

Ventura County Fire Protection District 2013 Annual Report



Message from the Fire Chief



Chief Mark Lorenzen

The year 2013 broke many records in Ventura County. Some of them were good, others bad, but they all had an impact on the Ventura County Fire Protection District.

The worst of the records concerned the weather. We had record-breaking heat, record-breaking winds, and record-breaking drought conditions. In May, they combined to result in the Springs

Fire, a 24,000-acre wildfire (almost 40 square miles) that threatened over 4,000 homes. The fire itself went into the record books as the 20th largest fire in Ventura County history.

The weather kept our firefighters on alert throughout the year and although we had a number of smaller brush fires occur – all around 50 acres – good brush clearance around homes and hard work by our firefighters prevented any of them from becoming catastrophic.

In light of what we witnessed during wildfires in other parts of the country, I am very proud of the work done by our firefighters in combating our fires and by our Fire Prevention Bureau for their work on the Fire Hazard Reduction Program that gives the firefighters the defensible space they need to save homes.

Some records seem more important than others and one that we are extremely proud of is the number of people who were saved by CPR this year. Today, there are 31 people who are walking around, living normal lives thanks to the administration of CPR. That number ties the record we set in 2012. Another patient is still in recovery from his heart event meaning 2013 could become a record-breaking year for saves.

It takes the coordinated effort of a number of agencies – including ambulance services, hospitals and even the general public – to save a life with CPR. I am very pleased with the part our personnel played in each one of those saves. I am equally happy about the role we play in our community teaching traditional CPR, hands-only CPR and the use of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs).

As 2013 came to a close, we embarked upon two new initiatives – one organizational and one operational – that will help carry the District into the future. Operationally, we are addressing a type of incident that is occurring with distressing frequency around the country: an active shooter working in a crowd of people. The special training our firefighters are receiving is detailed elsewhere in this report.

Operationally, we are realigning our bureaus to increase efficiency and equitably distribute the department's workload. Most of this project will not occur until well into 2014 and will be detailed in next year's report, but the outline of the project is included in this report because the changes are so important to the future of the District.

And, speaking of the future, it is bright for the Ventura County Fire Protection District. Our people – sworn and civilian – are among the best in their fields. Each of them is committed to excellence, and that commitment is shown in the quality of their work every day. That makes us strong and prepared for whatever 2014 brings our way.

Board of Directors

The Ventura County Fire Protection District (fire department) is a dependent special district within the county that was created by a special election, held in 1928, to provide fire protection for the unincorporated areas of the county. Over time, the protection was expanded to include six cities in the county – Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley, Moorpark, Camarillo, Port Hueneme and Ojai.

The County of Ventura Board of Supervisors acts as the Fire District's board of directors. One supervisor is elected from each of the five supervisorial districts within the county. These five supervisors appoint the fire chief to provide fire protection services for the District.

Currently, the Ventura County Fire Protection District Board of Directors is comprised of:



District 1 – Supervisor Steve Bennett

He represents the communities of San Buenaventura, Montalvo, Saticoy, Ojai Valley, City of Ojai, Upper Ojai Valley, Riverpark, Northwest Oxnard, and North Coast.



District 2 – Supervisor Linda Parks

She represents the cities and areas of Thousand Oaks, Newbury Park, Westlake Village, Oak Park, Bell Canyon, Hidden Valley, Lake Sherwood, Somis, Las Posas Valley, California State University Channel Islands, Portions of the Oxnard Plain, Santa Rosa Valley, Naval Base Ventura County Point Mugu, California Air National Guard, and South Coast.



District 3 – Supervisor Kathy Long

She represents the communities of Camarillo, Port Hueneme, Southeast Oxnard, East Oxnard Plain, Santa Paula, Fillmore, Piru, East Lockwood Valley, and Eastern Portion of Naval Base Ventura County Port Hueneme.



District 4 – Supervisor Peter C. Foy

He represents the communities of Simi Valley, Moorpark, Santa Susana Knolls, Box Canyon, Chatsworth Peak, Home Acres, Sinaloa Lake, and Tierra Rejada Valley.



District 5 – Supervisor John Zaragoza

He represents the communities of Oxnard, Oxnard Shores, Mandalay Bay, Silver Strand, Hollywood Beach, Hollywood By-the-Sea, Channel Islands Harbor, El Rio, Nyeland Acres, Del Norte Area, Oxnard College, Oxnard Plain, Strickland and Portion of Naval Base Ventura County Port Hueneme.



County Executive Officer – Michael Powers

He is responsible for overseeing more than 8,000 employees in 27 agencies and departments, including the Fire District. In addition, he oversees and supports all major county functions including budget, finance, legislation, human resources, labor relations, economic development and information technology.



Ventura County Fire Department

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<http://fire.countyofventura.org> • <http://vcreadysetgo.org>

<http://www.facebook.com/venturacountyfire>

District Promotions

Promoted to Assistant Fire Chief

Andrew Ortega

Promoted to Division Chief

Michael Milkovich

Promoted to Battalion Chief

Tomas Arce
Dustin Gardner
John McNeil

Promoted to Fire Captain

Nicholas Cleary Ryan Matheson
Randall Globerman Cary Rake
Dan Horton Jason Rangel
Clinton Kemp Mark Seastrom
Thomas Lanski Paul Torres

Promoted to Fire Engineer

Reed Adams Clinton Hull
Robert Ashby Bradley Knowles
Steven Chandler Desi Rodriguez
Guillermo De La Rosa Michael Williams
Andrew Gudaz

Promoted to Senior Fire Control Worker

Jesus Perez

Promoted to Fire Prevention Officer

Jeff Carter

Promoted to Senior Fire Equipment Mechanic

Christopher Morda

Promoted to Fire Equipment Mechanic II

Orville Brixey

Promoted to Supervisor–Public Safety Dispatcher

Cheryl Simmen

Promoted to Public Safety Dispatcher II

Jennifer Blake

Promoted to Fiscal Technician I

Gabriela Carrillo

Promoted to Management Assistant III

Margaret Remmen

Promoted to Accounting Officer III

Adonea Scott Katherine Turnball



District Retirements

Assistant Fire Chief

Darrell Ralston

Fire Battalion Chief

Michael Estrada
Scott Hall

Firefighter

James Mensendiek

Fire Captain

Cruz Garcia
Ronald Topolinski

Fire Engineer

Dean Burkhart
James Waldron Jr.
Gregory Yates

Manager–Fiscal/Admin. Services

Abbe Berns

Fire Communications Manager

Melvin Smith

Senior Office Systems Coordinator

Lawrence Older

Department Profile

The Ventura County Fire Protection District response area covers 848 square miles, an area about half the size of the state of Rhode Island. Ventura County has a total land area of 1,843 square miles, 42 miles of coastline and ranges in elevation from sea level to 8,831 feet at Mount Pinos in the Los Padres National Forest. The Ventura County Fire Protection District is an all-risk fire department that provides fire, emergency medical and rescue services in areas as diverse as urban centers, the coastline, farmlands and wildlands.

In 2013, District firefighters responded to 35,504 calls for service – an average of over 97 every day – under an adopted operating budget of just under \$126 million. Currently, the District serves about 58 percent of the population of Ventura County, more than 480,000 people in six cities and the unincorporated areas of the county.

FIRE DEPARTMENT PROFILE

PERSONNEL

Safety (firefighters, battalion chiefs, etc.)	390
Non-Safety (fire prevention, fleet maintenance, administration, etc.)	193
Total Allocated Positions	583
Fire Stations	32
Administration and Support Facilities	4

APPARATUS

First-Run Fire Engines	31
First-Run Quint Apparatus	1
Ladder Trucks (inc. 2 reserve)	5
Paramedic Squad Vehicles (inc. 1 reserve)	4
Wildland Fire Engines	11
Crash Truck	1
Crew Transports	3
USAR Vehicles, heavy-rescue	2
USAR Vehicles, medium-duty rescue	2
Reserve Fire Engines	16
Fire Boat and Water Rescue Craft	5
Command Vehicles	15
Heavy Equipment (bulldozers, loaders, backhoes, etc.)	12
Other Emergency Response Vehicles	33

The Springs Fire

On the morning of May 2, 2013, the conditions were perfect for a major wildfire in Ventura County.

Santa Ana winds were blowing when the sun rose, sustained at about 40 mph and gusting to more than 60 mph. The temperature was rising rapidly and humidity levels were plummeting. In fact, records were set that day in Camarillo for both high temperature and low humidity.

At about 6:35 a.m. a fire was sparked in grass and debris along the southbound lanes of Highway 101 about halfway up the Conejo Grade. The investigation later found that the fire cause was not suspicious in origin and was probably caused by a spark from a passing vehicle. That spark soon turned into a major conflagration.

Engine 52 responded to the point of ignition on the Conejo Grade but, by the time they got any water on the fire, it was already running up the hillside toward the community of Camarillo Springs. Within minutes, the fire was above Camarillo Springs and working its way west across Conejo Mountain and down to the homes in Camarillo Springs.

Although an evacuation order was issued for Camarillo Springs, the fire was on the residents before many in the mostly-senior community could leave. The District was deploying all available resources but the tinder-dry vegetation, strong winds and low humidity were providing the fire with everything it needed to rage out of control. As the fire burned past Camarillo Springs, firefighters were able to save all of the homes in the community, but embers blown into a storage area started a fire that consumed about 10 recreational vehicles parked there.

Because the fire was burning into a State Responsibility Area, a state Incident Management Team was dispatched to take command of the fire. Meanwhile, District fire dispatchers at the Fire Communications Center were ordering air and ground resources from across the state.

By afternoon, the fire was threatening the campus of California State University Channel Islands and by nightfall, it had reached Pacific Coast Highway and several military communications sites and Naval Base Ventura County were in peril.

Another flank of the fire had burned up and over Conejo Mountain and was moving down towards the Newbury Park community of Dos Vientos. At the peak of the fire about 4,000 homes were threatened.

As night fell, the fire began moving down Pacific Coast Highway towards Malibu. And then Mother Nature issued a new challenge for the firefighters. The powerful east winds that had been driving the fire all day subsided, only to be replaced by a strong onshore (west) wind that began pushing the fire back inland. This put homes and property in Sycamore Canyon and on Deer Creek Road and Yerba Buena Road in severe danger.



And, if the fire made its way up those canyons, Dos Vientos would be in the path of the fire from the other side, as would Hidden Valley.

By this time, more than 2,000 firefighters were attacking the blaze. They came from across the western United States representing more than 180 fire departments. Numerous helicopters and air tankers worked the fire from above while bulldozers and hand crews scratched containment lines across the mountainsides.

By Friday, May 3, firefighters had begun to gain ground on the fire and were making slow but steady progress containing it. But with a footprint of about 24,000 acres (almost 40 square miles), containment lines were only part of the effort. There was still heavy fire burning within the containment lines and there were days of "mop-up" work ahead as firefighters meticulously worked through the burned areas extinguishing "hot spots." Every stump, tree, branch, bush and patch of grass had to be checked for embers to prevent a flare-up or a spot fire caused by a windborne ember.

As firefighters gained the upper hand it became clear that, although 4,000 homes had been threatened, not a single one had been destroyed. This was testament to the skill and hard work of the firefighters, but it also illuminated the effectiveness of the District's nationally recognized Fire Hazard Reduction Program (FHRP).

Each year about 14,000 Ventura County property owners receive a notice from the District informing them that their property lies within the FHRP boundaries. Generally, these properties are within the Wildland Urban Interface, an area where development meets natural vegetation. In these areas, the District requires property owners to clear vegetation back 100 feet from structures.

This clearance area provides firefighters with defensible space. The defensible space gives the firefighters an area to work in that is between an advancing fire and structures that are in jeopardy. Using this space, firefighters can attack the fire, employ a backfire, cut dozer lines or call for a helicopter water drop to keep the fire from reaching a structure. In many cases during the Springs Fire, the fire burned right up to the clearance area where firefighters were able to stop it.

When the Springs Fire was finally declared contained on May 10, an area about the size of the city of Santa Barbara had burned at a cost of more than \$11 million. Firefighters had saved more than 4,000 homes and suffered only 10 minor injuries.

The Springs Fire was a tangible demonstration of the value of preparation, training and a commitment to excellence.

Active Shooter

It is one of the most frightening criminal acts that can be perpetrated and it is happening with increasing regularity. So-called “active shooters” are terrorizing schools, malls and other public places. The Ventura County Fire Protection District is changing how it responds to these incidents and the change represents a major departure from its prior response guidelines.

By the nature of their actions, active shooters create a large “hot zone” around themselves, an area typically not entered by firefighters due to the possibility of further gunfire. And, because of that possibility, even law enforcement proceeds with extreme caution. Because first-responders could not safely enter an area, many early victims succumbed to their injuries. But a new “active shooter rescue” technique is now allowing firefighters and law enforcement officers to enter a shooting site to quickly treat and then remove victims.

The new rescue technique explicitly keeps firefighters out of a shooter’s “hot zone,” but does allow them to enter what is called a warm zone – an area that has been checked by law enforcement to ensure the shooter is no longer present – to render immediate lifesaving medical care and then remove the patient to a safe zone. Simply put, the goal of the technique is to stop death.

Studies have shown that, in active shooter situations, patients will die without rapid medical intervention. In fact, 90 percent of the deaths occur prior to any medical care. Time is of the essence in these situations; 35 percent of the shooting victims die within five minutes of being shot. Under the new procedure, those victims will receive immediate trauma care.

In an active shooter rescue, firefighters enter a scene under law enforcement guard and provide initial trauma treatment. Depending on the circumstances, they can also engage in limited fire suppression activities.

This occurs while law enforcement is still actively engaged in locating the shooter. Patients are treated where they are found, as quickly as possible. They are then evacuated from the threat environment to a treatment area when it is safe to do so.

“There is risk associated with this procedure,” said Fire Chief Mark Lorenzen, “but we’re talking about saving lives here. We will risk a lot to save a lot, but we will do so only when we can provide the firefighters with adequate protection.”

Training on the procedure is being conducted jointly with the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office and the county Emergency Medical Services Agency. As of January 1, 2014, 350 firefighters had received the training along with 469 Sheriff’s deputies and more than 200 other law enforcement officers from around the county.



Confined Space Rescue Training

In 2013, members of the Ventura County Fire Department’s Urban Search and Rescue team conducted specialized confined space training in a storm drain channel located in the city of Camarillo. The training was designed to allow firefighters to practice with recently acquired equipment for rescues in tunnels and confined spaces more than 300 feet long.

These so-called super confined spaces are problematic because their size exceeds the capacity of the self-contained breathing apparatus normally worn by firefighters. The standard SCBA gives a firefighter about 20 minutes of air. In a super confined space, that length of time is not adequate for a firefighter to gain access, effect a rescue and evacuate a patient.

The new equipment includes closed circuit breathing apparatus (CCBA) that increases the capability of firefighters to work for extended periods in confined spaces. This increased productivity also enhances the survivability of patients by giving firefighters more time to operate at a confined space rescue. The CCBA’s allow the firefighters to work almost eight times longer than they can using the standard self-contained breathing apparatus typically used at structure fires and other emergencies.

Ventura County has three railroad tunnels in Santa Susana at the east end of Simi Valley – the longest is more than a mile long – hundreds of miles

of storm drain systems and flood control channels, and other confined space tunnel infrastructure at dams across the county. The 2008 Metro-link train accident in Chatsworth was only moments away from occurring in the longest Santa Susana tunnel.

At the drill, the firefighters made simulated rescues from a vehicle accident and other confined space rescues.



Bureaus

The Fire District is currently divided into six functional bureaus. Each performs specific tasks either to directly serve the public, or to support the District's mission of public service. A reorganization plan is currently underway that will realign the bureaus in 2014. The new organization will result in more efficiency and a more balanced distribution of work.

The **Bureau of Emergency Services** fulfills the core function of the Fire District. The bureau is responsible for all fire suppression and rescue activities, the delivery of emergency medical care, regional dispatching, and specialized responses such as hazardous materials incidents (HazMat), urban search and rescue (US&R) and water rescues.

The Fire District maintains 32 stations across the county, staffed 24 hours a day, for responding to emergencies. The fire apparatus at these stations are equipped to handle fires, provide emergency medical care and perform rescue operations. As a regional dispatch center, Public Safety Dispatchers at the Fire Communications Center direct responses from the Ventura County Fire Department, most of the other fire agencies in the county, and all of the ambulance services in the county.

In 2013, District firefighters responded to more than 35,000 calls for service.

The **Bureau of Support Services** consists of the Fleet Maintenance Division, the Wildland/Aviation Division and the Supply Division.

Fleet Maintenance is responsible for keeping the District's fleet of vehicles in service and available for response. This past year, the Shop achieved 100 percent completion of the Preventative Maintenance Program by coordinating and tracking the schedules for the District's various types of Fleet vehicles. This improved process resulted in cost savings and reduced the downtime of apparatus and vehicles. The Shop also took delivery of, and placed into service, eight new vehicles and ordered a new D6 dozer.

The Wildland Fire and Aviation Division responds to wildfires with hand crews and dozers to create firebreaks, conduct backfiring operations and assist in firefighting operations. It also coordinates the use of the Ventura County Sheriff's Department fleet of helicopters for Fire District missions.

The Supply Division receives and distributes all goods and materials for the Fire District.

The **Bureau of Fire Prevention** is responsible for three functions that are both interrelated and mutually supportive. They are: Planning and New Construction; Code Enforcement and Licensed Care; and Engineering and Fire Protection Systems. Fire Hazard Reduction (weed abatement),

Community Education and Filming, and Public Information are also units within the bureau.

The **Bureau of Planning and Technology** consists of the Training, Public Records, Computer-Aided Dispatch, Geographic Information and Mapping, Emergency Medical Services, Information Technology, Pre-Emergency Planning and Investigations, and Telecommunication units.

The EMS Division reported 31 CPR saves for 2013. These were all people who were found in full cardiac arrest, had a pulse re-established in the field and were later discharged from the hospital to resume a normal life. This ties the highest number of CPR saves in a single year ever recorded by the District.

The Regional Training Center is responsible for fire, rescue and emergency medical training for the District's members. In 2013, departmentwide training focused on live structure fire simulations to train firefighters to recognize rapid heat build-up and the proper use of nozzle applications in interior structure fire operations. The RTC also held promotional workshops for both captains and engineers and conducted behind-the-wheel driver's training for all firefighters.

The Pre-Emergency Planning and Arson/Fire Investigation unit aids the District by preparing plans for District actions in the event of a major emergency or disaster, and investigating the causes of fires.

The **Human Resources Bureau** handles the recruitment, hiring and administration of the District's employees. It staffs the fire stations, coordinates insurance and other benefits, conducts testing for promotional opportunities and performs risk assessment for the department. Industrial accidents and injuries are also under the supervision of Human Resources.

In 2013, the Human Resources Division conducted a number of internal and external recruitments. Administered various promotional processes and facilitated department retirements.

The **Bureau of Administrative and Fiscal Services** is responsible for the financial management of the Fire District. Its functions include payroll, accounts payable, purchasing, budgets, financial analysis and facilities management.

In the fiscal area, staff continued to refine procedures in payroll and purchasing to make functions more efficient. In addition, actions continued in implementing the department's cost recovery program which resulted in continued successes.

District Reorganization

Fire Chief Mark Lorenzen announced in December that he was reorganizing the structure of the Ventura County Fire Protection District with the changes to become effective in early 2014.

"The primary purpose of the restructuring is to increase efficiency and balance the workload among the bureaus," he said. "I believe this new structure will allow us to work more effectively today while giving us the opportunity to anticipate what lies ahead."

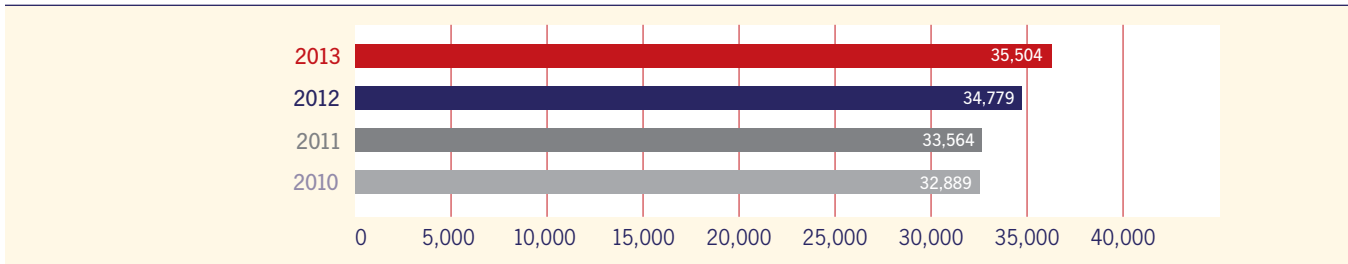
Working with the Executive Staff, Chief Lorenzen leveraged retirements to create positions that would not have been fiscally feasible otherwise. All of the changes are expected to take place on or before April 1, 2014, the date at which most of the retirements and promotions become effective.

The new structure establishes five bureaus within the District: Fire Prevention, Support Services, Emergency Services, Administrative Services and Business Services. The Support, Emergency and Administrative bureaus will be administrated by Assistant Chiefs. The other two bureaus will have civilian management.

The largest bureau – Emergency Services – encompasses the core mission of the District and is responsible for all firefighting operations, the Fire Communications Center, Special Operations (Urban Search and Rescue, Hazardous Materials), Fire Cause Investigation and Wildland Operations.

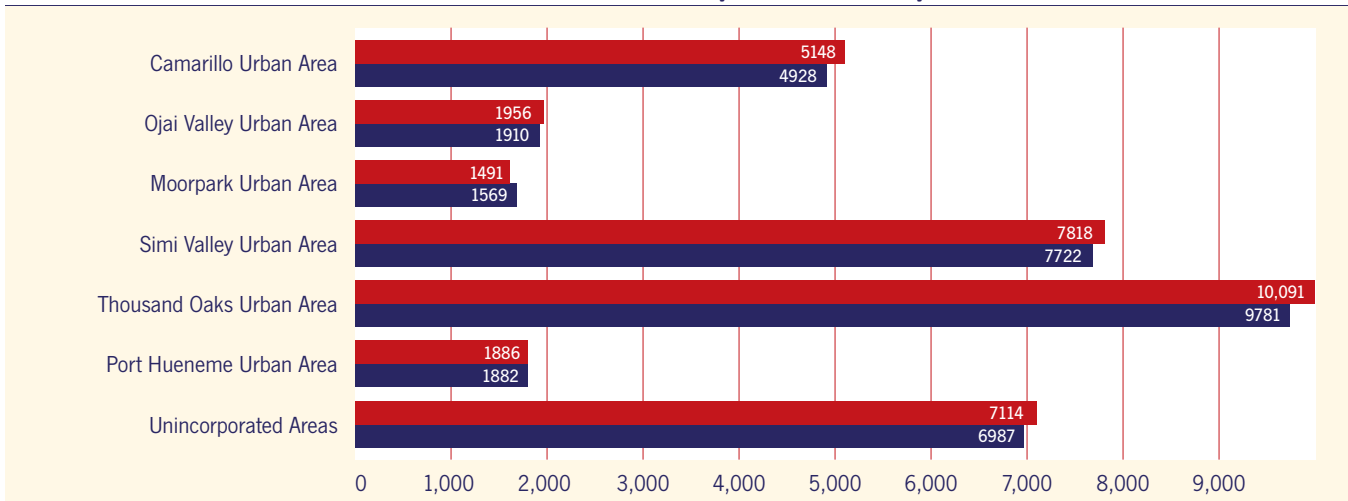
The new structure is expected to streamline District operations on a day-to-day basis and provide concentrated oversight of its functions.

Annual Calls for Service



Calls for Service by Community

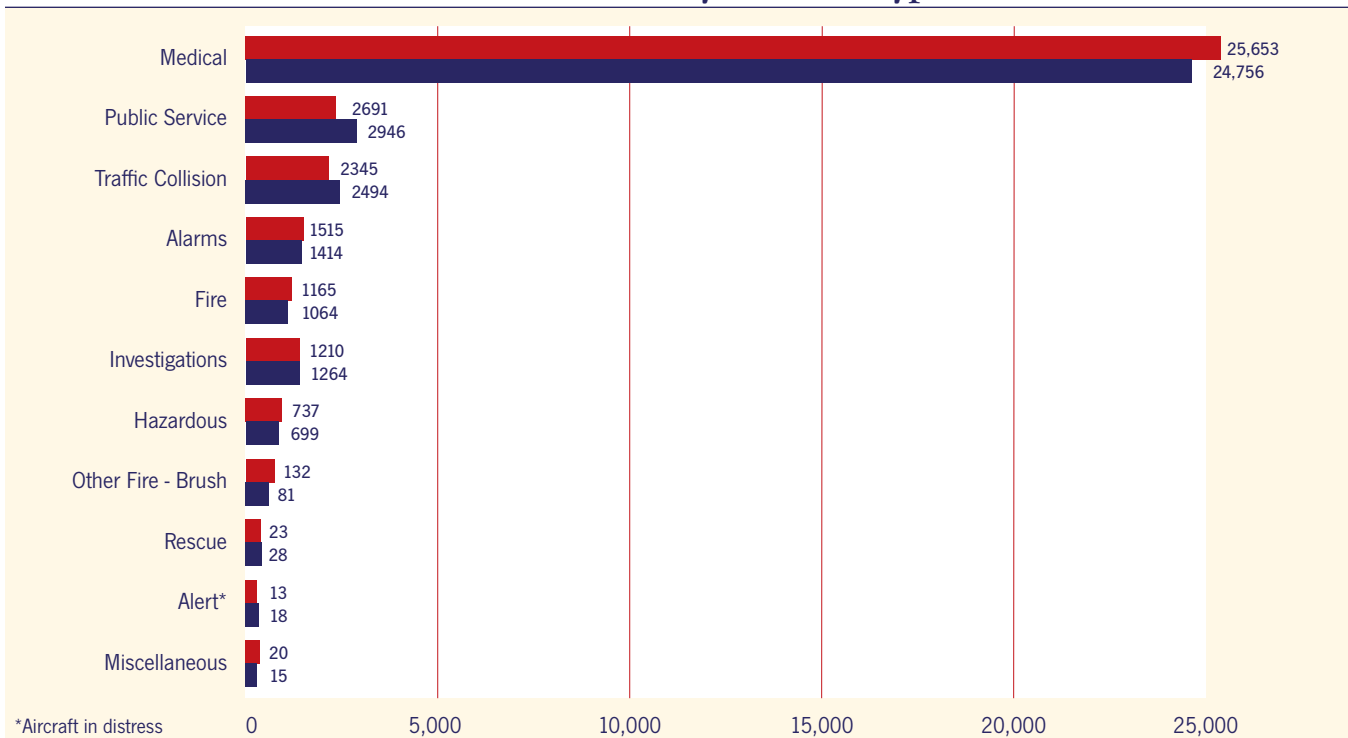
2013: 35,504 2012: 34,779



The statistics shown in this graph are generated from the District's Computer-Aided Dispatch system. The CAD system dispatches the closest resource to a call without regard to city boundaries. As a result, the statistics are shown by area, not city. Some results for 2010 have been restated in this publication due to changes in reporting methods. The Ojai Urban Area includes Oak View. The unincorporated areas include brush areas, the Camarillo and Oxnard Plains, portions of Malibu, and the communities of Oak Park, Casitas Springs, El Rio and Piru.

Calls for Service by Incident Type

2013: 35,504 2012: 34,779



*Aircraft in distress

