

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO 2018 - 2019 CIVIL GRAND JURY



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*** PRESS RELEASE ***

ACT NOW BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE: AGGRESSIVELY EXPAND AND ENHANCE OUR EMERGENCY FIREFIGHTING WATER SYSTEM

San Francisco, CA, July 17, 2019 – San Francisco is notoriously vulnerable to fires following a major earthquake. Today, the City has a seismically safe high-pressure Auxiliary Water Supply System (AWSS) -- separate and distinct from the low-pressure municipal water supply system -- that provides excellent firefighting protection to parts of the City. However, the Civil Grand Jury found that large parts of the City, such as the outer Richmond, outer Sunset, and Bayview/Hunters Point, among others, do not have a high-pressure AWSS, and would be particularly vulnerable to fire damage when the next major earthquake strikes.

City leaders have known about this deficiency for decades, but have yet to develop concrete plans or a timeline to provide a robust emergency firefighting water supply for all neighborhoods. In 2014, the US Geological Survey estimated that there is a 72 percent chance of a 6.7 or greater magnitude earthquake striking the Bay Area by 2043. Plans to develop a seismically safe high-pressure AWSS for the western portion of the City are now moving forward. However, at the City's current pace and funding levels, expansion of AWSS protections to inadequately protected neighborhoods will not be completed for 35 years or more – well after the USGS predicts that one or more major earthquakes will strike. The Civil Grand Jury, therefore, recommends that, by the end of 2020, the City present a detailed plan to extend AWSS protections to all neighborhoods, with an accelerated completion date of no later than 2034.

As an interim measure, the Grand Jury strongly recommends that the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors approve the San Francisco Fire Department's (SFFD) request to replace and expand its portable water supply system (PWSS). Comprised of specially equipped trucks ("hose tenders"), the PWSS can distribute pressurized water from many sources for long distances, and can be built and operational in one to two years. The Grand Jury recommends that these new PWSS hose tenders be strategically placed in Districts 1, 4, 7, and 11 -- neighborhoods lacking in AWSS protections. Although the Mayor's draft budget includes funds for 4 new hose tenders, this is barely sufficient to replace the current inventory of 5 tenders, all of which are past their useful lives.

The Grand Jury also recommends that the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and the SFFD jointly develop "best practices" to ensure the proper maintenance of all AWSS assets, and that these agencies adopt and implement annual emergency response exercises, which include simulated earthquake drills using both AWSS and PWSS assets.

ACT NOW BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

Experts tell us that San Francisco is overdue for another major earthquake like the one that devastated the City in 1906. Nevertheless, City officials have not prioritized plans to expand the high-pressure emergency firefighting water supply to all neighborhoods. This is a problem that threatens the lives and property of over one-third of our City's residents. City officials should make the expansion of emergency firefighting protections to all San Franciscans a matter of high priority, before it is too late.

Civil Grand Jury reports may be viewed online at <http://civilgrandjury.sfgov.org/report.html>.

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