

NEVADA COUNTY CONSOLIDATED FIRE DISTRICT

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

STAFF REPORT

DATE: March 21, 2013
TO: NCCFD Board of Directors
FROM: Keith M. Grueneberg, Chairman
SUBJECT: Fire Training Incident 1/27/08

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Directors provides direction to staff or an ad-hoc committee, of the Board, on how to proceed with this follow-up.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

At a previous Board meeting. Testimony was given by Wyatt Howell, his wife, and Brad Amaral regarding an incident that occurred on 1/27/08. The District command staff never reported this life threatening incident to the Board. The Board was not aware of this incident until I brought it to their attention.

To refresh your memory. On 1/27/08, a live fire training burn was conducted in the Peardale-Chicago Park area. During this training, Captain Brad Amaral was on the second floor of an old farm house attempting to extinguish a fire. Captain Amaral was wearing all required safety gear including self contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). Captain Amaral fell through the floor and was trapped with active fire below him. Captain Amaral's SCBA was the only thing keeping him from falling into the fire. Captain Amaral transmitted a "mayday" call over the radio as an emergency call for help. Engineer Howell heard this emergency traffic, over the radio, and responded to aid Captain Amaral. While attempting to rescue Captain Amaral, (Amaral weighs over 250 lbs.) Engineer Howell injured his back. Once Howell freed Amaral from his entrapment, Amaral collapsed and passed out. Engineer Howell placed Captain Amaral over his shoulder and carried him down the stairs to safety. Both fell out of an open window or doorway to exit the structure and onto the ground. Captain Amaral was examined by a Paramedic on scene, in an ambulance, and refused transport to the hospital. Both Amaral and Howell suffered minor burns. Both employees exhibit signs and symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder due to this incident.

After the testimony was received, Director Bass informed the Board he received information from FPO Terry McMahan, who participated in the live burn, and other firefighters, this incident was "no big deal" and didn't happen as reported by Amaral and Howell. Director Bass was told no ambulance was on scene.

Since this statement by Director Bass created confusion amongst the Board members, and contradicted the statements made by Amaral and Howell, the Board directed Div. Chief Ray to conduct an investigation to determine the facts surrounding this incident.

It is very important, as Board members, to either acknowledge this incident took place or reject their statements. The Board needs accurate information regarding this incident. It may be necessary to hire an investigator or, have one of our Board members with investigative experience complete this investigation.

Attached is the e-mail I received from Wyatt Howell, dated 2/26/13, requesting action by the Board. I have received permission from both employees to include this with the staff report.

Also attached is an e-mail trail regarding this incident. They begin with Chief Ray's request on 1/22/13, to Chief Harris, 1/25/13, from Tony Roberts, and 1/31/13, from Tony Roberts.

The Board needs to decide if an investigation is warranted to document the incident. Or reject it completely.

Subject: 2008 injury incident
From: Wyatt Howell (1wyatthowell@gmail.com)
To: kgberg0178@sbcglobal.net;
Date: Tuesday, February 26, 2013 8:39 PM

Chairman Grueneberg,

I know that you have a lot on your plate, and I hate to burden you with any further problems, so this is simply a request for a further understanding.

Brad Amaral called me last week, and during our conversation he asked if we were any closer to a formal recognition of 2008, Brad also indicated that he was seeing Kay Williams "Trauma Therapist," and then mentioned that she, (Kay Williams) and Local 522 CISDT were paid for participating in our debriefing. Brad's family as well as mine are awaiting the recognition by the Board of Directors for the incident that happened in 2008. I am attempting to keep you in loop and up to date as well as trying to make sure this event doesn't fall on deaf ears once again.

I know I am preaching to the choir, but the recognition of this event is very important and our two families need this to move on. David Ray, Tim Fike, Lisa Labarbera and Spike Newby have all allowed this incident to go without recognition, and its time that we put some closure to this incident. Brad and I are counting on this recognition to help us get the help that I believe we deserve as well as the recognition from Work Comp.

I don't view myself a hero, just the guy that helped another brother out of harms way! I know that any of the loyal men and women that I serve with would have done the same if presented the same challenge.

Please advise me of any changes or timelines that you may have knowledge of. This matter is very important to the two of us and our families, I hope you can understand.

Thank you,

Wyatt Howell

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Tony, can you help out on where to go on this one.

Brad Harris
Unit Chief
Nevada - Yuba - Placer Unit
Office: (530) 889-0111
Cell: (530) 277-2300

From: David Ray [<mailto:davidray@nccfire.com>]

Sent: Tuesday, January 22, 2013 3:06 PM

To: Harris, Brad@CALFIRE

Subject: Assistance

Brad,

I am in need of some assistance. I have been requested by my Board of Directors to investigate a previous training burn where an injury occurred. This training burn was conducted on January 27, 2008 in the Peardale-Chicago Park Fire District. This was a multi agency training burn. The IC was Chief Bierwagen and the Fire Control III Senior was Chief Tony Roberts. NCCFD personnel assisted with this training burn.

During the burn, an NCCFD Captain fell through the second story floor capturing him between the first and second floor. A MAYDAY was announced. Another NCCFD Engineer aided his Captain and removed him from the hole and assisted him down the stairs and out an exit way. All parties were checked. The only visible injury was a red sunburn type burn on the Captain. A "Hot-Wash" analysis was conducted. No further injuries were reported.

In February, 2008, the Engineer that assisted the Captain started to experience back pain. In December 2008, both the Captain and Engineer started to experience emotional affects from the incident. They received counseling for this incident. In January 2013, the Captain and Engineer filed workers compensation claims for PTSD, under review by workers compensation.

Nevada County Consolidated Fire District is requesting assistance from CalFire to investigate the facts and circumstances of this incident. Due to the multiple agencies involved and the fact that I was present at the burn, a neutral agency with extensive fire training and investigative knowledge is paramount.

Please let me know at your earliest convenience if your agency is able to assist with this. Thanking you in advance,

David Ray
Division Chief
Nevada County Consolidated Fire District
11329 Mc Courtney Rd.
Grass Valley, CA 95949

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From : "David Ray" <davidray@nccfire.com> [+] **Date :** Thu, 7 Mar 2013 08:39:03 -0800
To : "Keith Grueneberg" <keithgrueneberg@nccfire.com> [+]
Subject : FW: Assistance

Keith,

Here is the request and reply. I will be forwarding additional.

David Ray
Division Chief
Nevada County Consolidated Fire District
11329 Mc Courtney Rd.
Grass Valley, CA 95949
(530) 273-3158 Office
(530) 913-5300 Cell

From: Roberts, Tony@CALFIRE [mailto:Tony.Roberts@fire.ca.gov]
Sent: Friday, January 25, 2013 2:12 PM
To: Harris, Brad@CALFIRE
Cc: Holmes, Bill@CALFIRE; Wenham, Doug@CALFIRE; Gouette, Kelley@CALFIRE; Stangeland, Brent@CALFIRE; davidray@nccfire.com
Subject: RE: Assistance

Hi Brad,

I spoke with Chief Ray on this matter today. He may have someone obtain a statement of facts from those present and let the board review them as requested. That's who he works for. I embrace this approach or whatever investigation initiated otherwise. Most of the incident overhead are still around. So that's good.

I'm not concerned of any errors or omissions on the operations, reporting and safety of the training.

All safety items were followed before, during and after the incident. The captain went into an old burn room against prior instructions.

Please give me a call if you wish to discuss further.

Thank you,

Tony

From: Harris, Brad@CALFIRE
Sent: Friday, January 25, 2013 12:47 PM
To: Roberts, Tony@CALFIRE
Cc: Holmes, Bill@CALFIRE; Wenham, Doug@CALFIRE
Subject: FW: Assistance

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From : "David Ray" <davidray@nccfire.com> [+] **Date :** Thu, 7 Mar 2013 08:41:01 -0800
To : "Keith Grueneberg" <keithgrueneberg@nccfire.com> [+]
Subject : FW: Two More Chains - Winter 2013

Keith,

This was a follow up form Chief Roberts.

David Ray
Division Chief
Nevada County Consolidated Fire District
11329 Mc Courtney Rd.
Grass Valley, CA 95949
(530) 273-3158 Office
(530) 913-5300 Cell

From: Roberts, Tony@CALFIRE [mailto:Tony.Roberts@fire.ca.gov]
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2013 11:17 AM
To: davidray@nccfire.com
Subject: FW: Two More Chains - Winter 2013

Hi David,

I hope this email finds you great. Been thinking of the Peardale FC-3A training. Granted we had dotted the I's and crossed the T's, yet could we have done better as people? The old "buck up and get with the program" statements are no longer the accepted norm. It's about follow up and care. Why do war veterans not talk about their experiences? I am beginning to understand why.

Read the Two More Chains article from the surviving Prineville Hot Shots. Riveting!

I spoke with Chief Romer about the FC-3 matter after our conversation. He was witness to a peer session with Brad at the SCA a week or so after the FC-3 training in Peardale. Brad's issue was self imposed his embarrassment and his personal life seemed to be unraveling. We reiterated he is the firefighters' firefighter. We all hugged and moved on without any more visible behaviors from Brad all the way up to and after I left the SCA cadre.

I'm not questioning our training officer role or anyone's behavior. I only want to learn more about these PTSD matters in order to be a better chief officer and person.

Tony

From: Roberts, Tony@CALFIRE
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2013 9:54 AM
To: CALFIRE Northern Training Officers; Larkin, Ian@CALFIRE; Washington, Brian@CALFIRE
Subject: FW: Two More Chains - Winter 2013

Excellent reading and for sharing with returnee and new firefighter safety training. A wake up quote: No human interaction happened. Looking back now," Kim reflects, "that may have been the catalyst to my Post

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