

# FIRE COVERAGE

## Study: Merger would benefit city, UCSC fire departments

Fire & Fire Protection

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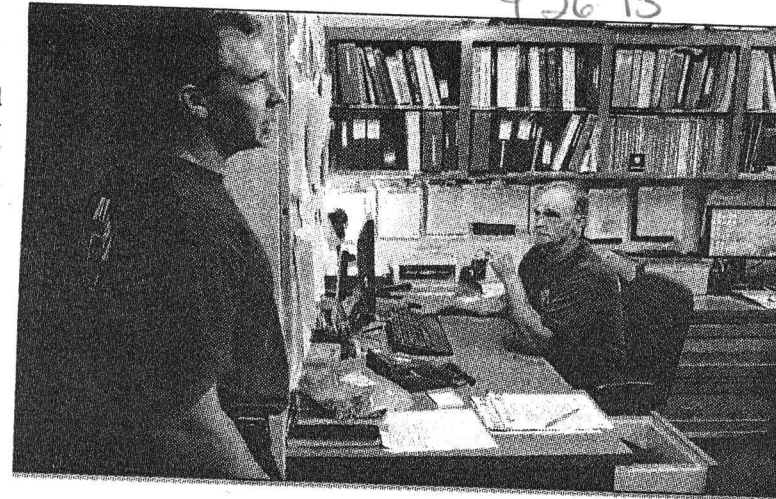
SANTA CRUZ — Blending the Santa Cruz and UC Santa Cruz fire departments into one department with one chief, shared training and other consolidated resources would be a boon to both agencies and residents who need their services, according to a report released this week by a Sacramento consultant.

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A merger of the fire departments has been talked about for several years, and the departments are more than halfway through a two-year trial merger that began in January 2012 after the retirement of former Santa Cruz Fire Chief Ron Oliver.

The temporarily merged departments are overseen by UCSC Fire Chief Jeff Trapp, who has been with the university for nine years.



MATTHEW HINTZ/SENTINEL

Brian Thomas and Jim Fuller work at the UC Santa Cruz Fire Station on Thursday afternoon. The UC Santa Cruz Fire Department is currently considering merging with the Santa Cruz Fire Department as a way to cut costs and improve efficiency.

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## FIRE

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The study by consultant Citygate Associates indicates both departments would save money and improve fire coverage and response times throughout the city and campus if the union is made permanent.

"It is too expensive to staff a complete, standalone headquarters team for a single crew fire department," at UCSC, according to the report, whose

\$50,000 costs was split by the two departments. "It makes excellent operational and fiscal sense for UCSC to merge its line positions with the city of Santa Cruz and have them staff the campus fire station just like any other neighborhood."

Trapp said the plan will allow UCSC firefighters to gain better training by working with city firefighters, while the city gets additional crews and quicker response times for Westside calls.

The Santa Cruz Fire Department operates three

stations throughout the city with 42 firefighters, as well as a lifeguard unit at the Municipal Wharf. The department, with an annual budget of \$13 million, responds to about 7,000 calls each year.

The single station at UCSC has 14 firefighters, receives 730 calls a year and runs on a budget of \$2.3 million. UC Davis is the only other UC campus with its own fire department.

Under the merger proposal outlined in the study, UCSC firefighters would become city employees and the cost

of the headquarters' top-level staff — chief, deputy chief and four battalion chiefs — would be shared between the city and university.

The city would pay about 85 percent of the costs and UCSC would pay 15 percent, as recommended by the consultant.

The merger would cost UCSC an additional \$150,000 a year, according to the study, which Trapp says is a good deal considering the campus station is understaffed and in need of hiring more firefighters to provide adequate emergency response services.

"The department today is understaffed. To get to where it needs to be we'd have to spend considerably more than that," Trapp said. "Operationally, I think it makes sense. A larger department generally provides better service."

Santa Cruz City Manager Martin Bernal said a consolidation would cost the city about \$75,000 a year, which is far less than what it would cost to open a fourth station on its own.

He said he welcomes the merger.

"Fundamentally, in the end it would improve services all around the city and the university," Bernal said. "For employees, it's better, especially the university firefighters because there's more room for career development and growth."

The UC Regents and the Santa Cruz City Council would have to give their approval before any merger becomes final.

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