



Press Release

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For Immediate Release

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Cambria CSD Approves 1-Year Contract with Cal Fire for Interim Management of Local Fire Operations

Agency Will Cover Duties of Retiring Cambria Chief Mark Miller; CSD Board Names Committee to Look at Long-Term Options

CAMBRIA, CA – The Cambria Community Services District (CCSD) announced today that it has approved a one-year contract for management services from the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire).

The term of the contract starts on Wednesday, July 1. Approved by the CCSD Board of Trustees at its June 25 meeting, the \$228,856 contract runs until July 1, 2016.

Cal Fire Battalion Chief Eric Shalhoob will serve under the contract as department head of the CCSD's Cambria Fire Department, whose current chief, Mark Miller, is retiring later this month. Shalhoob is a 20-year veteran in fire service who currently serves as Cal Fire's Battalion Chief of Training in San Luis Obispo County. In his new Cambria post he will be supported by a team of Cal Fire officials, with Cal Fire/San Luis Obispo Fire Chief Robert Lewin in overall command.

Also on June 25, the CCSD Board President Gail Robinette appointed with Board approval, an ad hoc committee of two directors, Mike Thompson and Board Vice President Muril Clift, to consider possible long-term arrangements under which Cal Fire and Cambria Fire could more effectively share their resources. The appointment of the committee comes in response to a recent recommendation by the San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury.

“At a time of extremely high fire danger such as this, it is very reassuring to have the resources of Cal Fire available to maintain peak fire prevention and response efforts,” said CCSD General Manager Jerry Gruber. “Chief Mark Miller’s retirement leaves a gap that can only be filled by a leadership of deep experience and proven skills. Eric Shalhoob, Robert Lewin and the rest of the Cal Fire team provide that level of leadership.”

Shalhoob will serve both as the CCSD's Fire Department head and as battalion chief over Cal Fire's station in Cambria. He will work in partnership with Battalion Chief Phill Veneris, who has been battalion chief for the Cambria area for 15 years and will now act in that role for Cayucos and Los Osos. Also supporting Shalhoob will be Battalion Chief Laurie Donnelly,

serving as county fire marshal, and Battalion Chief Tom McEwen, in charge of fire law enforcement. Assistant Chief Eric Cleveland and Administrative Officer Bill Winter will provide administrative support. Assistant Chief/Forester Alan Peters will continue to handle forestry issues. Deputy Chief Steve Reeder oversees all operations and is acting chief in Chief Lewin's absence. Cal Fire has three battalion chiefs on primary response every day and a 24/7 duty chief assigned with the rank of division chief or higher.

Lewin said he is currently developing a transition plan with Miller to ensure a smooth transfer of management. "Our focus will be on maintaining public safety and good leadership of the firefighters," he said. "The document will outline a 15, 30 and a 60 day plan."

Lewin added, "I want to offer my appreciation to Chief Miller for his years of service and leadership and wish him the very best in his well-deserved retirement." Gruber also saluted Miller for his "dedication to Cambria and its service to the public throughout his career."

The CCSD's ad hoc committee will examine possible options for the CCSD-Cal Fire relationship after the management contract ends. Currently, CCSD and Cal Fire each have a fire station serving Cambria's approximately 6,000 residents. The Grand Jury report has suggested that services might be delivered more efficiently through consolidation. The ad hoc committee will be holding a series of meetings in coming months to gather public input and do a full cost-benefit assessment of options including a merger and staying with the status quo of two separate fire departments.

For further information, contact Tom Gray, CCSD Public Information Officer, at 805-927-4402.

Note: "Phill Veneris" is cq.

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