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SAN FRANCISCO FIRE DEPARTMENT
CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

September 18, 2017

Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Board of Supervisors
City Hall
1 Dr. Carlton B Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102-4689

Dear Supervisor Peskin:

Thank you for your letter dated September 12th that requested information surrounding the San Francisco Fire Department's (SFFD's) planning for and response to the unprecedented heat wave this past Labor Day weekend, September 1st – 3rd, 2017.

The heat wave in question brought unprecedented temperatures to San Francisco, and with those temperatures historic increases in call volume for the weekend, for both the SFFD as well as the City's 911 ambulance system. The Department saw a dramatic increase in both non-medical and medical calls over that period. Over the course of the three days, the SFFD responded to 2,039 calls, peaking with 769 calls for service on Saturday, September 2nd, which is a 95% increase from an average day in the previous month. Given these extreme temperatures and significant increases in call volume, our dedicated members were able to meet County-mandated response time goals for the first paramedic on scene and Code 2 (non-emergency) ambulance on scene, while achieving response times close to the County goal for Code 3 (emergency) ambulance response times.

While there were forecasts in the week leading up to Labor Day weekend pertaining to the expected high temperatures, most of the forecasts projected the City of San Francisco to reach the mid-90s at most. It wasn't until the afternoon of Friday, September 1st that the National Weather Service updated its forecast for that day to 94 degrees and issued an excessive heat warning for San Francisco.

I would also like to provide additional detail in response to the specific questions you had asked regarding the Department's response on Labor Day weekend:

- ***How many SFFD EMT vehicles/ambulances were deployed each day over the 3-day period, and at what times and where (including EMTs on actual fire engines)?***
Consistent with its minimum daily staffing requirements, over the course of the Labor Day weekend, the SFFD staffed 44 engines, 20 trucks, four Paramedic Captains and a number of other specialty units in a 24-hour capacity. As of 1989, an EMT certificate is a minimum qualification to be employed by the SFFD, therefore the vast majority of the hundreds of SFFD personnel on-duty every day are EMTs, providing Basic Life Support (BLS) care. On September 1st, the Department had 32 of its 44 engines deployed as Advanced Life Support (ALS), which means the engine is staffed with at least one paramedic. The Department staffed 33 ALS engines over both the Saturday and Sunday of Labor Day weekend. In addition to these units, the Department had up to 36 ambulances on-duty during the Labor Day weekend. Please see the attached chart, SFFD Ambulance staffing by hour Labor Day 2017, for further information.
- ***It has been widely known within SFFD and DEM that the highest calls for service come on Friday evenings, a fact later confirmed at our recent June 12, 2017 hearing. What staffing changes have happened since that hearing to increase line staffing on Friday evenings?*** The Department is regularly updating its data to model staffing levels going forward and to schedule resources it anticipates will allow the SFFD to meet its response time goals. Given a fixed number of employees, this is done mainly through use of additional overtime shifts as well as additional shifts worked by the SFFD's per diem ambulance work force. As the Department reviews historical demand for previous Fridays (as well as all days of the week), it will increase the need for projected resources as it sees appropriate, accounting for time of day in its analysis. By offering additional overtime or per diem shifts to account for anticipated increases in demand for services, the Department can add ambulance units to meet changing demand levels.
- ***Assuming there was already an increase in Friday evening staffing, were additional staffing changes made on top of that in advance of the 3-day weekend to take into consideration the heat wave? How many additional staff were brought in over the weekend, and how were they deployed during the surge periods?*** This planning was coordinated on a City-wide level, accounting for all three of the providers of 911 ambulance service and their available resources. The Fire Department utilized all available avenues for bringing on additional personnel during the course of the weekend, using voluntary overtime shifts, per diem employees, and mandatory overtime shifts. The Department also extended shifts of already-working ambulance crews (up to three hours) if the demand for services showed a need for additional ambulance resources. The City's private partners added additional units into the system.
- ***Please map the call data during the heat wave by type of call and location of call.***
Please refer to the attached maps for further breakdown of calls, both medical and non-medical in nature.
- ***What was the wait time for an ambulance at peak times during this 3-day period? What is the normal wait for an ambulance on a Friday and Saturday night?*** The peak period for ambulance service over the weekend was approximately 12:00 pm to 10:00 pm on

both Friday and Saturday. On Friday, the City's system had an average Code 3 response time of 6 minutes 24 seconds during this period, and an average Code 3 response time of 7 minutes 24 seconds for this period on Saturday. This compares to the average Code 3 response times of 6 minutes 4 seconds and 5 minutes 49 seconds, for Fridays and Saturdays respectively, for the past year during this same time period. For the entire four-day weekend, the City's ambulance service had an 89% on-time performance when using the policy goal of responding on-scene to a Code 3 ambulance emergency within 10 minutes. The Department met the policy goal of having a paramedic on-scene to an incident within 7 minutes 90 percent of the time during this four-day weekend, with an on-time percentage of 92%.

- ***Given that the National Weather Service predicted on August 29 that San Francisco would be experiencing "severe" levels of heat beginning September 1, why did SFFD issue a PSA on "Preventing Heat-related Injuries and Fires" on September 1 at 2:30pm?*** The Fire Department does not generally provide extreme weather updates through press releases or other forms of communications. The Department's PIO regularly updates the SFFD's social media accounts with relevant information for the general public, including advisories or other notifications, and in the days leading up to the weekend, the Department updated postings with heat-related information. Please see the attached samples of such posts. As I mentioned previously, in the days leading up to the heat wave, there was a heat advisory for San Francisco which anticipated San Francisco reaching the mid-90s temperatures over the Labor Day weekend which, while definitely above normal temperatures for San Francisco, are not as unprecedented as the temperatures that actually occurred that weekend in the City.
- ***Given that many of our first responders live outside of the City, do we have any data on how their travel times impacted staffing during the heat wave?*** The travel time of SFFD employees getting to and from work did not have any impact on staffing levels for the weekend. All members arrived on time. Some ambulance tier members who were called in to work, either for an overtime shift or as a per diem employee, made their shifts on time and did not have any issues.
- ***During a weather emergency, like what happened on the weekend of September 1, how does SFFD coordinate with other City departments? What are the protocols and contingency planning that is followed?*** For large scale events and disasters, the City will activate its Emergency Operations Center (EOC), where Departments will meet to coordinate policy and make operational decisions in a City-wide capacity. SFFD staff were assigned to the EOC over the course of the Labor Day weekend, working closely with personnel from the Department of Emergency Management, the Department of Public Health and the City's private ambulance providers. In addition, Department heads keep in close contact with conference calls to coordinate and execute the operational plans for the event and to adapt to changes as they arise. Depending on the scope of the incident, the Department may activate its own Departmental Operations Center (DOC) to communicate with other Departments' DOCs and the City's EOC to further develop lines of communication to assist operations as needed.

Appendix C – San Francisco Fire Department

- *What kind of feedback loop and reflection is there after a disaster happens? How does SFFD (with other City departments) assess response and coordination so as to improve on it next time? Is there a performance matrix that is used to measure response?* After large scale events or disasters, a “hot wash” is held to bring together all City participants for an extensive review of the incident, to discuss positives as well as look at possible improvements. An after-action report (AAR) is generated after every such an event, where the incident/response is reviewed and formal feedback and recommendations are made to improve coordination and operations in a future event.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information, and I look forward to presenting in front of the GAO Committee on Wednesday morning and answering any additional questions you or the other committee members may have.

Respectfully,

Joanne Hayes-White
Chief of Department

Cc: Board of Supervisors President London Breed
Supervisor Jane Kim