



ANNUAL REPORT FROM COMAL COUNTY ESD #3

2011 EDITION

Poised for the Future



Fire Chief Shawn Wherry keeps an eye on construction at Station No. 5, which is scheduled to open this summer.

Almost 75% of ESD3 calls seek medical assistance

In 2010, almost three out of every four calls that ESD3 received were for medical assistance.

Canyon Lake Fire/EMS, the operating arm of ESD3, responded to 2,319 calls during the year. That's more than six calls per day. Every day. All year.

Of those, 1,730 were medical calls. That could range from a major automobile accident to a heart attack to someone who was inexplicably out-of-breath.

No matter what the call for help, the firefighter/EMTs have to be ready to provide the emergency treatment that can keep people alive until they get to a hospital and a doctor. Canyon Lake Fire/EMS personnel arrive on the scene with training in more than 100 medical procedures or "protocols."

They carry more than 40 different drugs that may be required to be administered. Of course, all these drugs have shelf-lives. When they expire, they are disposed of, and expensive replacements must be purchased.

ESD3 doesn't know what the next 9-1-1 call will be, but it knows this: With the Baby Boomers advancing in age, the demand for emergency medical service is not going to decrease any time soon.

New station to open doors this summer

With the completion of Station No. 5 on Island View this summer, Comal County ESD No. 3 is nearing the end of its three-year capital expenditure program.

Station No. 5 will become the second new station constructed as part of the program. ESD3 opened its Station No. 1 in 2009.

Station No. 5 experienced construction delays. "We apologize to the community for the delay," said ESD3 Board Pres. Keith Lewis, "We are working with our advisors to make sure that we resume our pace and open the new station as soon as possible."

In other capital projects, ESD3 also added modular living quarters – at Stations No. 2 and No. 3 – and purchased two new pumper trucks to outfit the stations.

Thanks in part to the new stations, ESD3's operating arm, Canyon Lake Fire/EMS, has been able to cut its average response to 8 minutes.

As the capital program winds down, ESD3 is taking a breather and plans no major undertakings. That's partly because of the economy and partly because ESD3 is at the ceiling of its property tax rate.

More staff necessary

Once ESD3 officials can rely on increased revenues, they plan to add staff. Currently ESD3 employs 44 paid staff, including 39 operational firefighter/EMTs on shift.

As the number of calls resumes its climb, more staff will be needed to avoid "Status Zero," when all per-

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Questions and Answers

about your emergency services

Q: Who provides our fire protection and emergency medical service?

A: Two emergency services districts – Comal County Emergency Services Districts #2 and #3 – are the grassroots governments responsible for providing those services. ESD#2 is responsible for emergency medical service and ESD#3 is responsible for fire protection in a 250 sq.-mi. area. Comal County ESD#3 operates Canyon Lake Fire/EMS and contracts to provide emergency medical service for ESD#2.

Q: What is an emergency services district?

A: An emergency services district is a political subdivision of the State of Texas, just like a school district. It is not part of County government, although it works closely with the County Commissioners Court.

Q: Where do our local ESDs get their money?

A: As allowed by the Texas Constitution and state statutes, ESD#2 and ESD#3 levy a property tax. The State Constitution limits ESDs to a tax rate of no more than 10 cents per \$100 of property value. ESD#2 collects a rate of 4.5 cents per \$100 of property value. With voter approval in 2007, ESD#3 was able to increase its tax rate to 8 cents per \$100 of property value.

On a home taxed on \$200,000 of value, that means both ESDs receive a total tax of \$250 a year – **just more than \$20 a month** – to know that trained, professional firefighter/paramedics with state-of-the-art equipment will be at your door within minutes in an emergency.

ESD#2 bills for ambulance calls; it waives co-payments for residents of the district.

ESD#3 also collects a one-cent sales tax. The sales tax reduces the reliance on property tax and distributes the tax burden among visitors who may not own property in the district, but are protected during their stays. And ESD#2 collects co-payments from non-residents on its ambulance calls.

Q: Aren't all the firefighters and EMTs volunteers?

A: No. They are paid, certified professionals. Canyon Lake Fire/EMS cannot rely exclusively on volunteers to provide the level of service you expect. With an aging population and more time-stressed commuters, fewer volunteers are stepping forward. And the types of calls – medical, hazardous materials, homeland security – require the training and expertise a professional can provide.



Fire Chief Shawn Wherry and ESD#3 Pres. Keith Lewis stand in front of the Sattler building the ESD is leasing for use in training and meetings. Training is stressed for the district's 44 employees, in part because training is a component in calculating an area's fire safety for setting homeowner insurance premiums. With effective ESD training, many homeowners pay less for their insurance.

A look at ESD3's 2011 budget

INCOME

Property Tax	\$2,100,000
Less 5% Noncollectable	(75,000)
Sales Tax	700,000
ESD#2 Contract	950,000
WORD Standby Funding	10,000
EMS Billing	540,000
Contributions Drive	85,000
Interest Income	1,500
Other Income	2,500
CLHS Football Standby	2,500
SAFER Act Grant	300,000
Sale of Equipment	150,000
Less Debt Service	(662,735)
Less Budgeted Capital Expenditures	(20,000)
TOTAL AVAILABLE OPERATING FUNDS	\$4,083,765

EXPENSES

Administrative	\$100,800
Professional Services	109,000
Personal Protective Equipment	9,000
Fire Equipment	9,000
Fire Apparatus	145,000
Fire Stations	239,500
Medical	145,700
Communications	11,750
Insurance	55,000
Personnel Payroll	2,480,000
Personnel Overhead	546,000
Training	82,500
Contingency	50,000
Retainage	100,515
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$4,083,765



Commissioners from Comal County ESD No. 2 and No. 3 got a taste of firefighting April 27. After an introductory lecture (bottom left), the commissioners donned bunker gear. At left, ESD2 Commissioner Larry Burrow suits up. Using a smoke-making machine, Canyon Lake Fire/EMS filled the second floor of its old Sattler Station with smoke, and the simulation was on. At the scene (bottom right) ESD2 Commissioner George Steinke received instruction on handling an axe, while others hauled heavy hose (right). With experience searching for victims and “rescuing” a heavy dummy, the civilian training is a prototype for a Citizens Fire Academy in the works for interested residents of ESD3.



Keep watching out for wildfires

In the face of yet another record-shattering drought, Canyon Lake Fire/EMS praised residents for efforts to prevent wildfires.

“We want to thank the Canyon Lake community for being aware of burn bans and for working to prevent these fires,” said Chief Shawn Wherry. “As dry as it has been, we could have faced much worse.”

Here are some tips to continue preventing wildfires:

Have a fire break: Move combustible material, such as firewood, away from your house. Propane tanks

should be far enough away from buildings for valves to be shut off in case of fire.

Clean roof surfaces and gutters of leaves, branches, etc., regularly to avoid accumulation of flammable materials.

Landscape smart: Keep the area clear of flammable vegetation. Prune trees to keep branches away from your home.

Call the Fire Department, 907-2922, for assistance in assessing your home’s wildfire risk.

INFORMATION FROM THE PEOPLE WHO PROVIDE YOUR FIRE PROTECTION

Para obtener una copia de esta informacion traducida en Español, favor de llamar a telefono 830-907-2922

Cooperative effort

Combined drill allows ESD3, neighboring agencies chance to work together

Flashing lights and raised ladders added a bit of excitement at a Comal County resort last fall. While firefighters in full gear hooked up hoses and checked second floor rooms for “victims,” curious resort visitors peeked out their doors to get a glimpse of the action.

Despite the array of emergency vehicles and response units that flooded the parking lot, there was not an actual fire at the scene. It was only a training drill.

Canyon Lake Fire/EMS, the operating arm of Comal County ESD No. 3, hosted a three-day training event at the resort, and invited nearby fire departments to join in on the combined drill.

About 120 firefighters participated in the training event, with members from the San Marcos, New Braunfels, Spring Branch and Bulverde fire departments taking the opportunity to practice sharing resources and working

together with Canyon Lake in the event of a large-scale fire.

Using a block of units at the resort, scenarios were set up on the second floor of the building. In the drill, firefighters had to find and rescue a victim in a “burning” building, while thinking on their feet to overcome challenges they



could face in an actual fire. In one drill, for example, two firefighters became trapped in one of the units and had to be rescued.

Each time the drill was run, the team debriefed afterwards, discussing what went well and what could have been improved.

The training event not only provided an opportunity for local departments to work together, but allowed rural and urban-interface departments to practice with ladder trucks and other equipment they can't usually afford, and gave urban departments the chance to work with the extra manpower they would need in major fire situations.



Firefighters look for victims during a joint drill.

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sonnel are committed. If another call comes in, there's no one to send.

Then ESD3 has to rely on neighboring departments for mutual aid, and that can delay response.

“Those minutes are critical when a home is on fire or a person is suffering a heart attack,” said Chief Shawn Wherry.

‘Employer of choice’

Once ESD3 can expand its staff, it should have no problems finding applicants.

“We've become an ‘employer-of-choice,’” Lewis said. Because of the advanced training, up-to-date equipment, and competitive salary and benefits, firefighter/EMTs from other agencies in the area are eager to come to work for ESD3. When ESD3 had a few vacancies recently, more than 80 people applied for