

LAFCO acts on fire districts

'Sphere of influence' lines drawn by agency

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After a series of hearings that began 11 months ago, Santa Cruz County's Local Agency Formation Commission yesterday approved "spheres of influence" for fire districts in South County.

The spheres are an indication of where the districts might expand in the future, and are not absolute boundaries.

LAFCO's action "doesn't mandate consolidation of districts," Watsonville Fire Chief Gary Smith said after the meet-

ing. Some people, he said, are under the mistaken impression that the designation of spheres is a precursor to consolidation.

Smith said there are three ways districts could merge: by vote of the directors of the affected districts; by the voters in those districts; or by vote of the county Board of Supervisors.

(The possibility of Freedom contracting with Watsonville for fire services is being studied, but it has nothing to do with the LAFCO action. See story below.)

The spheres-of-influence

issue came up in 1984 when the Freedom Fire District proposed annexation of the Larkin Valley-Calabasas Road area, which had been served by the Division of Forestry under a contract with the county. The proposal required designation of a sphere of influence.

Instead of determining a sphere just for Freedom, LAFCO decided to cover all the South County fire districts.

The hearings produced little change in the sphere for the Aptos-La Selva district, which includes the White Road area now served by the Department

of Forestry under contract with the county.

The city of Watsonville already had a sphere, which includes Freedom and the College Road area.

The chiefs of South County districts have been meeting on a regular basis to figure out the best ways of serving eight areas where there's a question as to which fire agency can respond fastest, Smith said. In each case, the area is in one district, but trucks from another district often provide the initial response to a fire.