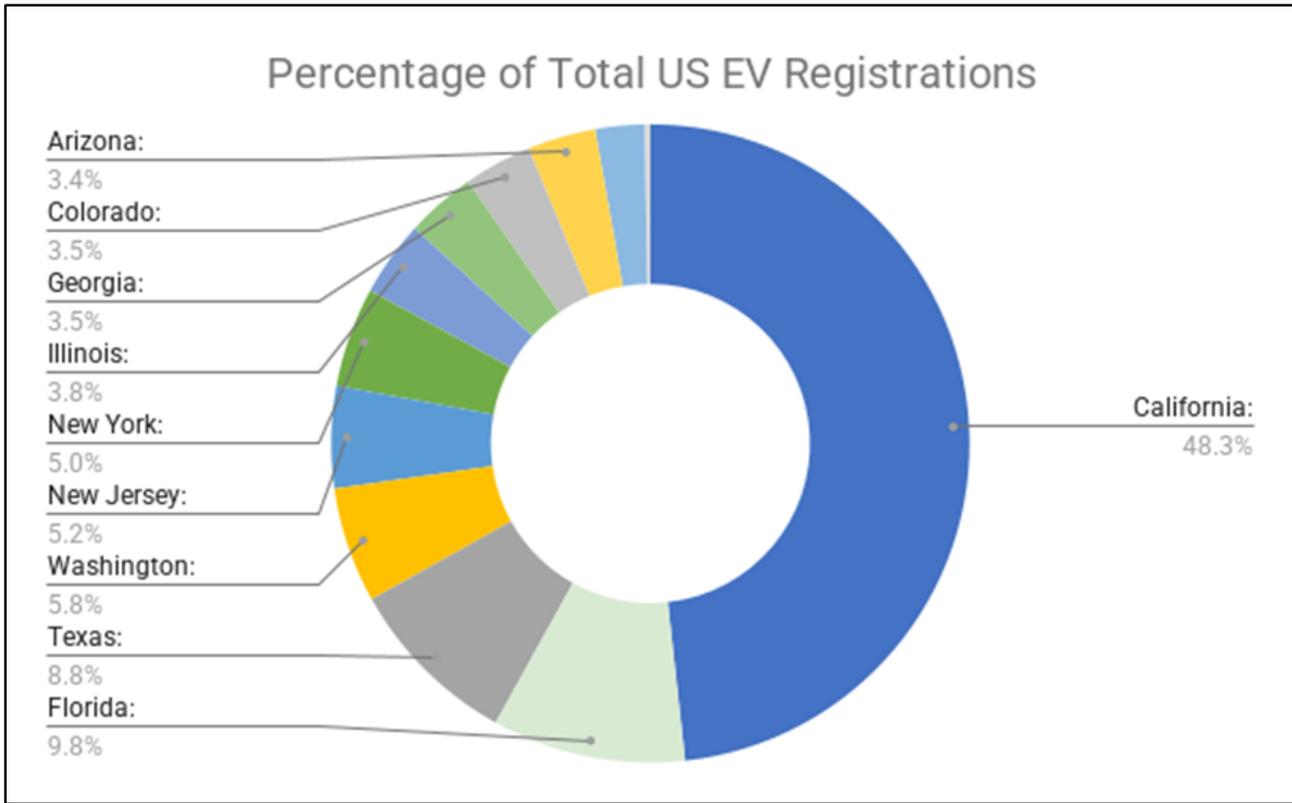
Chart 6: DOE E-vehicles registrations
(*https://www.recurrentauto.com/research/states-leading-the-ev-revolution*)

The US Department of Energy's September 2024 inquiry into Electric Vehicle (EV) registration. It shows that California has an estimated 48.3% of EV cars on the road, which breaks down to an estimated 1,256,646 vehicles.

To bring this data closer to home, SBC is fifth in light duty EV sales behind the other counties (Orange, Los Angeles, San Diego, Riverside). However, the county experienced the fastest rate of growth, from 8% of sales in 2021 to 19% of sales in 2024, which equates to 136% growth in four years.

SBC is second behind Los Angeles County in total non-residential system output capacity. Non-residential solar installations include the sectors of commercial, educational, industrial, military, non-profit, other government and unknown. In terms of residential solar generation capacity, San Bernardino County's

total solar output of 35.0 kilowatts per 100 residents, which is behind San Diego (57.1) and Riverside (46.2) counties, but ahead of Orange (24.3) and Los Angeles (10.1) counties. (https://indicators.sbcounty.gov/environment/green-innovation/)

The CGJ found that along with the positive advantages these power supplies give us, there is also a serious negative side. The fire they produce is a situation which has proved very difficult to extinguish due to the chemical makeup of the Lithium element itself.

This was very apparent to some in SBC on Friday July 26, 2024, at 5:57 am, when an overturned semi-truck transporting lithium batteries caught fire causing the shutdown of Interstate 15 (I-15) in both directions.

In a Caltrans news release on July 28, 2024, about 80 motorists were stranded for hours, causing the authorities to send in essential supplies and medical aid, including 100 gallons of diesel and 60 gallons of gasoline to stranded motorists. The I-15 freeway was finally reopened at 3:00 am Sunday July 28, 2024 (dot.ca.gov/news-releases/news-release-2024-027).

Fire usually requires heat, oxygen, and fuel. Unfortunately, when a LiB catches fire, the self-sustaining chain reaction generates excessive heat. The characteristic of a LiB fire becomes a major concern when it causes a "thermal runaway", which is a rapid, uncontrolled increase in temperature and energy. This often leads to ignition and possible explosion because as it burns (estimated range of 1,472°F to 2,192°F) it creates its own renewing heat source as well as producing its own oxygen source, making it very difficult to break the triangle of the fire (gasmet.com/blog).

Due to this characteristic, there is no simple method to extinguish this type of fire. The CGJ has found that the standard operation procedure to fight these types of fires is the use of a very large amount of water.

In addition to the use of water, the possible use of a large specially designed heavy duty fire blanket which covers the E-vehicle is to try to limit the amount of oxygen, and to manage the smoke and toxic gases that emanate from the batteries (gasmet.com/blog). One popular electric vehicle's maintenance manual state that it could take from 3,000 to 8,000 gallons of water to extinguish and cool the battery which could take up to 24 hours.

In an April 2021 article on the Popular Science.com website, it was reported in Houston, Texas, that one EV fire took up to four hours and nearly 30,000 gallons of water to extinguish (popsci.com/story/technology/electric-vehicle-battery-tesla-fire).

There are new possibilities being developed, such as specialized extinguishing agents, innovative fire-retardant materials and a high-pressure water delivery system (fireapparatusmagazine.com/fire-technology-innovation).

The CGJ acknowledges that the lithium-ion battery hazards are not only a county issue, or state, or even a federal one. This is a global concern, and it will be resolved through continual research and innovative thinking.

COMMENDATION

The San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury commends the Board of Supervisors. During this investigation the CGJ found the board has continually supported the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District in its ongoing efforts

to protect the county. This support has been crucial and has led to some new and promising technological advances.

<u>CONCLUSION</u>

San Bernardino County is a tinderbox. Its mountains, deserts, scrublands, urban and suburban neighborhoods render it particularly susceptible to wildfires and structure blazes. FEMA's Fire Risk Analysis rates San Bernardino County as the third most hazardous county in the country. The rating is not unusual, or unexpected. FEMA rates many California counties as high-fire risks; several are in the top ten. FEMA isn't assigning blame, though; its ratings merely acknowledge that California's locations and climates, Southern California especially and San Bernardino in particular, contribute to elevated fire risks.

Although San Bernardino County rates high in risk, it also rates high in resilience: it recovers from disasters, learns from them and journeys to the future with confidence in its abilities to provide effective, efficient and timely responses to fire-related crises, and thus to protect its people, property and the environment.

San Bernardino County also has quality and dedicated personnel, an innovative technological approach to firefighting and a Board of Supervisors that supports the county's Fire Protection District. San Bernardino is prepared to respond to events and to confront and overcome the risks.

They Are Ready!

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings:	Recommendations:	Implementation Date:	Required Responses:
F-1: The SBCFPD's maintenance personnel must go back and forth between the two maintenance yards and department's parts warehouse, which is in a third location. This causes delays in the repair of out-of-service fire apparatuses.	**R-1:** That the SBCFPD consolidates these three locations.	07/01/26	**SBC Board of Supervisors**
F-2: SBCFPD has introduced drones and robotics into its firefighting arsenal but has insufficient resources and qualified personnel to take advantage of this new technology. As a result, the district cannot fully implement its Drone First Response program.	**R-2:** That the SBC Board of Supervisors provide funding for resources and personnel so that the SBCFPD can fully implement their DFR program.	07/01/26	**SBC Board of Supervisors**
F-3: SBCFPD trains new recruits through its fire	**R-3:** That SBCFPD increase the incentives to retain firefighters.	07/01/26	**SBC Board of Supervisors**

academy to meet the qualifications necessary for firefighting certification. The district, though, does not provide competitive incentives to retain many of these recruits. As a result, after completing their academy training, many recruits leave SBCFPD to seek employment with other fire agencies, leaving the district with insufficient certified firefighters.			
F-4: OSHA requires compliance with its "2-in/2-out" rule of four firefighters for each deployed fire engine, but SBCFPD does not comply, instead deploying only three per engine. As a result, this lack of a fourth (and required) firefighter creates delay when that fourth is needed and reduces	**R-4:** That the SBC Board of Supervisors increase the number of firefighters per engine available to SBCFPD.	**07/01/26**	**SBC Board of Supervisors**

the district's capacity to fight fires and rescue victims.			
F-5: There is no official routine documentation provided by independent water districts to SBCFPD about the readiness of public water hydrants to deliver sufficient water to combat fires. As a result, SBCFPD is unaware of the readiness status of these hydrants and is unsure of the district's capacity to hook up and extinguish the fires.	**R-5:** That the SBC Board of Supervisors provide any current agreements with SBCFPD and create a procedure to obtain regular reports from all SBC water districts providing SBCFPD with reports indicating compliance with all guidelines and standards.	07/01/26	**SBC Board of Supervisors**

GLOSSARY

(Note: While there are numerous terms used within the firefighting community, the following are a sampling of those learned by the San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury during their investigation.)

Advanced life support system (ALS): A system in which the paramedic provider provider level is a component. (LawInsider.com/Dictionary)

Aerial ladder: A firefighting apparatus that has a permanently mounted or telescoping ladder usually constructed of steel, aluminum or a combination of metal alloys. It is operated via a hydraulic fluid and lift system in conjunction with steel cables and pulleys. These ladders vary in size and reach heights of 100 feet or more. (LawInsider.com/Dictionary)

Alarm: 1) System for detecting and reporting unusual conditions such as smoke, fire, flood, loss of air, hazmat release, etc. 2) A suspicious specific assignment of multiple fire companies and/or units to a particular incident, usually a fire in nature. 3) A centralized dispatch center for interpreting alarms and dispatching resources. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Apparatus: A term usually used by firefighters describing a piece of mobile firefighting equipment, such as an engine, a pumper, a tanker, a ladder truck, etc. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Authority having jurisdiction (AHJ): Organization or agency with legal authority over a given type of incident, for example fire, EMS, star SAR, arson, hazmat; May change or overlap as the incident changes. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Available flow: Total amount of water that can be put on a fire depending upon water supply, pump size, hoses and distance to the fire. Incident commander must assess available flow to determine whether additional apparatus or streams are required. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Battalion: A geographic area consisting of one or more stations supervised by a Battalion Chief. (CalFire)

Contract City or "Partnering Agency": An incorporated city or municipality which contracts with the CAL FIRE or Riverside County Fire Department for dispatch, fire protection and emergency medical services. (CalFire)

Division: A geographic area consisting of a group of battalions. Divisions are managed by a Division Chief. (CalFire)

Discharge flow: The amount of water flowing from a fire hydrant when it's open, compared to static flow and residual flow. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Drone (Unmanned Aircraft Vehicle): An aircraft operated without the possibility of direct human intervention from or on the aircraft (defined by the FAA), (SBCFD OpsDir3130)

Drone First Responder (DFR): In an emergency, a fast response saves lives. Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) or "drones" have become a critical tool for providing real time situational awareness and public safety operations. A drone as first responder (DFR) system includes prepositioning drones at launch stations, enabling rapid, remote UAF deployment to an incident. Launch stations are spaced strategically so drones can arrive on scene in minutes, often before emergency response personnel. The drones transmit critical information back to emergency teams in real time allowing for faster and better-informed decision making. (dhs.gov/AEL03OE 07SUAS dtd 11July 2025)

Emergency Communication Center (ECC): The department's 911 call center is the heart of the department. All initial reports, incident support functions, equipment and status-keeping are part of this 24/7 operation; carried out by highly trained dispatchers and supervisory staff. (CalFire)

Engine: An engine is a piece of emergency response apparatus that carries water, fire hoses and ladders. (CalFire)

Firefighter: Certified personnel who respond to fire alarms and other emergencies for fire suppression, rescue and related duties. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Fire Hydrant: A valved connection on a water supply or storage system for the purpose of providing water for fire protection and suppression operations. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Fire Risk Assessment: A Fire Risk Assessment is the systematic evaluation of a building, facility or workplace to identify potential fire hazards, assess the likelihood of a fire occurring and analyze the consequences in case a fire does break out. (www.ecconline.com/glossary)

Fire Marshal: Administrative and investigative office for fire prevention and arson investigation. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Fire Suppression Personnel: Employees in the classifications of fire captain, fire engineer, firefighter and firefighter/paramedic**. (**LawInsider.com)

Hazardous material: A substance or material that potentially poses danger to life and property due to its properties. (CalFire)

High-pressure system: A supplemental pump system used to pressurize the water supply, sometimes used during a large fire, or whenever more than one hydrant is being used. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH): More narrowly defined by OSHA. And often requires increased personnel accountability**.** (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Incident Command System (ICS): The theory and structure of which incidents are operationally managed. ICS is the result of the 1970 fire siege in Southern California. This system is utilized for the smallest of incidents, such as traffic collision and can expand with resources and personnel to manage the needs of a large-scale disaster. A tried-and-true method of incident management, ICS is used world-wide. (CalFire)

Incident Management Team (IMT): Group of trained personnel that coordinates and manages responses to emergencies and complex incidents, ensuring effective command and control. (CalFire)

Initial Attack Response: Resources committed to the incident during the early minutes/hours of an incident. (CalFire)

Mutual Aid: Agreements between agencies to assist in emergencies and other incidents. (CalFire)

On-call (Paid): Personnel who can be summoned and paid when necessary to respond to an incident; a type of volunteer fire department. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia) (Minnesota State Fire Dept Association Article dtd 27 May 2022)

Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA): A U.S. government agency concerned with regulating employee safety, particularly in hazardous occupations such as firefighting**.** (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Parts chasers: Personnel who are dispatched to pick up vehicle parts/equipment from one location and are transported to another location. (SBCFPD)

Robotics: Design, construction and use of machines (robots) to perform tasks done traditionally by human beings. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA): Atmosphere-supplying respirator for which the breathing air source is designed to be carried by the user. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Search and rescue (SAR): Entering a fire building or collapse zone for an orderly search for victims and removal of live victims. Becomes "recovery" if victims are not likely to be found alive. (CalFire)

Structure Fire: A fire in a building (residence, commercial building, garage, etc.) (CalFire)

Thermal Runaway: One of the primary risks related to lithium-ion batteries. It is a phenomenon in which the lithium-ion battery cell enters an uncontrollable self-heating state. (Glossary of firefighting- Wikipedia)\

Two-in, two-out: Refers to the standard safety tactic of having one team of two firefighters enter a hazardous zone (IDLH), while at least two others stand by outside in case the first two need rescue thus requiring a minimum of four firefighters on scene prior to starting an interior attack. It also refers to the buddy system which firefighters never enter or leave a burning structure alone. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Volunteer fire department: An organization of part-time firefighters who may or may not be paid for on-call time or firefighting duty time, but who in nearly all states are held to the same professional training standards and take the same examinations to advance in rank as career firefighters. (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

Water Tender: A fixed-tank mobile vehicle that supplies fire engines with water when other water sources are not available. Some water tenders have the capability of "sidebar" pumping or pumping directly from the tank while mobile. Tanks on water tenders range in size from 500 to over 5,000 gallons. (CalFire)

Wildfire or wildland fire: Fires in forests, grasslands, prairies or other natural areas not involving structure fires. (CalFire) (Glossary of Firefighting-Wikipedia)

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The Apple Valley Animal Shelter

A Road Map to Improvement

SUMMARY

In the 1970's, there was a movie called *Bless the Beasts and the Children*. The theme song, by the same name, was made popular by *"Carpenters"*. The first verse begins with these words (De Vorzon and Batkin):

Bless the Beasts and the Children,
For in this world they have no voice, they have no choice.

Our society owes it to the least of us, the animals who cannot speak for themselves, to treat them with decency. The Apple Valley Animal Shelter (AVAS) is the subject of this 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury (GJ) report.

After reviewing multiple complaints about the shelter, the GJ investigated AVAS to find out about the treatment of the animals in their care.

The Grand Jury found that the employees of the shelter do care about the animals.

There are, however, many circumstances that have come together to make caring for these animals difficult. This report details these circumstances. The investigation found evidence of some problems.

The main concern is the high euthanasia rate (the percentage of animals euthanized: avma.com). The rate is extremely high, for cats in particular. The report details other areas of concern, including insufficient staffing; overcrowding; lack of space for the number of animals; mismanagement and importantly, a months-long contract negotiation with the County of San Bernardino (SBC) to buy AVAS from the Town of Apple Valley. Because the negotiations for a possible purchase had been ongoing since June 2024, it had left the employees of AVAS in a state of limbo, with positions going unfilled. Therefore, morale was very low. The employees were

overworked and spent over a year not knowing if, in the future, they would be Town of Apple Valley employees or SBC employees.

Finally, in July of 2025, the Apple Valley Town Council voted to reject the offer from the County of San Bernardino to buy AVAS. This report, then, is written to the Apple Valley Town Council, who now owns the shelter without a contract with SBC.

Despite the problems at AVAS, the GJ found that the employees of the shelter, as well as residents of Apple Valley and other people in San Bernardino County do care about the animals.

BACKGROUND

Approximately fifty miles northeast of the City of San Bernardino is a community called Apple Valley. It is a smaller, mostly residential rural community, and it houses approximately 76,000 people (census.gov). Apple Valley lies in the Mojave Desert of San Bernardino County, the closest city being Victorville. In the 1960s, Apple Valley was the home of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans – the Double R Bar Ranch. To the public, Apple Valley was an all-American desert town - the home of their favorite cowboy. It is also in Apple Valley that an animal shelter was created fifty years later. It is called the Apple Valley Animal Shelter (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apple_Valley,_California).

Apple Valley Animal Shelter started out many years ago as an idea formed by a small group of people. They wanted to create a league that would help the animal population in their area. This group met with the National Humane Society in 1956, and in 1958 formed the Victor Valley Animal Protective League. In 1960, the group received a land donation from Newton T. Bass, a donor representing the Apple Valley

Foundation, a philanthropic group. A shelter was soon built on those grounds in 1962. It originally was built as a private home, and it operated as the key animal refuge in the area until the 1980s. In 2005, this shelter expanded; however, it was determined that the facility was still too small to meet the needs of the expanding community. On Saturday, May 8, 2010, a new shelter opened – the Apple Valley Animal Shelter (applevalley.org › historical-points-of-interest).

The new AVAS is located at 22131 Powhatan Road in Apple Valley. It is a one-of-a-kind shelter for animals. The architecture is beautifully created in a Southwestern style to match the surrounding desert and is built in the shape of a 'U' to allow for a courtyard which is protected from the wind. On the inside of the building is an atrium with skylights. Planter boxes line the kennel areas. It is a beautiful, modern and clean facility.

Photo 1: Front of AVAS Shelter (from the Town of Apple Valley website)

AVAS, which cost approximately eight million dollars to build, is a vast 36,000 square feet facility and includes the following:

- space for 115 dogs - many of the kennels have indoor/outdoor access
- space for 134 cats including viewing rooms
- an aviary
- a courtyard
- an area for livestock
- a special room for exotic pets
- a spacious entry/lobby area
- an unfinished large room that can be used for educational purposes or for vaccine clinics on the weekend (originally meant for a medical/surgical clinic area, but was never completed)
- vacant property that can possibly be used for future addition(s) because the grounds are extensive.

(applevalley.org/Home/Components/426/119?arch=1&page=41)

AVAS began as a municipal animal shelter serving the residents of the Town of Apple Valley only. However, on January 1, 2013, less than three years after its original opening, AVAS contracted with San Bernardino County to take in animals from the unincorporated areas of Victor Valley. There are fifteen unincorporated towns in Victor Valley. Taking on the responsibility to house all these animals is a huge task for any facility but especially one that is just starting out. The main reason for this contract was that San Bernardino County Animal Control did not have another facility in the High Desert area, so some of the animals were routed to the newly built and large facility of AVAS. This new contract was in effect for ten years until 2023 and was approved by the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors

(BOS). The contract was then extended for one year from July 2023 to the end of June 2024.

Photo 2: AVAS Courtyard (Courtesy of 2025 SBC Civil Grand Jury)

Photo 3: Example of one shelter's Animal Exercise Yard (Courtesy of 2025 SBC Civil Grand Jury).

This contract cost the county $183,875 for a six-month period. It also included a one-time bonus of $35,000 for necessary supplies and additional kennels, and it mandated care for pets in the unincorporated areas of Victor Valley. Each year following this agreement for the next ten years, the county paid $297,750 annually (vv.dailypress.com). In 2023, the Board of Supervisors passed another contract as a renewal to the 2013 arrangement. This time AVAS received $1,110,122 for the fiscal year 2023-2024.

The contract between AVAS and SBC had been in ongoing negotiations since mid-2024. As of this writing, the Apple Valley Town Council voted to terminate the contract with San Bernardino County. The shelter will now service the Town of Apple Valley residents only.

Some people had been very vocal as to the activities at AVAS when the shelter had contracted with San Bernardino County. Activists, members of rescue groups (see Glossary) and others had spoken loudly about their concerns at public town council meetings, the County Board of Supervisors' meetings and on social media. Some had travelled great distances in Southern California to voice their disapproval of what they perceived as an unacceptably high euthanasia rate.

METHODOLOGY

These concerns were like large ripples in a pond and eventually gained the attention of the San Bernardino Civil Grand Jury. The Grand Jury began an investigation into the Apple Valley Animal Shelter.

To facilitate the GJ's investigation, several sources of information were reviewed. The GJ interviewed several complainants as well as AVAS administrators

and employees. The GJ also interviewed San Bernardino County employees and some officials from the Town of Apple Valley.

The GJ reviewed several documents including complaints, the law about animals in California, disposition reports, lost-and-found animal reports, budgets, organizational charts and the AVAS *Policy and Procedures Manual.*

The GJ visited several other animal shelters of similar size and operations. Some were owned by SBC, some were operated by Humane Societies (see Glossary), and some were city owned. One of these observations was of a shelter outside San Bernardino County. It was a facility similar in size and geographical region to AVAS.

The GJ researched multiple internet sites such as the SBC website, the Town of Apple Valley website, social media and news sites.

The GJ also reviewed the minutes from the Apple Valley Town Council (AVTC) meetings, as well as the minutes from Board of Supervisors meetings.

After completing the investigation, the San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury wrote this report about the Apple Valley Animal Shelter.

DISCUSSION

** Special Note**

The GJ notes that at the time of writing this report, AVAS was owned and operated by the Town of Apple Valley and had been contracting with the County of San Bernardino for some services.

The Law

Hayden's Act, SB 1785 (see Glossary) was enacted in 1998 to codify and amend how shelter animals in California are to be treated, adopted out and returned to owners. The law either added to or amended sections of the *Civil Code*, the *Food and Agricultural Code* and the *Penal Code*.

The bill provided that "all depositories of live animals have a duty to provide them with necessary and prompt veterinary care, nutrition, and shelter, and to treat them humanely." (California State Legislature, *Hayden's Act*).

The law states several items including (along with other provisions):

- that shelters and humane organizations share a common purpose in saving animals' lives and work together to end euthanasia of adoptable and treatable animals, as redemption is preferable to incurring the social and economic costs of euthanasia,
- that shelters promote spay and neuter programs and not adopt out animals that are not spayed or neutered,
- that "shelters should be required by law to take in lost animals and properly care for them with prompt veterinary care, nutrition, and shelter and treat them kindly" (California State Legislature, *Hayden's Act*).

Hayden's Act continues on to state that it is the policy of California that no adoptable or treatable animal should be euthanized if it can be adopted into a suitable home.

Hayden's Act amended §31108 (see Glossary) of the *Food and Agricultural Act* as to the required holding period for stray dogs and cats, increasing it to four or six days, dependent upon days and hours of operation of the shelter. It also required

that prior to euthanasia an animal for any other reason but irremediable suffering is to be surrendered to animal rescue or adoption organizations.

§31752.5 was added to the *Food and Agricultural Code* to read that: ... domestic cats' temperaments range from completely docile indoor pets to completely unsocialized outdoor cats that avoid all contact with humans. Feral cats [see Glossary] are cats with temperaments that are completely unsocialized, although frightened or injured tame pet cats may appear to be feral. . . If an apparently feral cat has not been reclaimed within the first three days of the required holding period, shelter personnel qualified to verify the temperament of the animal shall verify whether it is feral or tame by using a standardized protocol. . . If the cat is determined to be truly feral, the cat may be euthanized or relinquished to a nonprofit (law.justia.com/codes).

AVAS is inconsistent with the holding period for animals provided for by *Hayden's Act* as evidence shows that the shelter will sometimes euthanize animals at 3 days (72 hours), rather than the 4-day (96 hours) holding period required by *Hayden's Act.*

Before April 2025, evidence shows that AVAS was waiting to vaccinate some animals, rather than performing vaccinations when the dogs and cats were first impounded. However, currently the shelter is vaccinating most animals right away with the exception of those who are too difficult to handle. Animals under *Hayden's Act* are supposed to receive prompt veterinary care. Vaccinations are a form of veterinary care that is useful in preventing the spread of disease.

Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters

The "Association of Shelter Veterinarians", an organization of international veterinarians, wrote the *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters (2022)* to provide information to help any animal welfare entity meet the physical, mental and behavioral needs of animals in their care. The Guidelines were developed to identify unacceptable practices, minimum standards and best practices (www.sheltervet.org).

The "American Veterinary Medical Association" wrote guidelines called *Animal Welfare Principles* to provide a model for the welfare of animals across multiple types of organizations, including animal shelters. These guidelines were based upon *The Five Freedoms,* originally written by Great Britain's Farm Animals Welfare Council, which provide that animals are entitled to the following:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- Freedom to express normal behavior
- Freedom from fear and distress (www.animalhumanesociety.org).

Evidence shows that areas in which AVAS is inconsistent with the recommendations of *The Five Freedoms,* include:

1. Sound Control – "Cats, in particular, are adversely affected by the sound of barking dogs. . . Because sound can have a detrimental effect, interventions to reduce sound in shelters are important for animal health and well-being" (www.sheltervet.org, page 17).
   When cats are brought to AVAS upon intake, are placed in an area where they can hear dogs barking. The GJ recommends that the Apple Valley

Town Council direct the shelter to move the cats away from the barking dogs or soundproof the cat holding areas.

2. Cleaning and Disinfection – Ideally, sanitation protocols should be developed and periodically reviewed in consultation with a veterinarian. Enough staff must be assigned to complete sanitation tasks promptly each day so that animals spend the majority of their time in sanitary conditions. (www.sheltervet.org, page 20).

   The shelter has been understaffed in the last few months, while the SBC and the Town of Apple Valley were in negotiations. The GJ recommends that the Apple Valley Town Council fill all the open positions at the shelter.

3. Vaccinations – "Because risk of disease exposure is often high in shelters, animals must be vaccinated at or prior to intake with core vaccines" (www.sheltervet.org, page 25).

   The GJ found that vaccinations had not been given to every animal immediately upon intake at AVAS. After the distemper outbreak in April 2025 the staff began to vaccinate almost all animals right away. The GJ recommends that AVAS buy and use varied sizes of "squeeze cages" (see Glossary) so that all animals, whether feral or not, can be vaccinated, as the Guidelines suggest.

4. Enrichment and socialization – "Enrichment refers to the process for improving the environment and behavioral care of confined animals. . . The purpose . . . is to reduce stress and improve well-being. . . and should be given the same significance as other components of veterinary care" (www.sheltervet.org, page 34).

   Currently, AVAS does not have enough employees or volunteers to properly exercise and train the animals. The GJ recommends that Apple

Valley Town Council hire all positions that are open at the shelter. Most of the open positions include the essential workers who clean cages and perform other necessary functions for the animals.

5. Feral cats – "Appropriate procedures for handling and minimizing stress in feral cats have been described. For example, when capturing or transporting feral cats, squeeze cages, feral cat boxes or humane box traps with dividers should be used for the most humane restraint and for administering tranquilizing injections prior to handling". (www.sheltervet.org, page 39).

Budget and the Trap-Neuter-Vaccination-Release Program

When the 2024 fiscal year ended, AVAS received another $1,110,122 and an amended amount of $1,174,418 for a total of $2,284,540 from the County of San Bernardino. (San Bernardino County website)

Of this money, $100,000 was slated to go to a Cat Trap-Neuter-Vaccination-Release (TNVR) Program. In a TNVR (see Glossary) program, the citizens are responsible for trapping feral cats and bringing them to AVAS. The staff of the shelter then take the animal(s) to a veterinarian for neutering. The citizen retrieves the animal from the veterinarian and returns the animal(s) back into the community, into the same area from which they were originally trapped. The veterinarian has also clipped an ear to indicate that the animal was neutered (animalcare.sbcounty.gov/tnvr).

Based on the information provided in AVAS' disposition reports (which are accessible on the Apple Valley Town website), March 2025 was the first time that animals were released from the shelter after TNVR. The money was in the contract,

but it took some time partially because there was a change of leadership. The shelter is now actively doing TNVR for cats.

Facts about Apple Valley Animal Shelter

The following table describes the AVAS employees' expected duties:

Employee Position	Duties
Animal Services Manager	Shelter administrator: performs marketing, community relations and social media, liaison with public/ private organizations, manages animal service contracts/ grants, provides fundraising and budget oversight, supervises daily technician activities, manages administrative lien process and billing. Reports directly to the Town of Apple Valley's Town Manager.
Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB)	Evaluates the shelter's animals' behaviors; trains and modifies animals' behavior, educates pet owners on their animal's behavior.
Shelter Supervisor	Maintains and manages compliance with Veterinary Medical Board licensing, supervises daily shelter activities, oversees the paraprofessional veterinary care services, control substance inventory and completes the shelter's usage logs.
Registered Veterinary Technician (RVT)	Trained and certified to work under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian; performs vaccination and euthanasia, responsible for maintaining and managing the health and welfare of all the shelter's animals.
Animal Health Assistant	Assist the RVT in their duties, *i.e.* performing injections, and microchipping animals, managing the health and welfare of all the shelter's animals.
Animal Health Assistant	Assist the RVT in their duties, *i.e.* performing injections, and microchipping animals, managing the health and welfare of all the shelter's animals.

Rescue-Shelter Liaison (RSL)	Works as a liaison with rescue organization and fostering programs; works with the intake of exotic animals.
Animal Services Assistants	Cleaning kennels/cages; transferring, exercising, feeding and socializing animals (if possible); and working with RVTs to provide for the health and welfare of the shelter's animals.
Front Desk Employees	Community outreach, community education, answer phones, greet the public, accept adoption and fostering applications

Table 1: Job descriptions of AVAS employees (AVAS Organizational Chart)

Photo 4: AVAS Outdoor Part of Indoor/Outdoor Kennels
(Courtesy of 2025 SBC Civil Grand Jury)

Photo 5: Indoor Sections of Indoor/Outdoor Kennels at AVAS
(Courtesy of 2025 SBC Civil Grand Jury)

Other Facts

The facility at AVAS has the following:

- There are 114 indoor and outdoor dog kennels; 78 of those kennels are viewable to the public for adoption.
- For cats, there are 93 kennels and 38 more in the adoption area. There is also a cat "community room" where cats that get along can run free.

Photo 6: Cat Community Room
(Courtesy of 2025 SBC Civil Grand Jury)

- AVAS does not just shelter dogs and cats. At times, they also have exotic animals such as lizards, snakes and turtles. They even have livestock occasionally.

- Operating hours for the Animal Shelter: open Tuesday – Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. It is closed on Sundays, Mondays and designated holidays (www.applevalley.org).

The facility fee schedule is:

- The adoption fee for a dog is $75 which includes spay/neuter, first vaccination and microchip. There is also an additional $10 rabies fee and

a license fee which is $13.20 for Apple Valley residents. Additionally, it is $86 for a dog license if the dog is not sterile.

- For cats, the adoption fee is $35 which includes spay/neuter and first vaccination (animalcare.sbcounty.gov/fees).

- The fees to foster (see Glossary) animals are free including veterinary needs and food. The fostering parent(s) need to provide a safe home and transportation for vet appointments. Due to a new grant, AVAS is restructuring the foster program. They are accepting animals from Apple Valley Residents only (www.applevalley.org).

- Veterans, by California State law, are allowed to adopt one pet every six months without paying an adoption fee (CA. Senate Bill 245, Chapter 205, Section 2)

It is expensive to start an animal rescue organization in California. A group needs to set up nonprofit organization status (Internal Revenue Code §501(c)(3)), obtain necessary licenses and permits, secure funding and create a volunteer base to assist. This does not include food, bedding, toys, bowls, veterinary costs, nor the fees to "pull" a rescue animal (see Glossary). These organizations are crucial for animal shelters, as they will sometimes adopt "unadoptable animals" and get them ready for adoption while fostering them.

Looking at the AVAS Disposition Summary (see Table 2), one can see the varied dispositions, along with the number of animals, that occurred at AVAS from November 2024 through April 2025.

AVAS Disposition Date by Month (Nov 2024 thru Apr 2025)

Disposition	11/2024	12/2024	01/2025	02/2025	03/2025	04/2025
Pets Adopted	143	156	121	114	111	47
Citizen Holding/ Foster	7	6	11	8	10	19
Died Medical	14	8	2	5	21	5
DOA (Dead on Arrival)	81	83	97	103	114	94
Euthanized – Not Adoptable	71	77	28	15	49	70
Euthanized – Space	5	23	21	20	20	6
Euthanized – Health	58	85	19	57	87	107
Euth. – Owner Request	11	12	23	8	6	9
Released	0	0	0	0	8	17
Rescued	133	120	176	141	147	121
Return to Owner	27	28	34	25	37	23
Transfer	1	4	17	37	22	45

Table 2 Summary of AVAS Monthly Disposition 11.24 to 4.25 (Created by 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury)

For complaints, contact AVAS by e-mail, phone, or in person. If the matter is not handled appropriately, the next step is to make a complaint to the town administration. AVAS does not currently have a formal written complaint process, nor a log of complaints.

Negotiations

For the last decade AVAS has needed improvements:

- expanding the number of kennels which are at times over capacity;
- building a medical facility/clinic, which they do not currently have, into the shelter;
- expanding a play/work- out area for the animals outside; perhaps utilizing the extra space they have (for example, the courtyard);
- better temperature control for the inside because the indoor areas of the kennels are very cold.

These improvements had been put on hold because negotiations with San Bernardino County buying the shelter were on-going. The Town of Apple Valley, its residents and its animal shelter employees did not know if the shelter would be county-owned or municipality-owned in the future.

Recently, however, the Apple Valley Town Council voted to terminate its contract with the County of San Bernardino. The Council voted to end its contract with the county within 30 days of its July 2025 decision.

Improvements can now be made in the shelter, since negotiations are no longer pending.

Community and Rescue Groups' Perceptions of AVAS

At many recent Apple Valley Town Council and Board of Supervisor meetings, during the public comment phase, there were consistently several speakers who had complaints concerning the Apple Valley Animal Shelter's treatment of cats and dogs. The speakers complained that the shelter mistreats its animals, does not vaccinate the animals, does not clean the shelter's kennels properly, has banned rescue organizations and, according to the public complainants, unnecessarily euthanized animals. After the GJ investigated these public complaints, it was determined some complaints were unfounded rumors and unverified chatter from social media. Additionally, the majority of the complainants were members of rescue organizations. Some were not citizens of the Town of Apple Valley or even San Bernardino County.

Some networkers (see Glossary) complained of being banned from AVAS and forbidden to pull any animals. The rescuers also complained about not being able to communicate, for multiple reasons, with the AVAS employee(s) responsible for

being a Rescue-Shelter Liaison (RSL) (see Glossary). The shelter and the rescue groups in the community need to cooperate fully and work together for the wellbeing of the animals. The GJ learned that the shelter liaison is unable to answer these communications through texting. The Grand Jury recommends that the Liaison(s) be given the ability to text with these groups on a shelter-owned cell phone, used only for rescue group-shelter communication. This will speed up communication and may help expedite the rescue of some animals.

Euthanasia: General Information

Euthanasia (see Glossary) at animal shelters is designed to end an animal's suffering in a way that minimizes the animals' pain, fear and distress.

- Reasons – it can be used in various situations, including, but not limited to:
    - Terminal illness or severe injury with no treatment options.
    - Chronic pain or suffering that cannot be adequately managed.
    - Severe behavioral problems that are not manageable or pose a risk.
    - Not adoptable for a variety of reasons, including behavior issues or age of the animal.
- Method: the most common method used at shelters on cats and dogs is intravenous injection of Sodium Pentobarbital (SP), a barbiturate anesthetic that induces rapid unconsciousness and death.
- Procedure: the process typically involves:
    - Sedation or anesthesia to ensure the animal is calm and comfortable.
    - Administering the SP intravenously.
    - Confirming death by checking for lack of pulse, breathing and responsiveness (avma.org/euthanasia).

Euthanasia at AVAS

An issue with euthanasia at AVAS is the high euthanasia rate, one of the highest of any shelter in California. In order to lower that rate, the following suggestions are offered:

1. Provide a Euthanasia List – The Grand Jury has found that AVAS does not provide a daily "Euthanasia list" to the public through its website or social media platforms, although a confusing "Urgent" list is circulated. A "Euthanasia list", which shows animals reaching the end of their stay, along with pictures of the animals being sheltered that are available to be fostered or adopted, may increase the chances of them being saved. All animals need to be on one of the lists, even if they are considered "unadoptable". Some rescue groups may adopt these animals and work with them to become adoptable. Putting euthanasia lists on-line every day has caused anger in the past among different people who object to the fact that so many animals are on the list. Evidence shows, however, that publishing a daily euthanasia list is essential for direct and honest communication with the public, because possible fosters, adopters and rescue groups need to know exactly when each animal will be euthanized. Groups can respond by asking to pull an animal. This would possibly save animals' lives.

2. Hire or Train a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist – A Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB, see Glossary) is trained to observe animals, conduct research and analyze data to understand why animals behave the way they do. They can recognize and diagnose issues like aggression, anxiety, phobias and compulsive behaviors in animals. Based on their understanding of animal behavior, they create plans to address these problems using techniques like positive reinforcement and

behavior modification. An average salary for a CAAB in California is $60,000 - $80,000 ("Animal Behaviorist".zip recruiter.com).

These workers usually have a two-to-four-year college degree and numerous hours of practice. They also play a role in educating animal owners about their pet's behavior and how to manage or modify it. The evidence shows that AVAS needs this vital employee position so that cats may be assessed accurately whether they are indeed feral or just frightened and overwhelmed. A CAAB can assess if dogs are really aggressive or just not accustomed to being confined in kennels. The Behaviorist will determine if animals can become more adoptable. This is essential to lower the number of animals euthanized unnecessarily (www.animalbehaviorsociety.org).

The Grand Jury recommends AVAS hire or provide training for a current employee to become a CAAB, so that the shelter may better determine which animals should be euthanized.

Photo 7: Squeeze Cages (wildlifecontrolsupplies.com/animal/)

3. Use Squeeze Cages – A squeeze cage is a device used to safely and efficiently restrain animals for medical procedures, examinations or transport. (see Glossary). It typically features an adjustable side that can be squeezed together, gently restricting the animal's movement while keeping them comfortable and safe.

Many shelters use this device, or a similar alternative, to gently vaccinate feral cats or aggressive dogs. Some shelters use a long "pole" to help give shots to animals who are not easily controlled.

Evidence shows that AVAS does not use squeeze cages or other controlling devices when administering vaccinations, examining animals or doing medical procedures. The controlled environment of a squeeze cage can help reduce stress for the animal, making procedures smoother and easier, while protecting the employee (ontosight.glossary.term/squeeze-cage).

The cage's primary feature is its ability to squeeze the animal gently. Some cages include headgates or other features to secure the animal's head, preventing it from moving around excessively. Typically, the cages are made of sturdy, durable materials like metal or reinforced plastic. Squeeze cages come in various sizes and shapes to accommodate different species and sizes of animals.

The GJ recommends the purchase and use of a squeeze cage or other device to protect employees as well as animals.

The following link (created by a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist) shows one example of a person using a squeeze cage:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5cow2zuGfs.

4. Expand the TNVR Program – The following statement can be seen on Apple Valley's web site:

The Town of Apple Valley Animal Services Department will be offering a pilot Feral TNVR program. We understand the huge need for spay and neuter of outdoor community cats in our service areas. However, due to limited funds and surgery appointments, we unfortunately cannot help everyone requesting the TNVR services.
(applevalley.org/Home/Components/News/News/4647).

However, according to AVAS's budget for the fiscal year 2023-24, $149,600 was budgeted for the spay/neuter of sheltered animals. This shows that there were funds to perform TNVR. On the Inland Valley Humane Society and SPCA website, the GJ found that the average cost of a spay/neuter procedure is $120.

Cat Spay/Neuter	
Cat Age	Price
4 months +	$120*
*The microchip is included, if your cat is not already chipped.	

Table 3: (https://ivhsspca.org/spay-neuter/)

AVAS has an agreement with a local veterinarian to provide services when called by the shelter. Therefore, spay/neuter procedures could have been scheduled with this veterinarian.

5. Creation of a Population Management Board – The Grand Jury found that there are only two employees at AVAS who are primarily responsible for determining which animals are to be euthanized – one person for cats and another for all other animals. This is a lot of responsibility for such a small team. The Grand Jury has seen a similar operation where a team of five or six employees work together to determine the status of each animal in their care. As a group they decide which animals are suitable for adoption. This could be called a Population Management Board (see Glossary). While the Board meets, the shelter is closed for about two hours. As a group, they discuss the path for life for each animal. Euthanasia becomes the last resort after behavior training, socialization and/or moving to other rescue groups or shelters. This process relieves some of the pressure from individuals as it is a decision shared by the group.

The Grand Jury recommends the formation of a Population Management Board that will jointly manage the care and population control of the shelter.

6. Need for a Team Approach for Euthanasia – The Apple Valley Animal Shelter has a very large animal intake on a monthly basis. The number of animals that are euthanized are broken out into three categories:

- Not adoptable
- Lack of space
- Health reasons

One of the individuals at the shelter is responsible for making the decision to euthanize and is also active in performing the euthanasia process. Being such a heavy burden, it is a very stressful and emotional position for one employee.

Photo 8: (above) Euthanasia Room at AVAS where euthanasia takes place. (Courtesy of 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury)

The GJ recommends, as mentioned above, that AVAS implement a Population Management Board of at least five employees that meets weekly, to make these difficult decisions.

Management Issues

The Apple Valley Animal Shelter has experienced some management issues in the past. However, the shelter seems to be going in the right direction after the change of leadership. Some of the management issues include:

- Outdated *Policy and Procedures Manual*
  - Last updated in 2014
  - Laws and standard practices have changed
  - Training and instruction should be modernized and made more professional

- No up-to-date employee or volunteer training is in the current outdated procedure manual
- TNVR program
  - Implemented in March of 2025
  - Has been shown to reduce euthanasia rates in cats
  - Has been shown to significantly decrease feral cat populations
  - Present program should be expanded and fully implemented
- Hours/days of operation
  - AVAS is open Tuesday through Saturday
  - Closed on holidays
  - No specific days for Rescue Groups only
- Few adoption fee incentives
  - Special fees should be offered for special populations such as disabled individuals, senior citizens, first responders and people who adopt senior animals
  - Eliminate fees for special times such as "Clear the Shelter Month"
  - Lower fees at adoption events which are partnered with the community and businesses
- Lack of ongoing access to a professional or city grant writer to provide additional funding for the animal shelter

Staffing Issues

There are staffing issues at the Apple Valley Animal Shelter, primarily because of the uncertainty of past negotiations. When positions have been vacated due to employees quitting, moving out of the area, retiring or being dismissed, many of these jobs have been left unfilled or open for a long period of time. An example of

this are the workers who have the difficult job of cleaning kennels, feeding the animals and moving the animals from one cage to another, while monitoring the animals' health. As of this writing, there are four open positions. If these positions are filled, the workers will be walking the dogs, playing with them in the facility's play area, cleaning cages and kennels more thoroughly, socializing dogs and cats and spending more hands-on time with the animals.

On the other hand, some positions seem to have more employees than are needed for the size of the shelter. An example of this is the staff which runs the front desk and does administrative tasks at AVAS. These workers deal with the public, fosters, adoption applicants and rescue groups. The front desk positions are important but may be needed less than the people who work in the back and care for the animals and do the cleaning. Therefore, the GJ suggests the shelter implement cross-training of all employees so that all staff will be available to work in other places in the shelter as needed. Observations at other shelters show that shelters can operate with fewer employees in the front office area. People could be brought up front from the back as needed.

Another position needed at AVAS is a full-time Volunteer Program Coordinator. Because the shelter has a limited volunteer program, it needs one full-time person to restart and administer the program with several dependable volunteers. A robust volunteer program will include a group of adult volunteers who are dependable and come in on a set schedule. The Volunteer Program Coordinator could bring the volunteers in as a group and train them on how to help in any way that is needed at the shelter. The training manual for volunteers could be included in the new *Policy and Procedures Manual*. A large and trained volunteer group would free the workforce to have more time to socialize the animals and arrange for more adoption events with businesses in the vicinity, as well as fill in wherever needed.

One suggestion would be to utilize a work program through the local high schools to recruit students to volunteer at AVAS. Some school districts in the area have a work program where students must put in a certain amount of community service hours, volunteering for any entity of their choice before they are allowed to graduate. If there is a program like this in Apple Valley, high school students could volunteer at the shelter. This would provide a great opportunity for students to work in a career in which they are interested, while helping animals.

Spread of Disease

AVAS has had at least two serious distemper outbreaks since it was built in 2010. The most recent outbreak occurred in April of 2025. Evidence shows that there are three main reasons for the distemper outbreak this year, which closed the shelter down for two weeks.

1. Not all animals are vaccinated immediately upon intake – It was previously stated that the immediate and complete vaccination of all animals upon intake is currently not being implemented at Apple Valley Animal Shelter. Evidence shows that it does not harm the animals if they are already vaccinated, very young or sick. In fact, it is prudent and effective to vaccinate all animals immediately upon intake. This is already being done in other county shelters and humane societies in SB County. These shelters have had good results. Shelters which the GJ observed have less spread of disease when all animals are immediately vaccinated.

   The San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury recommends that AVAS implement this process immediately. As mentioned, squeeze cages will help achieve this objective, since animals who are deemed to be aggressive or feral may be sedated

in a squeeze cage and then vaccinated without injury to the employee or the animal.

Photo 9: Feral Cat Room at AVAS. The cardboard boxes hold the feral cats picked up from the community. Many of these cats were deemed too fractious to be vaccinated before intake. (Courtesy of 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury)

2. Not all standard cleaning protocols are followed – Evidence shows that the Apple Valley Animal Shelter's employees do not change gloves every time they start to clean a different kennel. Changing gloves is the industry standard and should be done in the future to prevent the spread of disease.

3. County animals separated from city animals – Some shelters in San Bernardino County who serve both county and city animals separate the two upon intake. This is important because county animals have been shown to have more disease than city animals. County animals, usually brought in by county animal control, are more feral, more aggressive and not used to being locked up. County animals are more diseased when entering the shelter. City animals are less

aggressive and usually have less disease. Segregating the two groups helps prevent the spread of disease, especially if county animals are always kept in outside kennels, where the spread of disease is less likely.

This used to be a problem at AVAS. It will most likely not be a concern in the future, since animals from the county's unincorporated areas will no longer be accepted at Apple Valley Animal Shelter after the Town Council's vote to terminate the contract with the County of San Bernardino.

Other Shelters

The Civil Grand Jury visited numerous animal shelters to observe their practices. One was in another county; some were operated by, or contracted with, San Bernardino County. Humane societies were observed as well as other city-operated animal shelters. Most were in rural high desert areas. Shelters visited were of similar size and geography.

A wide range of management styles and standards were observed. The best and most efficient practices, as observed and combined with *Hayden's Act* and the Guidelines, include:

- Vaccination of all animals immediately upon intake to help prevent disease spread
- Veterinarian(s) at the shelter to spay/neuter and perform medical procedures in-house
- Medical facility in the shelter
- Sufficient and qualified staff with every position filled
- Certified Applied Animal Behavioral therapist to help "unadoptable" animals become adoptable

- Clear concise management

- Updated policies and procedures

- "Board" of people meeting every week to determine the fate of each animal

- Robust Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate and Release program for stray/feral cats

- Standard and consistent cleaning protocols in place

- A clear philosophy of "no-kill" or "low-kill" (see Glossary)

- Hands-on staff to work with the animals and socialize them

- Color-coded kennel cards which make it easier for employees and possible adopters to quickly and easily check the status of the animal

- Sufficient kennels and grounds to cover the animal population

- Two-way immediate communication with rescues and foster groups, ideally through texting

- Reaching out to the community and co-sponsoring many cat and dog adoption events

Four of the most important issues to the Grand Jury, in relation to AVAS, include:

1. Philosophy of low-kill or no-kill – A clear philosophy of low-kill throughout the Town of Apple Valley and the Apple Valley Animal Shelter, making it a last resort to euthanize. (see Glossary for no-kill and low-kill philosophies)

2. Veterinarian in-shelter – Animals would be examined and given the care they need right there at the shelter, eliminating the need to make an appointment, and helping to make the animal more adoptable right away.

3. Surgical/medical center inside the facility – Animals upon intake could be taken immediately to the in-house surgical center to be examined, scanned for a chip, vaccinated, neutered if needed and given medical intervention. The

medical care would be provided in the same building, eliminating a need to transport the animal to a veterinarian.

4. Community outreach – Reach out and schedule several adoption/foster/rescue events per year held in conjunction with the businesses and rescue organizations in the area.

This would provide the community residents and rescue group members with more education about the shelter and animal care in general. The shelter employees and the rescue group members could have beneficial two-way communication and get together in their ideas to help the dogs and cats.

Solutions: A Road Map to Improvement

The community of Apple Valley has some unhappy customers because of problems at the Apple Valley Animal Shelter. Whether these concerns are real or perceived, or a combination of both, the view of many residents is that the Town of Apple Valley and the staff of AVAS do not care about the animals. These residents point to the high euthanasia rate, shown by the shelter's own monthly disposition reports. These reports show a higher euthanasia rate than other shelters in California.

The Civil Grand Jury has found evidence that the employees of Apple Valley Animal Shelter do care about the animals. As explained above, there are many factors that make it hard for the staff to implement some of the best practices mentioned in this report.

There is, however, a road map to improvement for the Apple Valley Animal Shelter and the community it serves. The GJ is confident that if the following recommendations are considered, the citizens of Apple Valley, animal rescue

organizations, employees of Apple Valley Animal Shelter and the Apple Valley Town Council will hopefully work together for the future of the animals.

COMMENDATIONS

The 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury appreciates the Town of Apple Valley, the shelter employees, the rescue group members (who speak out at meetings for the animals) and the San Bernardino County staff for complying quickly with requests for information.

Interviewees were very helpful and informative, and showed passion for animals. Multiple shelters welcomed the GJ members while visiting.

The GJ also appreciates employees of AVAS who truly and obviously have the best interests of the animals at heart. The GJ commends the employees of the Town of Apple Valley who work at the shelter. AVAS staff continue to work hard and care for the animals and have done so under less than ideal conditions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of the Apple Valley Animal Shelter has been a very interesting and informative one. Apple Valley is a unique town, and its shelter has unique problems. The community is very rural and spread out. Parcels are large and animals are not used to leashes or kennels. There is a lot of wildlife in desert areas which spread disease. Many stray cats tend to have traits belonging to feral

cats. Dogs come to the shelter with diseases common to desert rural areas. The community is just beginning to learn the benefits of an active and robust TNVR program for cats.

While the Grand Jury commends the people working diligently for the animals, and the citizens speaking out for the animals, it also recommends that the Apple Valley Town Council and the Apple Valley Animal Shelter seriously consider the recommendations at the end of this report. Working together for the animals is a road map to improvement.

The ending verse of the song, *Bless the Beasts and the Children* (De Vorzon and Batkin) is:

Bless the Beasts and the Children,
Give them shelter from the storm,
Keep them safe, keep them warm.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings	Recommendations:	Implementation Date:	Required Responses:
F-1: AVAS's lack of providing posted lists of all housed animals and euthanasia lists leads to higher euthanasia rates and lower adoption rates.	**R-1:** AVAS posts daily, all housed animals and its euthanasia list on social media such as Facebook and Instagram, as well as the AVAS's website.	**06/01/26**	**Apple Valley Town Council**

F-2: AVAS's Rescue Shelter Liaison's inability to send/ receive texts hinder timely and effective interacting with rescue agencies and networkers.	R-2: AVTC provides AVAS's Rescue-Liaison employee(s) a shelter-owned cell phone on which the RSL may communicate with rescue groups by text.	06/01/26	Apple Valley Town Council
F-3: Because AVAS does not vaccinate all animals immediately upon intake, the spread of disease in the shelter contributes to more euthanasia of sick animals, and the shelter being closed for periods of time.	R-3: AVAS fully vaccinate all incoming animals within twenty-four hours of intake.	06/01/26	Apple Valley Town Council
F-4: AVAS's failure to have the cats' areas "out of earshot" of the barking dogs has caused the cats to exhibit some of the characteristics of feral cats and has resulted in	R-4: Apple Valley Town Council sound-proof the AVAS cat intake area and/or move the cat areas to reduce the amount of barking the cats can hear.	06/01/26	Apple Valley Town Council

increased euthanasia rates.			
F-5: AVAS's lack of the use of color-coded kennel cards has resulted in delays in employees and adopters knowing which animals are immediately adoptable.	**R-5:** AVAS initiates the use of color-coded kennel cards to easily distinguish between the different classifications of its kenneled animals.	05/01/26	**Apple Valley Town Council**
F-6: AVAS does not employ a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist, which causes a lack of proper assessment of the animals for adoption and euthanasia possibilities.	**R-6:** The Apple Valley Town Council hire and/or provide training for an employee to become a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist to work at AVAS.	10/01/26	**Apple Valley Town Council**
F-7: AVAS has minimally worked with other animal entities and businesses in the local area to plan for community adoption events	**R-7:** AVAS improves communication with animal rescue organizations and other shelters, nearby humane societies and Apple Valley businesses to plan more community adoption events.	05/01/26	**Apple Valley Town Council**

and as a result fewer animals have been adopted.			
F-8: AVAS's failure to use squeeze cages for vaccinating or euthanizing animals, such as feral cats, causes a higher probability of injury and disease spread.	**R-8:** AVAS purchase varied-sized squeeze cages and begin training and usage.	**05/01/26**	**Apple Valley Town Council**
F-9: AVAS's failure to update their *Policies and Procedures Manual* (2014), in a timely manner causes the current manual to be outdated, incorrect and incomplete.	**R-9:** AVAS revise and update the shelter's *Policy and Procedures Manual* and add employee and volunteer sections that describe the respective procedures and training programs. Training for all employees on the new *Policy and Procedures Manual* is to be completed.	**06/01/26**	**Apple Valley Town Council**
F-10: Opening AVAS for a sixth day of the week for rescue groups only, will give more time for rescue of the animals, thereby	**R-10:** The AVTC authorizes and fund an extra position for one more day per week so that AVAS may open for rescue organizations only to pull animals.	**06/01/26**	**Apple Valley Town Council**

decreasing euthanasia.			
F-11: AVAS's practice of using only one or two employees in deciding the fate of an animal causes higher employee stress, greater euthanasia rates and a narrowed view of the animal's behavior.	**R-11:** AVAS establish a *Population Management Board* that meets weekly, made up of qualified employees, to manage the shelter's population size and decrease euthanasia rates.	**06/01/26**	**Apple Valley Town Council**
F-12: AVAS's lack of a strong volunteer program, managed by a full-time employee and with many adult/student volunteers, causes less hands-on care and socialization for the animals.	**R-12:** The AVTC to provide a paid full-time employee to manage and coordinate the shelter's program of adult/student volunteers.	**06/01/26**	**Apple Valley Town Council**
F-13: AVAS's lack of ongoing access to a professional grant writer causes less monetary	**R-13:** The AVTC to provide ongoing access to a professional or city grant writer so the shelter can apply for more grants per fiscal year.	**06/01/26**	**Apple Valley Town Council**

support for the shelter.			
F-14: Lack of offering discounted rates for certain adopters causes a decrease in adoptions.	**R-14:** The AVTC, along with AVAS, develop programs that allow for a permanent reduction in adoption and alteration fees for certain residents, *for example;* seniors, first responders and disabled citizens.	06/01/26	**Apple Valley Town Council**
F-15: The lack of an in-house veterinarian dedicated to AVAS, and an in-shelter medical/surgery center in AVAS has caused a decrease in neutering surgeries and other medical procedures.	**R-15:** The AVTC to provide an in-house veterinarian for AVAS and add a medical/surgical center inside the shelter, where neutering and other medical procedures may take place.	11/01/26	**Apple Valley Town Council**

GLOSSARY

Terminology	Meaning
Animal Networking Groups	Rescue volunteers and animal lovers who attempt to network and use social media to expose animals whose lives are at risk to get them to safety.

Animal Shelter	An establishment, maintained by local government or supported by charitable contributions, that provides a temporary home for dogs, cats, and other animals that are offered for adoption, and euthanasizes homeless animals that have been deemed unsuitable for adoption. (https://www.dictionary.com/browse/animal-shelter)
AVAS	Apple Valley Animal Shelter
AVTC	Apple Valley Town Council
BOS	San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors
CAAB	Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist
GJ	San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury
Catarrh	An inflammation of mucous membranes, especially of the respiratory tract, accompanied by excessive secretions. (www.dictionary.com/browse/catarrh)
Disposition	Refers to the final outcome of an impounded animal.
Distemper	Also called canine distemper. an infectious disease chiefly of young dogs, caused by an unidentified virus and characterized by lethargy, fever, catarrh, photophobia, and vomiting. (www.dictionary.com/browse/distemper)
Euthanasia	The humane process for putting animals to death by intravenous injections of a sedative and a death-inducing drug. (www.avma.org)
Feral cat	An unsocialized, "wild", undomestic cat living outside without human contact; fearful and avoidant of human interaction much like other wildlife species. (https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/article/view/42/19)
Fostering	Providing temporary care for a pet in need, typically a dog or cat, until they are adopted or reunited with their owners.

Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters	Document written by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians to provide information that will help any animal welfare entity meet the physical, mental and behavioral needs of animals in their care. (https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/article/view/42/19)
Hayden's Act	A California law introduced in 1998 as *Senate Bill 1785* that was to reduce the killing of shelter animals; facilitates reunification of animals with their caregivers, increases shelter holding periods and enables rescue groups to take shelter animals scheduled for death. (https://www.maddiesfund.org/hayden-law.htm)
Humane Society	A nonprofit entity organized for the rescue of animals.
Indoor/Outdoor Kennels	A traditional-type kennel with two sides divided by a guillotine door or a double compartment cage setup. It is the basic setup for housing dogs in animal shelters.
Live-release rate	The rate at which animals leave a shelter alive and includes animals returned to owner, adopted or transferred to a rescue or another shelter.
Low-kill shelter	A low-kill shelter means that the shelter does all it can to place every "adoptable" animal that comes into the shelter. There is not a time limit on an animal's stay, and an adoptable animal will not be euthanized to make room for another. (https://power959.com/)
No-kill shelter	Some facilities are considered "no-kill" facilities because they do not euthanize animals at all. These types of facilities usually only take in animals of their choosing, by taking in surrendered animals or pulling animals from other facilities. (https://power959.com/)
Photophobia	A painful sensitivity to or extreme intolerance of bright light. (www.dictionary.com/browse/photophobia)
Population Management Board	A group of shelter employees involved in the process of intentionally and efficiently planning services for each animal in the shelter's care.

Pulling animals	Removing animals from the shelter to transfer to a rescue organization.
Rescue Groups	Nonprofit entities that can serve as a shelter, rescue or humane society that is dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and rehoming of animals, primarily companion animals like dogs and cats.
RSL	Rescue-Shelter Liaison
RVT	Registered Veterinary Technician
SB	Senate Bill
SBC	San Bernardino County
Socialization of Animals	The process of training animals so that they can be kept in close relations with humans and other animals.
Squeeze cage	A specialized cage used in veterinary medicine and animal handling to restrain and hold animals. This physical object is designed to ensure the safety of both the animal and the handler during various procedures such as vaccinations, blood sampling, and medical examinations. (https://ontosight.ai/glossary/term/squeeze-cage)
Transferring an animal	Moving an animal at one shelter to either another shelter or an animal rescue to improve the animal's chances of being adopted.
TNVR	Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate and Release

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JAILS AND PRISONS MANDATED INQUIRY

BACKGROUND

California Penal Code § 919(b) authorizes the Grand Jury to tour prisons. It reads, "The grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county."

Penal Code § 925. The Grand Jury shall visit and inquire about the operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments, or functions of the county including those operations, accounts, and records of any special legislative district or other district in the county created under state law for which the officers of the county are serving in their official capacity as officers of the districts.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury used assessment categories from the jail inspection and facility tour form provided by the California Board of State and Community Corrections, as noted on the California Grand Jury Association website, www.cgja.org.

San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jurors obtained information from observations made by the Grand Jury and from jail administrative staff about the conditions of the exterior and interior of the building, including the exercise areas, playing fields,

exercise equipment, and general cleanliness of the facilities. Safety and Security were also observed.

The Grand Jury toured the following facilities:

- California Institution for Women (CIW)
- California Institution for Men (CIM)
- West Valley Detention Center
- High Desert Detention Center
- Central Valley Juvenile Detention and Assessment Center
- San Bernardino County Sheriff Central Detention Center

SUMMARY

The Civil Grand Jury toured both the inside and outside of each facility. Administrators gave the Civil Grand Jury a thorough overview of each facility before each walk-through. At the end of each tour, the Civil Grand Jury met for one last time to allow for any final questions.

The 2025 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury expresses our sincere gratitude to all staff members of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department at each of the facilities that were visited. The Civil Grand Jury received the utmost pride and heartfelt dedication of each facility, and we sincerely appreciate their cooperation and assistance during our tours.

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