



ANNUAL REPORT FROM COMAL COUNTY ESD #2 AND COMAL COUNTY ESD #3

2009 EDITION

Planning for a Safe Future

The basics...

To help you understand how you receive your fire protection and ambulance service, here are the basics:

Comal County ESD#2 is the local government responsible for **emergency medical service**.

Comal County ESD#3 is the local government responsible for **fire protection**.

The two districts have the same boundaries and cooperate on services. ESD#2 contracts with ESD#3, which operates Canyon Lake Fire/EMS.

Town Hall meeting March 11 to focus on ambulance funding

The future of ambulance service in the Canyon Lake area will be the topic of a town hall meeting at 6:30 p.m. March 11 at the Tye Preston Memorial Library, 1321 FM 2673 in Sattler.

Comal County ESD#2, the local government responsible for providing emergency medical service, will discuss plans for maintaining service levels in the face of an uncertain economy and the dramatically rising demand for its services. EMS calls rose 17 percent in 2008 and are projected to post another, dramatic increase of 25 percent this year.

Currently ESD#2 is limited to a property tax of 2 cents per \$100 of property value, the limit that has not increased in 17 years. On a home valued at \$100,000, the owner pays \$20 a year to ESD#2 to know that professional emergency medical technicians with state-of-the-art equipment will be at the door in minutes in an emergency.

ESD#2 is asking voters for permission to go above that 2-cent tax-rate. If voters grant the authority at a May 9 election, ESD#2 commissioners have pledged that, absent unforeseeable circumstances, the tax rate will not rise to more than 4.5 cents per \$100 in property

Continued on Page 3 "Funding"

Status Zero

*ESDs strive to avoid
running out of manpower*

For emergency responders who are dedicated to protecting lives and property, one of the most chilling phrases to face is "Status Zero."

Status Zero means that all personnel have been committed to answer current calls for help. Status Zero means that if another call comes, there won't be anybody to send.

With growth in population and demand for services, emergency officials fear that Status Zero

Continued on Page 3 "Status Zero"



Emergency medical technicians work to rescue a truck driver in a rollover.

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 has recently completed the acquisition of Canyon Lake Fire/EMS. It 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 2 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 \$200 a year – **less than \$17 a month** – to know that trained, professional firefighter/paramedics with state-of-the-art equipment will be at the 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.

ESD#3 to add staff with federal grant

Comal County Emergency Services District #3 has been informed that it was awarded a five-year grant for firefighting assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The \$975,420 grant will allow ESD#3 and Canyon Lake Fire/EMS to add fire suppression staff.

The grant provides funding for the fire suppression staff members in the first year of the grant, and gradually reduces its annual commitment over the course of the grant.

The SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grant was created to provide funding directly to fire departments and volunteer firefighter interest organizations in order to help them increase the number of trained, "front-line" firefighters available in their communities.

The goal of SAFER is to enhance the local fire departments' abilities to comply with staffing, response and operational standards established by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

With the support of voters to increase its tax cap, Comal County ESD 3 was able to hire six additional personnel in 2008. The 2009 budget calls for hiring six more shift personnel and an assistant chief to manage day-to-day operations.

With the SAFER grant and additional resources, ESD#3 will be able to hire nine additional firefighters in 2009, bringing the total shift staff to 39 or 13 per shift each day.

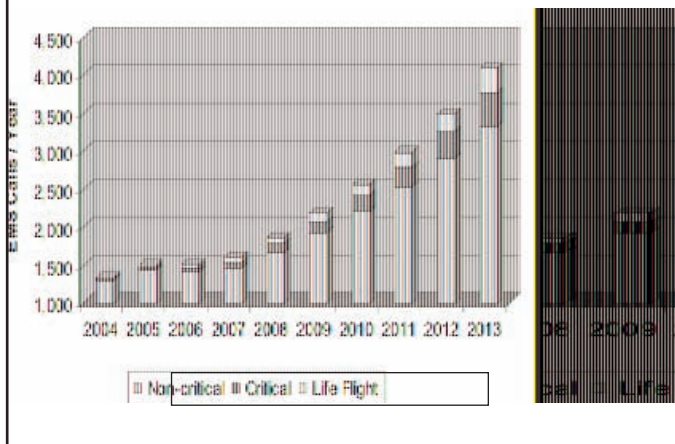
It's all about the clock

When emergency service officials talk about personnel or new stations, they're really talking about one thing: Beating the clock.

When fire breaks out or a person needs medical help, every minute counts. In a heart attack or a stroke, a minute may mean the difference between life and death.

By making sure that trained, well-equipped professionals are ready to answer the call and can get there quickly, Comal County ESD#2 and ESD#3 can beat the clock – and save property and lives.

EMS calls in ESD#2



Status Zero/From Page 1

will become more common in the Canyon Lake area.

Even with the addition of staff in 2008, ESD officials predict that, without additional personnel and equipment over the next few years, there will be more times when Canyon Lake Fire/EMS reaches “Status Zero.”

When that happens, Canyon Lake Fire/EMS must rely on mutual aid contracts with other jurisdictions. Fire departments or ambulances from neighboring jurisdictions have to be summoned.

“They always do their best,” said Fire/EMS Chief Shawn Wherry, “But, because they are a good distance away, it takes longer for them to get here.”

The mutual-aid call means it could take 45 minutes or more to get help to you in an emergency.

“That’s critical time when you’re suffering chest pain or watching flames on your roof,” Wherry noted, “That’s why we’ll do everything we can to avoid Status Zero.”

Emergency officials believe that, with additional resources, they can keep Status Zeros in our area a rare occurrence, not an everyday reality.

Funding/From Page 1

value for the next two years. For the owner of that previously mentioned \$100,000 home, that would mean increased payments of \$25 a year a little more than \$2 a month.

ESD#2 commissioners hope to purchase additional equipment and add staff for an EMS unit at Station No. 5 (Island View), which is set to begin construction this year.

“We need to stick to our plan to expand our fleet of ambulances,” said Fire/EMS Chief Shawn Wherry. “We are making about five medical calls every day. That puts a lot of strain on our vehicles, as well as our personnel.”

Ambulances are costly equipment. Canyon Lake Fire/EMS ambulances have added mobile intensive care units that save critical time – and lives – by transmitting detailed information about a patient’s condition to the hospital during transport.

As the area population grows – particularly with the influx of retirement-oriented Baby Boomers – ESD#2 planners expect a dramatic increase in the demand for emergency medical service over the next five years. It’s projected that in only four years, our firefighter/EMTs will be answering 10 medical calls a day, and almost one a day will be serious enough to summon a helicopter from San Antonio for speedier transport.

ESD#2 and ESD#3 are discussing how to split the bill for the increased manpower and equipment.

“Both ESDs are at the limit of their taxing ability, but we foresee the need for additional manpower and equipment,” said ESD#2 Commissioner George Steinke.

He noted that ESD#2 does bill insurance companies for ambulance calls. Under current ESD#2 policies, though, residents of Comal County ESD#2 do not pay co-pay charges on those bills. Commissioners may have to re-evaluate the policy to meet financial goals.

“At our March 11 meeting, we want to explain the constraints we face,” he said, “At the May 9 election, our residents will decide the level of ambulance service they would like us to provide.”

Keep watching out for wildfires

In the face of a 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.

Comal County Emergency Services District #2 (EMS)
Comal County Emergency Services District #3 (Fire)
P.O. Box 1412
Canyon Lake, TX 78133

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Information: 830-907-2922

TOWN HALL MEETING ON YOUR AMBULANCE SERVICE • 6:30PM MARCH 11 at LIBRARY IN SATTLER

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

2008

Promises Made/Promises Kept

- Canyon Lake Fire/EMS responds to 2,563 calls for assistance (701 fire; 1862 medical) – an increase of 14 percent over the previous year and 40 percent since 2004.
- Comal County ESD#3 insurance safety rating is in the top 11 percent of the nation's fire departments. The improvements mean some homeowners' **insurance premiums may decrease 15 to 50%.**

2009

More People/More Places

- Begin construction in July on a new Station No. 5 (Island View) to house 6 firefighters/EMTs and 4 vehicles.
- Comal County ESD#2 has called an election May 9, asking for voter approval to go above its current tax cap of 2 cents per \$100 of property value.
- With budget increases, grants and additional funding, hire nine more staff members. This will allow staffing of 13 persons per shift, up 62 percent over 2007 levels.
- To reduce the time it takes to respond for a call for help, update ESD#3's "Long Term Plan" to consider building a neighborhood station near 306 and Purgatory Road, as well as acquiring property for other neighborhood stations in the 250 sq. mi. service area.



New Station #1 opens in March

Comal County ESD#3 will move into its newly constructed central station – Station #1 – in March. The new station is located in Canyon City at 1074 Scissortail.

The new, 14,410 sq.-ft. station is part of ESD#3's five-year plan to have more of its people in more places so that it can reduce response times to emergency calls

The station was completed ahead-of-schedule and under the budget of \$200 per square foot. The building construction costs came in 15 percent under-budget from the original estimate.

The new station will provide a new center for Canyon Lake Fire/EMS and mean quicker average response in both fire and medical emergencies.