



Q&A Transcript for the March 5, 2025

Town Hall: Fire Safety and City Water Systems

(edited for clarity; full recording can be found [here](#))

Fire Department

[SantaBarbaraCA.gov/Fire-Department](https://www.santabarbara.ca.gov/Fire-Department)

(805) 564-5702

Public Works Water Resources Division

[SantaBarbaraCA.gov/Water-Resources](https://www.santabarbara.ca.gov/Water-Resources)

(805) 564-5387

Facilitator & Presenters:

City Administrator - Kelly McAdoo

Fire Department Chief - Chris Mailes

Fire Marshal - Ryan DiGuilio

Water Resources Division Manager - Joshua Haggmark

Water System Manager - Matt Ward

1. What are the weak links that keep our staff up at night in terms of emergency?

Chief Mailes: Human life first, I have ultimate confidence that our firefighters will be able to get in do the best job they can I have incredible confidence in our Mutual Aid System our partnerships across the state and the nation.

I worry about people not being prepared and not evacuating in a timely manner. I don't want people to wait to be told to evacuate everyone has their own individual situation whether it's a mobility issue. Whether, it's they don't have a car and they're going to be on foot, everyone has different situations and everyone needs to have a plan. It's me being worried about when I get there I can't concentrate on the fire I've got to get people out. Our primary job is to get people out

That was the focus of the First Responders on the Palisades Fire they had an incredible amount of people trying to get out at the same time. The best fire that I could go to is when I get there and everybody's gone and I can concentrate on the fire. It's life, safety, property conservation, environmental protection. The second and third are flipped but always first last and always is life safety.

Fire Marshal DiGuilio: When Sundowners happen, this one keeps me up at night. Sign up for

ReadySBC.org. Do your home hardening now, prepare yourself with your family and your kit and your plan, do all that now.

Mr. Haggmark: Keeping up with the ageing infrastructure we've identified years ago, and we've been trying to make that investment. We're putting \$17 million into pipe replacement every year and really trying to make sure that those pipes are going to be there. We are testing them and the other one that's not a surprise either is just the workforce. It takes between five to eight years to really get a water operator to the point where they understand the complexities of the system. It's been very difficult in this environment to hold on to those valuable employees, especially we're such an island it's hard to find Workforce housing here.

Administrator McAdoo: Having staff here to respond and making sure that we retain the staff that we have.

2. **There's people on the Mesa that are hypersensitive to any fire not necessarily a wildfire. Could you talk a little bit about the role of Vic Trace construction project and how it does or does not play a consequence to our water supply just to fight neighborhood fires?**

Mr. Haggmark: The Vic Trace Reservoir, which is one that's uh we're working on replacement. It's one of the City's largest reservoir at 10 million gallons, it provides about 70% of this community with water, 70% of our residents with water. We're working starting on the design of the replacement. The reservoir size, we know we're going to keep at 10 million, but how do we construct it while still maintaining the fire protection that's going to be part of the design? We do have a workshop coming up the we are welcoming the community to come and ask questions. We're going to have the design team, we'll be able to get that, we're just starting design. That'll be a big component of the replacement of the new reservoir.

3. **You mentioned there's 29 Personnel on call active every day do you feel that's adequate when 15 firefighters or 15 fire Personnel were at my house (the night of a fire) and you had the rest of the community? Is there enough fire personnel?**

Chief Mailes: We have data that supports that. Our eight station, 29 personnel, are adequate for the types of calls that we respond to, how many calls we get, multiple calls at the same time. What I am worried about is that the five engines at your house and then we will get another call up on the Mesa that needs five engines. I'm very comfortable with the fact that we have eight stations.

In fact, if you were to look on a map of Santa Barbara there'd be a lot of people that would go, wow 23 mile City. Ventura a similar size city has six fire stations. What's the difference? The difference is that you can't get down the Avenue, down Telephone Road. There's not a lot of straight shots from one end of town to the other end of town. Our fire stations are not set up so much by distance but by time...We really are set up for a timely response. Our response times are within the National Standard, but I'm going to go back to Regional Dispatch.

What I know that's going to do is effectively overnight will move us from an eight station fire department to an eleven station fire department. Immediately without delay. There are delays right now between our dispatch center. We have a fire in the city and we need to physically call the County and ask them to respond into the city. That's going to be done. We're going to all be

under one Dispatch Center.

When we move to Regional Dispatch, it's going to look a little different. We're going to have different color fire trucks on the calls because they are the closest available unit to handle the situation. I'm really confident with what we are actually doing is increasing the capacity and robustness of our department at a very reasonable price by not having to add a fire station ourselves.

4. Are our building codes addressing combustion (from structure to structure). Are they putting appropriate space between structures for the defensibility and how are we going to balance that with the new set of State laws?

Administrator McAdoo: We have different standards for how close structures can be in different set so in the high fire zones you can you have to have your structures farther apart. there's different building materials that can be used. it is one of the things we have to look at when we're talking about density and where we're building houses and how close they're together. In high-fire hazard zone is it that's where, why, when you look at the housing element and where we have planned for more dense housing it is in the lower areas of the city closer to the water where there's not as much vegetation, evacuation routes are easier and so I think trying to be thoughtful in the community planning process about where we plan for density so we're not putting thousands of additional people in a high-fire hazard danger zone with very poor evacuation routes that we can't get that many people out of.

Fire Marshal DiGuilio: One of the reasons the Eaton Fire was so devastating is that it is a very old neighborhood in Altadena, very old California Cottages built of old construction and very close to each other. In the early 2000's there was a giant fire siege in San Diego County. The fire code and the building code came together and said how are we going to build these new houses to be more fire resilient? What came of that was what is known as Chapter 7A in the building code and the fire code that means any house built from the ground up after 2008 in a high fire hazard area has to be built per these certain standards. My picture indicated earlier of that house, it was stucco right it was boxed eaves, noncombustible roof, dual pane glass window. These are all the things that need to take place now in new structures.

The City and Fire Department's stance on some development issues was the Senate Bill about lot splits and ADU lot splits, we took a good hard look at that high fire hazard areas and because the life/safety impact of these aren't allowed in those areas. We don't need the density there, we don't need the more cars there, we don't need structures closer to each other so that radiant heat can affect all those other properties. We take a hard look at those and when we can and it's logical, we have the right to do that per State law. We implement those safety factors into the city.

Administrator McAdoo: If you're thinking about remodeling your home know it's a great opportunity to take advantage and actually do the home hardening and upgrading building materials. I know that can be challenging with some of our historic structures in town but I think there are a lot of companies now that are specializing in building materials for historic structures historic homes where you can sort of still have that same look and feel but with more modern materials. I think will see a lot more of that as we sort of debrief from these fires.

I also wanted to mention if you see weeds overgrown trees other things that look like fire dangers, please use SBConnect to report it to the city so we can go out and take care of those

fuel issues uh throughout the community. we can't be everywhere all at once and this is the partnership piece please report that on SBConnect call the fire department, call code enforcement if you see a house that has a lot of trash building materials other things in the yard um please report that so that those materials don't become combustible and create an issue for other properties in the neighborhood.

5. The fire hydrant closest to our house is about 700 ft away way typically it's 350 between fire hydrants is the city going to be installing fire hydrants to meet that standard between fire hydrant in residential areas?

Fire Marshal DiGuilio: The state is rolling out new high-fire Hazard area maps. They've done it with the SRA land the state responsibility areas now they're doing it with the LRA (local) land which is where the city falls under. Those maps are actually being release Monday (March 10, 2025) and we'll be in the review process of that. There will be a public comment portion of that, we will review it. It'll need to get approved by the City. The maps may or may not change. CalFire designates the high-fire area. We, the City, have jurisdiction to make them more restrictive but we can't make them less restrictive than the state. I can't tell you if the maps are going to change I don't know yet, there are obviously things that there's a ripple effect if the if the high fire has area is moved or expanded when it comes to new construction or new development different standards that might roll down because of that but that's going to be starting as early as next week.

Mr. Ward: Typically fire hydrants are approximately 500 feet interval, it always differs from area to area but happy to differs from area to area but happy to into that individual um case. we also work with the fire department inciting all of our fire hydrants so there's areas that are strategically better to place a hydrant and there is some threats to fire hydrants as you know cars occasionally do hit fire hydrants so the spacing isn't always exact act but we work closely with the fire department.

Chief Mailes: Every fire engine in the city of Santa Barbara has at least 500 gallons and some of them have 750 gallons when we take a a fire attack line off of a fire engine we're pumping around 100 to 150 gallons per minute so our Engineers our drivers know that they have three or four minutes of hard firefighting before they have to think of um catching a hydrant. the other thing is you keep in mind is the next engine that comes also has 500 Gall so they can transfer water from one to another but typically what happens in a fire is the fire attack line goes out they start flowing water off of the fire engine and that engineer immediately is looking for a hydrant now. when I say looking for a hydrant it's not like they're out searching for it he's going to that hydrant. I want to make sure people understand all of our fire engines have computers on board that show all of the house numbers, they show what's called a hydrant layer we can click on it and see where the hydrants are. People have said, hey I don't have the blue dot in front of my fire hydrant anymore, we're kind of past the blue dots, we have a GIS layer that tells us exactly where they are. when that apparatus is going into you location the captain is looking at the map, your cross street is such and such it's going to be the third house on the right your closest hydrant is behind you at the intersection southwest corner so all of that stuff gets done in route so it's really pretty efficient.

6. I have a couple of Riviera specific questions one is when I walk around up there, which I do extensively, I don't see a lot of fire hydrants. I'm curious about that specifically and I'm going to do a tag on as we talk about home hardening I just went through a remodel of an almost 100 year old home so I understand the process of going through the city

and the HLC, one thing that comes to mind with my home hardening is especially on the north side of my home I have preserved all those windows and I would really prefer them to be dual pane windows especially on the North side, I wonder if there's going to be some understanding for that for these historic homes that we really take great pride in preserving and it costs a lot of money?

Administrator McAdoo: I think that's really great point and great feedback and something that we can absolutely be thinking about as we're talking with the HLC and I think sort of as the council is setting priorities and as we're continuing to talk when the new Fire maps come in that's the time when we have those conversations. single pane windows are great but you know there are there are alternatives that still have the historic look and feel that are dual pane and so where you know in the high-fire hazard zones that the council thinks about different policies around home hardening.

I just wanted to mention one of the other things we're looking about is you know we all think of Santa Barbara as a very wealthy community but there are also a lot of individuals on fixed incomes and we as the city are looking at potential Grant or Loan program for home hardening for individuals who are lower income or on fixed incomes. Thinking about how we can also support our community in that way, that is a priority for us as well so we can create equitable access and also safety for our entire community.

Mr. Ward: As noted by Chief Mailes, the fire department knows where every single fire hydrant was they've fought fires in our community and they know exactly where they're at. We have over 2500 fire hydrants in the city's water service area and they're all strategically placed. Sometimes you might not see them because they're placed out of the way of traffic in some cases out of view so it's easy to miss them sometimes. If anyone ever has a question about a specific fire hydrant you can always reach out to us at our web page online and we're happy to address specific hydrants. We regularly maintain all of our fire hydrants too, we're constantly going out almost daily, definitely weekly to go and inspect hydrant and make sure that they're accessible, they've got their maintenance updates and they're clearly marked.

Chief Mailes: Where these two fires that occurred in Los Angeles, are Hurricane Katrinas, these are massive fires that are forever going to change building codes, fire codes, road sizes, turnaround areas, gallons per minute of hydrants... I wouldn't be surprised if we start to see some building code changes and again possibly even like HLC changes where we're able to relax and or come up with some different alternatives.

We have a really comprehensive move up program so when we have fire engines committed in the City of Santa Barbara, we have other areas coming in so we'll have Montecito come cover our station We have an elaborate move up system that when we go Regional will be the entire County. I will not be a bit surprised the next time we have a major incident in Santa Barbara you might see Engine 32 and you don't think much of that but that engine 32 that's out of Santa Ynez and it's now sitting in Downtown Santa Barbara contributing to our robustness and ability to handle multiple incidents at a time one other.

The Fire Safe Council, an incredible non-profit available to us in our community. Community Centric Wildfire Protection entity that does defensible space inspections like we (fire department) do. They have received their 10% of all non-profit grants from CalFire to our Fire Safe Council. They have videos, the whole menu of things you can do to harden, from changing the siding on your house to installing vents to installing dual glaze windows it's all there amazing

it's an amazing website. They are an amazing partner, with local firefighter on their Board, very collaborative and we all work together in the name of fire safety in our community.

7. What is the # to call for property evaluation?

City Fire Department Prevention - Inspectors, Wildland Specialists, & Benefit Assessment District, 805-564-5702

8. How can we get copies of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan for our neighborhoods?

It's available on the City Fire Department website here:

<https://santabarbaraca.gov/government/departments/fire-department/wildland-fire/community-wildfire-protection-plan-cwpp>

9. How many burning structures would indicate that there is going to be a loss of water supply at a home?

Mr. Haggmark: I will start with if you are contemplating that question you should probably need to evacuate. Our drinking water system was set up to do multiple structures on the hottest day of the year, so that's what it was set up for you know 2 or 3 fires no problem. It depends on again. I think Chief Mailes this depends on the size of those fires. How big have they spread the next house? what's going on there? Each fire hydrant is capable of 750 gallons a minute, commercial fire hydrants are 1200 gallons a minute so it doesn't take much to overwhelm it overwhelm the system so yes we can handle multiple structure fires, however, if you are seeing fires like that, you probably want to start planning to evacuate, just in case, again we are there and we will have water available, but it's it again for how long and how many fires continue to start after that is really kind of the question. There isn't a defined answer.

10. What is the city stand on homemade or professionally installed exterior fire sprinklers their handful of stories out there where people leave exterior sprinklers on and leave hoping it will save property whether it be landscape or fire suppression. Any advice on that?

Fire Marshal DiGuilio: Sure, so that there are a lot of private industry companies that are gaining popularity with all different types of exterior fire sprinkler systems so some use just water, some use foam some are plumbed into existing pools. The fire sprinkler systems that we are used to seeing are interior fire sprinkler system. They are designed for a room in contents fire and that sprinkler head to extinguish that fire there's over a 95% success rate nationwide for interior fire sprinklers. There is not a lot of data and not a lot of research on the effectiveness of exterior fire sprinklers on homes. Am I going to tell somebody not to put one in? No, if that's their prerogative as if they'd like to do that just keep in mind that if you do leave your fire sprinklers if you leave your lawn sprinklers or leave one of these exterior sprinkler systems on out of the cities' water supply that's more water pressure that's leaving the system that is going to be on permanently whether the fire front comes to that part of the neighborhood or not.

11. There was one question about community wildfire protection plan where is it available which is on the fire department website but another user mentioned that it looks like the Community Wildfire Protection Plan is four years old when will be updated as it is four years old?

Fire Marshal DiGuilio: So the CWPP is our gold standard document like I mentioned earlier it is four years a long time to update the CWPP, some might say yes, I would say no, and the reason why is because the CWPP lays out of Roadmap for us to do the proper work to help bolster our community. It takes a long time and a lot of resources to actually start tackling all those objectives that we have made within that document. It's a very robust document and that's why the reason that's part of the reason why I say no it's because for us to start tackling all those objectives and give it the validity that that document really needs. It takes a lot of time to do that so are there certain aspects of the document we could take a look at the update? Of course there's things like evacuation routes. There's things like different vegetation management units, but to change the priorities from that document would really take even more time to shift some of those resources so I really think sticking to the current addition is going to get us the most momentum tech to help community there.

12. Can residents get a presentation to a specific neighborhood about plans that involve high fire hazard adjacent areas like yells Park

Fire Marshal DiGuilio: Yes and **bold underlined** we love to come out and do public presentations. Homeowner associations, neighbors of open spaces you name it you give us a call our wildland folks are more than happy to come out. I'm happy to come out and do as simple as a block party presentation and we've done them in people's living room so we're happy to come out and engage the community as much as we can.

13. What does the fire department recommend for defensible space and hardening for condominium complexes and mixed-use buildings?

Fire Marshal DiGuilio: That's really good cause there are definitely some different challenges within larger buildings and multi family dwellings or apartment complexes. The best thing I would say is to have the HOA if they have one to call us or if they have a facility manager to call us so we can go out we can do an evaluation for them. It's free of charge. We will give them ideas of proper defensible space what to clear what not to clear there's I have to say this too. People are hesitant to call because they think we're going to go out there and tell them to moonscape their entire property and just put gravel down. That's not the case we just help you the homeowner or the property owner of the HOA come with a proper balance of dispersing what we call a fire ladder so that fires can grow from the ground up higher we don't want to bomb out your entire front your backyard. We wanted to look beautiful, but we want to work with you to come with that proper balance so have that have that association or have the facility manager there? Give us a call and we're happy to come out there and do that evaluation.

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