

Fire Department Merger Approved

Directors of the Live Oak and Soquel fire districts voted Tuesday night to approve a joint powers agreement that will merge the two fire departments on July 1.

A formal, contract-signing ceremony is scheduled for Friday morning at the Live Oak Fire Station.

Under terms of the agreement, the two departments will be jointly administered by what is to be called the Central County Joint Powers Agency. A board of directors will be seated that will include three representatives from Live Oak and two from Soquel.

That new board, according to Live Oak Director Bill Reddehase, who headed the joint powers study, will hire all new firefighters, including a chief to admin-

ister the two departments through the agency. Two assistant chiefs will be selected.

The current boards of directors of the two fire districts will be retained to draft separate operating budgets and to transfer funds to the joint powers agency. Each fire district, Reddehase said, will retain all of its assets.

Tuesday night's agreement culminates months of study by representatives of Soquel and Live Oak. Capitola Fire District also participated in that study, but directors of that district voted late last month to pursue reorganization as a city fire department rather than to join the joint powers agreement.

The Capitola City Council has hired a private consultant to study the feasibility

of creating a city fire department. That study is due to be presented to the City Council early next month.

Even though the agreement to be signed Friday includes only Live Oak and Soquel, Reddehase said Capitola would be able to join that agreement at a later date if it so desires.

Directors of the fire districts began studying the joint powers agreement mainly because of shrinking revenue since passage of Proposition 13. Directors have said they feel joint administration of the two departments will be more cost effective.

One initial savings, directors feel, will be administration of the two departments by a single chief. Live Oak Chief Dick

Pound and Soquel Chief Ray Negro are both due to retire in July.

Reddehase said both departments will continue to operate very much as they are now, but added that the agreement could provide for fire station relocation and staffing changes at stations in the future.

Live Oak Fire Department has stations located on 17th Avenue and on Winkle Avenue. Those stations are manned by 24 paid firefighters, including three chief officers and six captains and by 10 volunteers.

Soquel Fire Department has a single station located downtown Soquel. The department is manned by seven paid firefighters, including two chief officers, an inspector and a captain and by 33 volunteers.