

# Fire Districts Will Keep On Truckin' Until..

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Sentinel Staff Writer

Devastated by Proposition 13, the county's fire districts say they'll keep on truckin' until their money runs out.

But, they warn, that's only a couple of months away.

Fire districts have been hit hardest by passage of the June 6 statewide property tax limitation measure because they are entirely dependent on the property tax levy for revenue.

Firemen expect to be hit by an eventual revenue loss once the legislature comes up with a plan of distributing what's left of the property tax plus whatever portion, if any, they give from the state surplus, but the period between now and the flow of that money is what's most crucial.

With their current budgets to run out July 1, directors of several fire districts have decided to dip into surplus funds to maintain fire and rescue service at present levels.

Faced with either reducing service by closing one station and cutting firemen's hours, or going full bore until their \$300,000 surplus is gone, Aptos Fire District directors chose the latter Tuesday night.

That surplus, set aside for future equipment needs, will last the department three months. Aptos firemen voluntarily proposed to reduce their hours to stretch the surplus further since they don't expect the department to begin receiving new revenue until December, but that would have meant closing the main station and switching operations to the Rio Del Mar house on a two-men per shift rotation.

"It's amazing our men are willing to work for what would amount to less than \$400 per month, but I really think we ought to try full service one more month before going to that."

"I'd hate to lose our paramedic service now after we worked more than three years to get it," said Director Stewart Davis.

Paramedic service, jeopardized anyway unless Aptos gets full funding, would have been immediately out with only two men on duty per shift.

Directors voted to hold special meetings every two weeks until the funding question is resolved. In the meantime, Chairman Dick Duchscher said, "we, as directors, will have to take the responsibility if the money runs out."

Chief Richard Chinn had warned the board that going full bore through July would wipe out a third of the \$300,000 surplus and would make things worse in following months until the department gets its money.

Live Oak Fire Protection District directors met in special session Tuesday night and also decided to go as long as possible on the \$127,000 the district has left.

That sum amounts to about three months of service.

Directors will meet again next Tuesday night to consider their next move. Live Oak expects to get approximately \$250,000 from property taxes for 1978-79 operations, compared to \$600,000 this year.

"Without the relief of enabling legislation to allow this fire district to receive a larger share of the property tax, drastic cuts in manpower and service is inevitable," said Chief Richard Pound.

Soquel Fire District Chairman Ken Izant says his district, like the others, is waiting for action from Sacramento on the distribution of funds.

"We'll try to operate as we have been for as long as we

can," he said.

Volunteer departments will by no means be spared by revenue reduction for the bulk of their budgets goes for operations — equipment and gasoline to run that equipment.

"Volunteer departments actually may be hurt worse than paid departments because they can't save money by laying off firemen," said Scotts Valley Fire Chief Bruce Scott, who this morning was determining how far he could stretch his paid department's surplus.

"If we go full bore, we can last maybe five months," Scott said.

He represented the state's 125 fire districts at the joint Senate-Assembly hearing Tues-

day in Sacramento. "The general opinion I got is there's going to be some kind of funding, but how much and when I don't know," he said.

Chinn told his directors that Aptos would get about 38 percent of past revenue, according to preliminary county estimates. State and federally-mandated programs, he said, will get the first and biggest slice of the pie.

As for the state surplus, Chinn said he expects schools to get the first claim because of heavy lobbying by strong teachers' unions.

The fire districts don't have that kind of clout, Chinn said, and are further hurt by a lack of support from city fire departments in the state which have other city sources of revenue.

Both Aptos and Live Oak fire directors Tuesday night called on district residents to get involved by contacting their legislators.

"We had a lot of well-meaning people who voted for Proposition 13 feeling they would not lose this most vital service."

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