

Ventura County  
Fire Protection District  
2009 Annual Report



# Message from the Fire Chief

Chief Bob Roper

## County-Wide Resources, Delivered Locally

The Ventura County Fire Protection District is responsible for the protection of lives and property in an area of more than 800 square miles, including six cities and the unincorporated areas of the county. This requires a complex organization of firefighters, firefighting equipment, support systems and personnel.

By taking a regional approach to fire protection in the county, the Ventura County Fire Protection District adds value to the resources it provides to the cities and areas it serves. With the economy of scale achieved through the purchasing power of a large agency, the district can provide fire engines and specialized training and equipment that some cities or areas could not afford independently.

As a result, the District does not allocate equipment based solely on city boundaries. Instead, all of the communities served by the District have access to first-response fire protection and medical care in addition to specialized services. These services include Urban Search and Rescue, Water Rescue, Hazardous Materials, sophisticated equipment used to extricate patients trapped in traffic accidents, large animal rescue and, in the case of wildfires, water tankers, bulldozers, wildland firefighters and water-dropping helicopters operated in cooperation with the Ventura County Sheriff's Office. Centralized fleet maintenance, supply, dispatch and administrative support also contribute to the efficiency of the District.

Like many governmental agencies, the current economic situation has had a negative impact on the Ventura County Fire Protection District's budget. But the District's regional approach makes it possible for the District to apply both its funding and resources to where they will achieve maximum efficiency.

The Ventura County Fire Protection District is committed to providing the highest levels of service possible to the citizens it protects. With innovative thinking, careful fiscal management and dedicated, professional firefighters and employees, the District will continue its tradition of excellence.

# 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 area 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 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, Oxnard Shores, Mandalay Bay, northwest Oxnard, north Ventura Ave., Foster Park, Casitas Springs, Oak View, Miramonte, Meiners Oaks, the City of Ojai, the eastern Ojai Valley and Upper Ojai, and the North Coast.



### District 2 – Supervisor Linda Parks

She represents the cities and areas of Thousand Oaks, Newbury Park, Westlake Village, Lynn Ranch, Oak Park, Santa Rosa Valley, Bell Canyon, Hidden Valley, Lake Sherwood, Malibu-Yerba Buena, portions of the Oxnard plain, Naval Base Ventura County, Point Mugu and the South coast.



### District 3 – Supervisor Kathy Long

She represents the communities of Camarillo, California State University-Channel Islands, Port Hueneme, southeast Oxnard, the eastern Oxnard plain, Santa Paula, Fillmore, Piru, Lockwood Valley and the eastern portion of Naval Base Ventura County, Port Hueneme.



### District 4 – Supervisor Peter C. Foy

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



### District 5 – Supervisor John Zaragoza

He represents the communities of Oxnard, Silver Strand, Hollywood Beach, Hollywood-by-the-Sea, Channel Islands Harbor, El Rio, Nyeland Acres, the Del Norte area, Oxnard College, portions of the Oxnard plain and the western portion of Naval Base Ventura County, Port Hueneme.



### Ventura County Fire Department

165 Durley Avenue • Camarillo, CA 93010

805-389-9710 • Fax: 805-388-4364

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

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

Cover: Engine 352 operates at the Station Fire in Los Angeles County.



In December, the District announced the promotion of Fire Protection Engineer Massoud Araghi to the position of Fire Marshal. He has been a member of the Fire Prevention Bureau since 1987 and, in his new position, will lead that bureau. A Promotion Ceremony was held in October to recognize the promotions of 21 District firefighters and civilian employees.

**2009 In Memoriam**

- Bryan Banister – Fire Control Worker
- Leonard Jenkins – Fire Captain, Retired
- Larry Morris – Fire Captain, Retired

**2009 Retirements**

- Conrad Damann – Fire Equipment Operator
- David Proett – Fire Captain
- R. L. Hudkins – Fire Captain
- Mark Sanchez – Asst. Fire Chief
- Debra Harris – Fire Captain
- Darrell Stillwagon, Jr. – Fire Captain
- Judy LaVallee – Office Assistant III
- Michael Sidlinger – Battalion Chief
- William Shirk – Battalion Chief



**Department Profile**

Ventura County is a geographical area larger than the state of Rhode Island. The Ventura County Fire Protection District response area covers almost half of that area: 848 square miles. The county has 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 District provides fire and rescue services in areas as diverse as urban centers, the coastline, farmlands and wildlands.

In 2009, Ventura County was one of only 17 of California's 58 counties to record a population growth rate of one percent or higher. A rising population results in both a larger number of people protected and an increase in calls for service. Currently, the District serves more than 480,000 people in six cities and the unincorporated areas of the county. During 2009, the department responded to 32,864 calls for service – an average of 90 every day – with an adopted operating budget of just over \$138 million.

**FIRE DEPARTMENT PROFILE**

**PERSONNEL**

- Safety: **398**  
(firefighters, battalion chiefs, etc.)
- Non-Safety: **133**  
(fire prevention, fleet maintenance, administration, etc.)
- Total Personnel: **531**
- Fire Stations: **31**
- Administration and Support Facilities: **4**

**APPARATUS**

- First-Run Fire Engines: **30**
- First-Run Quint Apparatus: **1**
- Ladder Trucks (incl. 1 reserve): **4**
- Paramedic Squad Vehicles: **4**
- Wildland Fire Engines: **11**
- Crash Truck: **1**
- Crew Transports: **2**
- USAR Vehicles: **2**
- Reserve Fire Engines: **17**
- Fire Boat and Water Rescue Craft: **5**
- Command Vehicles: **14**
- Heavy Equipment (bulldozers, etc.): **9**
- Other Emergency Response Vehicles: **33**

**Years of Service**

**5 YEAR**

- Kyle Arledge
- Brian Beliski
- John Braganza
- Justin Dilworth
- Matthew Falat
- Alejandro Garcia
- Joel Hanson
- Timothy Harward
- Katy Pallotto
- Jose Ramirez
- Jordan Roberts
- Charles Scherrei
- Roderick Zierenberg

**10 YEAR**

- Kevin Aguayo
- David Aherns
- Cecelia Alexander
- James Allen
- George Barrett
- David Coventry
- Clayton Cundiff
- Joseph Dullam
- Richard Ellison
- Katie Flores
- Michael Furlong
- Jeffrey Furnish

- Joshua Gisel
- Thomas Glauser
- Randall Globerman
- Israel Gutierrez
- Gregory Henderson
- Rodd Landon
- Anthony McHale
- Ryan Osler
- James Roscoe
- David Schwab
- Cheryl Simmen
- Melvin Smith

- David Stevens
- Jeff Studt
- William Thomas
- David Thompson
- Velinda Trujillo
- Mark Villasenor

**15 YEAR**

- Mark Enneking
- Cary Rake
- Michael Trabbie

**20 YEAR**

- Octavio Armendariz
- Maureen Basile
- Harry Fekkes
- Jules Griggs
- Allen Mandell
- Jeffrey Maurer
- Donna McGrath
- Michael Milkovich
- Martin O'Malley
- Raymond Padoan
- Daniel Preston
- John Spykerman
- Robert Szczepanek
- Marnel VandenBossche
- Samuel Villavicencio
- Beverly Walters
- Michael Yzaguirre

**25 YEAR**

- Vicki Crabtree
- Kevin Davis
- Brian Dilley
- Wayne Ferber
- Jon Jelle
- Mark Karr
- Raymond Lambert
- James Mendsendiek
- Jack Nosco
- Andrew Ortega
- Raymond Ruiz
- Anthony Salas
- John Vincent
- Daran VandenBossche

**35 YEAR**

- Michael Estrada

# 2009 Highlights

## Jesusita Fire Teaches Important Lessons

In May of 2009, the official fire season had hardly begun when a wild-fire started in the hills above Santa Barbara. Driven by both topography and weather, the Jesusita Fire soon turned into a conflagration that destroyed 80 homes, damaged 15 more, and destroyed or damaged more than 80 other structures. At the peak of the fire, more than 4,300 personnel were assigned to the fire.

Three of them almost didn't come home.

Ventura County Strike Team 1580A (five fire engines and a strike team leader) had been assigned to structure protection on Spyglass Ridge in the Mission Canyon area. As they are trained to do, the firefighters began an assessment of the homes they were assigned to protect, checking for defensible space, construction features and other factors that would help them to deploy their resources.

They positioned their engines, pulled hoselines and identified safety zones. But they couldn't predict the weather. A combination of fierce, dry winds and high temperatures drove the fire into the heavy brush below the homes creating extreme fire behavior that drove the firefighters back.

Two firefighters took refuge in the house they were protecting, but the

fire overwhelmed even that safety zone, forcing the firefighters to retreat towards their engine. The fire roared past them, scorching the engine. Calling for help as they retreated, they were met by the strike team leader and his assistant driving a VCFDP Suburban. They pulled the two firefighters into the vehicle and drove away from the fire to a house out of harm's way where medical aid could be rendered.

Two firefighters – Captain Ron Topolinski, a District member for 28 years, and nine-year veteran Firefighter Robert Lopez – had sustained serious burns. Captain Brian Bulger, a 30-year veteran of the department, had inhaled super-heated air and gases while aiding the others, putting his respiratory system in extreme danger. All three were immediately treated by Ventura County firefighter/paramedic Jeff Golden, then transported to Cottage Hospital in Santa Barbara. From there they were airlifted to the Grossman Burn Center in Sherman Oaks.

All three firefighters are now back at work, but their narrow escape served as a lesson for the entire District. Even for highly trained professionals, wildfires can be unpredictable and deadly.

The Jesusita Fire would eventually burn 8,733 acres and a total of 32 firefighters would be injured. We know now that it could have been worse.



## New Weapon to Fight Wildfires

During the 2009 fire season, the District deployed a new weapon to assist firefighters protecting homes during wildfires. Thermo-Gel® is a super-absorbent polymer that can be used effectively to fight a fire or as a coating to protect structures.

When Thermo-Gel® concentrate is combined with water, it transforms the water into a fire-preventing and heat-absorbing gel. The gel can be sprayed on structures, vehicles, vegetation and even people. The gel will adhere to virtually every type of surface, even vertical window panes, and forms a protective coating that protects objects from heating, charring and flame impingement.

The product can protect a structure for several hours. This means firefighters can apply the gel well ahead of the fire's arrival, evacuate the residents safely and then keep moving to protect additional homes.

The District identified 10 strategic engine companies across the county to receive the gel with the intent of equipping additional engines as the budget allows. Each backpack container weighs 47 pounds, not including the weight of the hose and nozzle.

District personnel are quick to point out that Thermo-Gel® is not effective in every situation under wildfire conditions, but when the conditions are right for deployment, it is an extremely effective firefighting tool.



# 2009 Highlights



## “Ready, Set, Go!”

### Teaches Early Preparation, Early Evacuation

The Ventura County Fire Protection District is trying to change the way people think about wildfires. With a year-round wildfire season in the county, the District has embarked on a long-term strategy to educate the public on the dangers of wildfires and the benefits of advance preparation and early evacuation.

The program is called “Ready, Set, Go!” and the title illustrates the intent of the program. Residents are encouraged to prepare themselves and their property well in advance of any wildfires (ready). This includes creating defensible space (weed abatement), retrofitting their homes with fire-safe construction features and planting fire-resistant landscaping.

When fire weather occurs, or when fires are burning, the program teaches property owners to increase their situational awareness, assemble their emergency supplies, identify their evacuation routes and load valuables into their vehicles (set).

In the final step of the program, residents are encouraged to evacuate early (go!). Having prepared themselves and their homes, homeowners can leave early, well before a fire arrives, knowing they have done everything possible to make their property defensible, and giving firefighters the room they need to operate.

The program is innovative in that it requires property owners to become part of the solution to fire losses in the Wildland Urban Interface, where development meets a natural area. Implementing the program requires innovation as well.

In order to reach as many residents as possible, the District is employing many methods to teach the principles of “Ready, Set, Go!” In Camarillo and Thousand Oaks, “Strike Team Saturdays” were held. At these events, firefighters on five fire engines enter a neighborhood and then go door-to-door with information on the program and an invitation to a community meeting.

The District also gives presentations to homeowner’s associations, service clubs, church groups and other assemblies. A special “Ready, Set, Go!” Web site has been set up (<http://vcreadsetgo.org>) that offers publications, checklists, videos and information on fire-resistant construction and landscaping. The District also ran Public Service Announcements on local cable television and in a movie theater in Thousand Oaks.

The “Ready, Set, Go!” program has been nationally recognized and is being adopted by other fire agencies across the country.

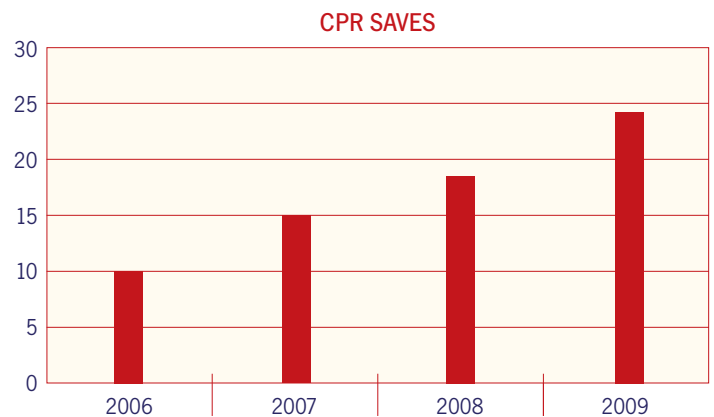
## CPR Saves Rise with “Hands-on” Approach

The “laying on of hands” is one of the most ancient healing methods. In today’s emergency medical environment, the most obvious example of that ancient art is cardio-pulmonary resuscitation. The use of CPR by first-responders is proven to save lives and, this year, the Ventura County Fire Protection District has again seen a remarkable increase in lives saved from just three years ago.

In 2006, the District’s firefighters and their ambulance partners saved 10 lives. But a new focus on continuous chest compressions, recommended by the American Heart Association and implemented that year, has led to a steady increase in CPR saves in Ventura County. In 2007, the number rose to 15, followed by 18 in 2008, to 24 in 2009.

This increase comes in spite of the fact that caring for cardiac arrest patients in the pre-hospital environment is very challenging. Firefighters are caring for extremely critical patients under uncontrolled circumstances, so the District evaluates every cardiac arrest and provides performance feedback to help firefighters continue to develop their skills.

The results are clear. The firefighters are saving more lives with CPR. Hands down.



## Guiberson Fire a Home-Grown Challenge

The highly trained firefighters of the Ventura County Fire Protection District are in heavy demand when wildfires are burning across California. Their professionalism has helped save dozens of communities in recent years. But in September, their skills were required here in Ventura County when the Guiberson Fire broke out.

The fire began in a mulch pile on a ranch across the river from Fillmore. It quickly spread to a nearby hillside and was soon spotting a mile or more out. At the peak of the fire, 2,750 personnel were assigned to the fire. There were 214 fire engines, 63 fire crews, 32 bulldozers, 21 helicopters and eight air tankers working the blaze.

At one point, more than 1,000 homes were threatened along with 20 commercial properties and thousands of outbuildings. Thanks to the hard work of the firefighters, the fire destroyed only two small outbuildings.

Ventura County’s strict weed abatement policy played a key role in providing firefighters with the defensible space they needed to keep the fire from consuming homes.

# Bureaus

The Fire District is divided into six functional bureaus and divisions. Each performs specific tasks either to directly serve the public, or to support the District's mission of public service.

**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 (USAR) and water rescues.

The fire district maintains 31 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 District and most of the other fire agencies and all of the ambulance services in the county.

**The Bureau of Support Services** consists of the Fleet Maintenance unit, the Wildland/Aviation unit and the Supply unit. Fleet Maintenance is responsible for keeping the District's fleet of vehicles in service and available for response. The Wildland/Aviation unit responds to wildfires with hand crews and dozers to create firebreaks, conduct backfiring operations and assist in firefighting operations and 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 material for the Fire District.

**The Bureau of Fire Prevention** is made up of six functional units that are both interrelated and mutually supportive. They are: Planning and New Construction, Code Enforcement and Licensed



Care, Engineering and Fire Protection Systems, Fire Hazard Reduction, Community Education and Filming and Public Information. Through its processes and programs, the bureau works to make Ventura County safer by educating and informing the public on how to prevent fires and prepare for disasters.

**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 technology-based units provide the District with the radio, computing and telephone services it requires to deliver its services to the public and operate its non-emergency business functions.

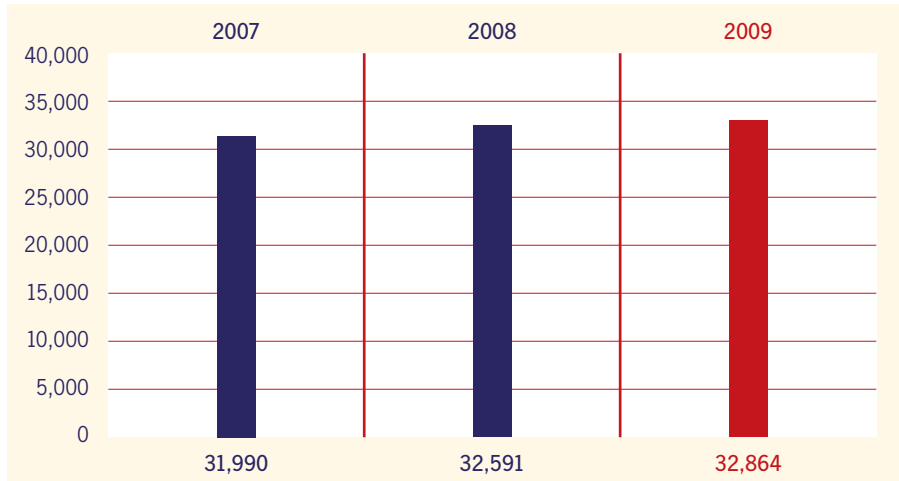
The Regional Training Center is responsible for fire, rescue and emergency medical training for the District's members and the Pre-Emergency Planning and Arson/Fire Investigation unit aids the District by preparing plans for department actions in the event of a major emergency or disaster, investigating the cause of fires and training Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members.

**The Human Resources Division** 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.

**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.



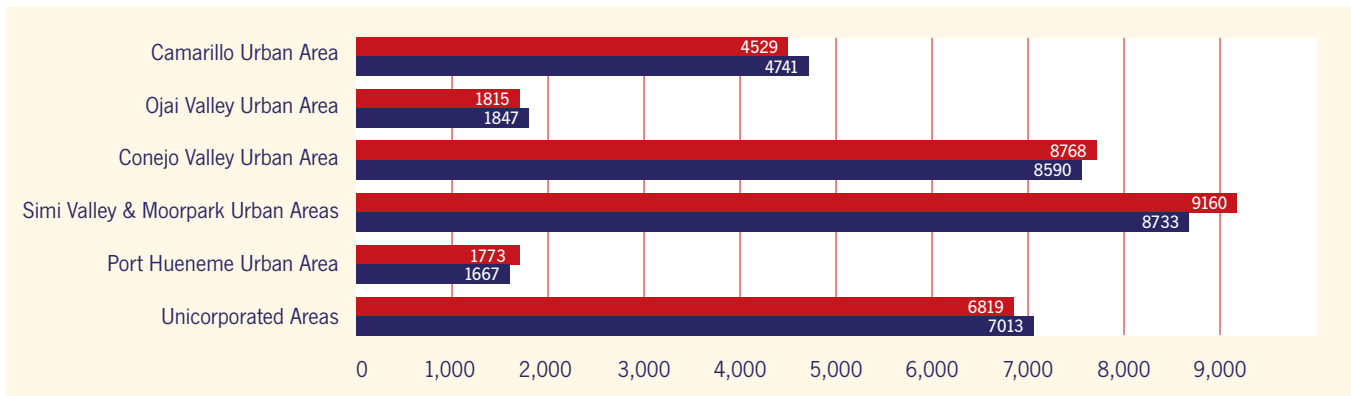
## Annual Calls for Service



2009 █  
2008 █

## Calls for Service by Community

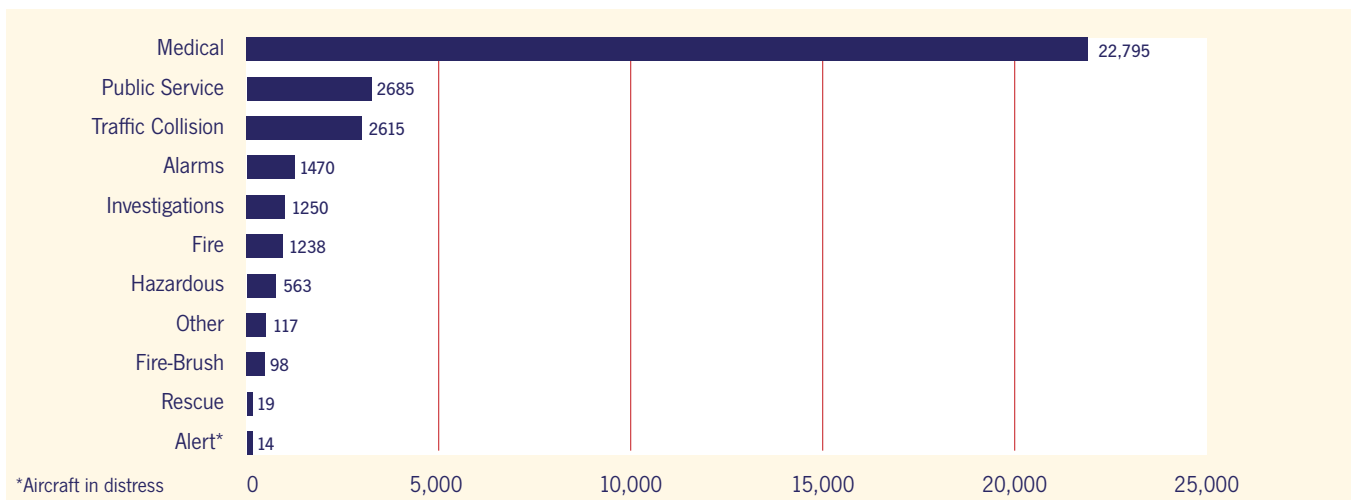
**2009 TOTAL: 32,864**  
**2008 TOTAL: 32,591**



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 cities. The Simi Valley and Moorpark urban areas are combined in the system. The Conejo Valley urban area includes Newbury Park and portions of Westlake Village. The Camarillo and Port Hueneme urban areas consist primarily of those cities. The Ojai urban area includes Oak View and the unincorporated area includes 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

**TOTAL: 32,864**



\*Aircraft in distress

