

**MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW FOR
SONOMA VALLEY
FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE
AGENCIES**

Appendix 3

Guide to Response Time Standards

Fire and emergency service agencies are often evaluated on response times – aggregate statistics indicating how long it takes an agency to reach the scene of a reported incident. Response times are measured from when the agency is “called out” (notified of an incident by a dispatcher) to when the agency reports being “on scene”.

In Sonoma County, with only a few exceptions (the City of Rohnert Park, Cloverdale Fire Protection District, and CalFire), REDCOM is the dispatch agency for all fire and emergency service providers. As such, REDCOM maintains call volume and response time statistics, which were used for this report.

A host of factors can affect response times, including agency readiness (are staff on hand, or do they need to report to an agency facility), crew redundancy (are resources already allocated to other incidents, requiring mutual aid backup), and travel time.

It should be noted that response times, while clearly a useful indicator of service quality, do not provide a complete picture of an agency’s ability to serve community needs. For example, response time averages do not reflect whether calls were responded to with adequate staffing and equipment, or whether calls were served with mutual aid responses.

Standards

There are no mandatory federal or state regulations directing the level of fire service response times and outcomes for suppression or fire engine-based Emergency Medical Services (EMS). The body of regulations on the fire suppression service provides that if fire services are provided, they must be done so with the safety of the firefighters and citizens in mind.

However, over the last twenty years a number of state and federal laws, regulations, and court cases based on firefighter safety have affected the flexibility of fire agencies in determining their staffing levels, training, and methods of operation. Some of these are given an abbreviated overview below:

1. 1999 OSHA Staffing Policies – Federal OSHA applied the confined space safety regulations for work inside tanks and underground spaces to America’s firefighters. This requirement pertains to atmospheres that are “IDLH” (Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health): teams of two members inside and two members outside must be in constant communication: the outside team has to be

equipped and ready to rescue the inside team. This situation occurs in building fires where the fire and smoke conditions are serious enough to require the wearing of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). This is commonly called the “2-in/2-out” policy. This policy requires that firefighters enter serious building fires in teams of two, while two more firefighters are outside and immediately ready to rescue them should trouble arise.

2. May 2001 National Staffing Guidelines – The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard on Career and Combination (volunteer) Fire Service Deployment provides guidance to local districts and has been widely adopted as a response standard.

NFPA 1720 Section 4.1 on Fire Suppression Organization states that “fire suppression operations shall be organized to ensure that the fire department’s fire suppression capability includes sufficient personnel, equipment, and other resources to deploy fire suppression resources efficiently, effectively, and safely.”

Table APP 3 -1 shows the staffing and response time recommendation contained in the NFPA standards.

Table APP 3 -1: NFPA #1720 Response Time Standards

Demand Zone	Demographics	Staffing and Response Time – FF/Minutes	Percentage of Completion*
Urban	>1000 people/mi. ²	15/9	90
Suburban	500–1000 people/mi. ²	10/10	80
Rural	< 500 people/mi. ²	6/14	80
Remote	Travel distance ≥ 8 mi.	4/No Standard	90

**Upon assembling the necessary resources at the emergency scene, the fire agency should have the capability to safely commence an initial attack within two minutes for this portion of calls.*

Subject Agency Demand Zone Characteristics

With the recognition that several of the Sonoma Valley fire and emergency service agencies serve a mixture of remote, suburban, and in limited cases suburban demand zones, the response time averages for the agencies have been evaluated against demand zone standards as listed in Table APP 3 – 2.

Table APP 3 – 2: Sonoma Valley Fire and Emergency Medical Service Agency Demand Zone Characteristics

Rural Demand Zone	Suburban Demand Zone
Glen Ellen FPD	City of Sonoma
Shell-Vista FPD	Valley of the Moon FPD
Kenwood FPD	
Mayacamas VFD	