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Investigation into accident that injured MOFD firefighters delayed

By Nick Marnell

Three firefighters from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District were seriously injured in an accident on Highway 24 in December. All three firefighters continue to recover at home from their injuries.

At the Dec. 13 MOFD board meeting, Fire Chief Randall Bradley issued a statement that "a comprehensive incident review by an independent consultant...is in progress and that report will be issued within sixty days." On Jan. 9, when asked about the progress of the investigation, Bradley said it was not yet under way but would begin as soon as a contract was signed with John Sharry and Associates, a Discovery Bay consulting firm. Bradley indicated that the terms would be worked out that week. He said that Sharry's rate to review and analyze all aspects of the accident was \$125 per hour, with an 80-hour maximum.

John Sharry and Randall Bradley worked together at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. "That is very well known throughout the fire service," offered Bradley. "He was a mentor and I trust him deeply...I called John and he reluctantly agreed to do (the investigation) for a reduced rate because it involved firefighter safety. And I asked him for a favor."

MOFD board president Frank Sperling saw no potential conflict with the level of friendship between the fire chief and a consultant. "The only relevant acceptability criteria are that the person hired by the chief is a well qualified consultant and that the cost is appropriate for the services provided," he said. "It doesn't surprise me that the chief would have connections and/or be professionally associated with most of the qualified post-event investigators/consultants."

Nearly two months from the date of the accident, the contract with Sharry and Associates was still unsigned. Sharry responded to a phone call in search of the reason for the delay. "You'll have to ask Bradley that," he said. "I have agreed in principle to the terms of the contract."

When asked, Bradley replied that he has yet to send the final version of the contract to Sharry. "I want to get this done," he stressed. "As soon as Sharry signs, I will sign, and update the board at the Feb. 6 meeting."

Sperling made it clear that the investigation of this accident is the "absolute right thing to do." He added that "this sort of action not only identifies potential holes in our procedures...it also ensures continual quality improvement."

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