

Salsipuedes, Freedom fire districts merge

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

A merger of the Salsipuedes and Freedom fire districts was approved Monday by unanimous vote of directors of both districts.

The merger created the Pajaro Valley Fire Protection Agency, which officially begins operation Sept. 1.

Freedom Fire Chief Ben Evans said the merger calls for keeping the Freedom and Salsipuedes stations open; headquarters will be at the Freedom station.

The new district will have nine paid firefighters and 52 reserves, and a budget of \$861,000. Merging the districts provided a bit more financial strength, Evans said.

A study is already under way on

the feasibility of creating a fire-protection agency that would include the Watsonville Fire Department and the Corralitos Division of Forestry station. The Freedom-Salsipuedes merger does not preclude a larger merger later, Evans said.

The new district's five-man board of directors is made up of all three Freedom directors and two of the three Salsipuedes directors. Salsipuedes director Robert Hiatt volunteered to be the odd man out.

The old boards will still be in existence and retain the right to cancel the merger at some future date.

Evans said the new board will meet Monday at the Freedom station to name a chief.