

# Fire chief sacked over purchases

By KEITH MURAOKA  
Sentinel staff writer

APTOS — Aptos/La Selva Fire District Chief Chuck Streeter, on the hot seat over the unauthorized purchase of fire district equipment, was ordered to resign by the Fire Board Tuesday night.

The unanimous action was taken during a closed-door personnel session.

Streeter, chief of the 33-firefighter district for the past 16 months, was placed on administrative leave with full pay and benefits until Jan. 23, at which time his resignation will be accepted. Battalion Chief Chuck Mornard will become acting chief.

Fire Board President Raymond Garcia refused to give details on why the chief was fired. However, it's generally known the action originated from two unauthorized purchases of fire district equipment.

Those purchases, totaling more than \$84,000, were for two Ford Broncos and a breathing apparatus system used to prevent smoke inhalation while fighting fires.

Streeter came to the district in August, 1988 from Santee in San Diego County, where he served as a division chief.

Streeter has accepted full responsibility for the financial blunders. He acknowledged he made the purchases without board approval and without following normal open-bidding procedures.

"I made a mistake. I didn't know the policies," Streeter said when questioned earlier.

Garcia said afterward that making a decision to fire a chief is "always tough." He added only that the board discussed a wide range of possible disciplinary measures, but

opted for termination.

Fire Board Director Don Griffin noted, "The board just lost confidence (in the chief)."

Fellow Director Duane Vance added, "It just tears the hell out of you. What really hurts is that he's one hell of a nice guy."

Streeter explained earlier that he went over fire district policies upon being hired. "I read them (the policies regarding purchases more than \$10,000 and the bidding process), but they slipped my mind."

The chief said that once he discovered his errors, he tried to correct them. "I didn't try to hide anything. I don't like hidden agendas. I'm as upfront as anybody."

However, during a Dec. 20 Fire Board meeting, Board President Garcia questioned a proposal by Streeter to open the bidding process on the breathing apparatus. Garcia said that since the equipment had already been received, there would be appearances of a "cover-up" should bids be opened.

Streeter has responded that the equipment had not been officially purchased at the time of his proposal. While he conceded a purchase order had been issued and the breathing apparatus was on hand, he said he was attempting to correct his mistake by fully complying with district regulations. He denied there was any attempted

cover-up.

As for the purchase of the two Broncos, Streeter said the vehicles had been budgeted, but the purchase price ended up being slightly over the budgeted amount. Also, while he did not go through the formal open bidding process, Streeter said he "shopped by telephone and got the best prices."

The Fire Board had already emphasized to Streeter the importance of consulting them to keep them apprised of all financial matters. The board had also moved toward a "line-item control program," which prevents an item from being bought if it exceeds the budgeted amount.