

2024-2025 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY



KERN COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT *21st Century Demands; 20th Century Infrastructure*

Release Date

October 24, 2024

KERN COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT

21st Century Demands; 20th Century Infrastructure

SUMMARY:

The 2024-2025 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) conducted a Continuity Investigation which is a follow-up to a previous report. The investigation looked into the Grand Jury Report on the Kern County Fire Department (KCFD) issued by the 2021-2022 Grand Jury. That Grand Jury Report included nine recommendations for specific improvements. All but one were implemented promptly. The remaining one, vermin control at the Keene Fire Station, is still being evaluated.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

Pursuant to Cal. Penal code §§925(a) and 928, an essential function of the Grand Jury is to follow up on recommendations from previous reports. The 2024-2025 Grand Jury conducted a Continuity Investigation to determine if the Kern County Fire Department had implemented the recommendations (Appendix A) from the 2021-2022 Grand Jury Report. The Kern County Grand Jury is authorized to investigate and report on the operations, accounts, records, and related expenses the County incurs.

METHODOLOGY:

The Grand Jury conducted interviews with the administration of the Kern County Fire Department and reviewed Kern County Fire Department Financial Statements. The Grand Jury also reviewed the various laws, policies, regulations, historical documents, and websites relative to the KCFD.

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

The Kern County Fire Department currently has 55 over-hires (similar to floating positions) to be used for projected retirements and/or separations. These extra firefighters are also used as trainers when needed to run an academy.

- A. Kern County Animal Services provides feral cats for vermin control.
- B. The Kern County Fire Department is still evaluating the most effective and appropriate pest control. (R7 from 2021-2022 Report)
- C. The Kern County Fire Department is in the process of, or has completed implementation of the recommendations outlined in the 2021-2022 Grand Jury Report.

FINDINGS:

- F1. Feral cats are a good vermin control solution for many facilities, including the proposed fire station at Hart Flat.
- F2. The 55 over-hires are used for future retirements and/or separations. This process allows the department to avoid a lag in hiring, and saves money by conducting fewer academies and minimizing overtime.
- F3. The Kern County Fire Department has been very responsive to recommendations stated in the 2021-2022 Grand Jury Report.

COMMENTS:

The 2024-2025 Grand Jury would like to thank the Kern County Fire Department staff for their hard work and dedication.

RECOMMENDATION:

- R1. The Kern County Fire Department should continue the process to implement all recommendations outlined in the 2021-2022 report. (Findings #1 and #3)

NOTES:

- The Kern County Fire Department should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: <https://www.kerncounty.com/government/other-agencies/grand-jury>
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: <https://www.kerncounty.com/government/other-agencies/grand-jury>

RESPONSE DEADLINE:

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM:** Kern County Board of Supervisors
- **REQUIRED WITHIN 60 DAYS FROM:** Kern County Fire Department

**RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO CAL. PENAL CODE §§933
(c) AND 933.05 WITHIN 90 DAYS TO:**

- **PRESIDING JUDGE
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF KERN
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**
- **FOREPERSON
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Cal. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

APPENDIX:

APPENDIX A: (Recommendations and Responses from the 2021-2022 Grand Jury Report)

Kern County Board of Supervisors
Response to Grand Jury Final Report
Kern County Fire Department – 21st Century Demands; 50's & 60's Infrastructure

Response to Findings:

The Board of Supervisors notes that the Grand Jury's findings are substantially correct.

Response to Recommendation:

R1. The Grand Jury recommends the Kern County Fire Department should, within the next 12 months, develop a comprehensive strategic plan to repair or replace all stations, 50 years and older, over the next 5-10 years.

We concur with the Grand Jury regarding the importance of ensuring that stations are in good repair and meet appropriate standards. The department has made a concerted effort to repair and maintain aging stations during the past few fiscal years. This work will continue into the foreseeable future. The department has cost estimates for replacement fire stations that exceed \$15 million each, which is cost prohibitive given the many priorities of the department. Furthermore, the department is aware that buildings very often remain in occupiable condition well beyond 50 years, especially with routine upkeep. Where station structures are damaged beyond repair, become unsafe to occupy, or no longer meet the department's mission, the department will seek to relocate or replace stations as resources are identified.

R2: The Grand Jury recommends The Board of Supervisors should secure necessary funds to coincide with the comprehensive strategic plan.

We concur with the Grand Jury regarding the importance of appropriately funding for the desired level of service to meet community needs. In recent years, the County has increased the amount of property tax share that is dedicated solely to the department's Fire Fund. The County has also continued to contribute discretionary General Fund dollars in order to prevent any reductions in service for the department. However, the Fire department faced revenue reductions that challenged the department to balance the budget and continue even basic services to residents. In this endeavor, priorities are given to mandated programs and services without jeopardizing safety of employees. Though [sic] the annual budget process, the Board continues to strategically work to address the needs of the community by allocating available funding across many departments that each provide critical service.

R3: The Grand Jury recommends that the Kern County Fire Department should install smoke detectors and Fire Ready Range Hoods in all kitchens within 12-24 months.

We concur with the Grand Jury on the importance of installing smoke detectors and other fire prevention and safety devices. The department remains committed to protecting the health and safety of the citizens and visitors of our county, as well as our Firefighters. The department will ensure all fire stations are equipped with smoke detectors in accordance with the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) recommendations. Fire stations serve as residence for the Firefighters during non-emergency times and are outfitted with all the same accommodations of residential housing. Fire Ready Range Hoods are generally reserved for use in commercial kitchen settings, are cost prohibitive for fire station applications and are not a current fire code requirement.

R4: The Grand Jury recommends the Kern County Fire Department replace Station 11's Air Operation generator with new auto start back-up generator.

We concur with the Grand Jury regarding the importance of reliable backup power systems. The department has secured multiple backup power grants in recent years. On February 15, 2022, the Board of Supervisors approved a \$1.32 million dollar [sic] generator grant from FEMA through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to purchase and install propane generators at fire headquarters and 32 fire stations. Many of these generators are being installed at stations that don't have backup power or with existing diesel generators secured through federal excess property. The department will continue to pursue funding opportunities that will better ensure all critical fire department infrastructure, including Stations 11's Air Operations, has reliable backup power.

R5: The Grand Jury recommends the Kern County Fire Department should request the installation of more dip tanks with reliable water for Air Operations; at a minimum one in the Rosamond area.

We appreciate the Grand Jury's recommendation for installation of additional dip tanks. The department regularly evaluates water infrastructure relative to risk throughout the County. Where necessary to mitigate the fire risk to life and protect structures, the department will work with necessary entities to establish and maintain the appropriate water supply for emergencies.

R6: The Grand Jury recommends within the next 3-5 years, Helicopter 407 should be replaced, followed by Helicopter 408.

We concur with the Grand Jury's recommendation and will review the options for replacing the aged helicopters in future fiscal years. A replacement helicopter is estimated to cost \$14 million. Capital replacement of this magnitude requires careful planning and prioritization among the other needs of the department.

R7: The Grand Jury recommends Station 11 should contact Animal Control to request one or more feral cats to help control the vermin problem.

We appreciate the Grand Jury's recommendation regarding vermin at Station 11. The department currently uses pest control services for various facilities and will evaluate and implement the most effective and appropriate pest control methods to address the vermin issue described at station 11.

R8: The Grand Jury recommends the Kern County Fire Department should expand their efforts, in the next fiscal year, to reduce Firefighters' exposure to diesel exhaust and diesel particulate matter and protect Firefighters with the goal of preventing future disease by all means necessary.

We concur with the Grand Jury's recommendation and the department will enhance efforts to mitigate Firefighters' exposure to diesel exhaust and diesel particulate matter. The department is committed to retrofitting existing extractors during the current and future budget years and will continue to look for ways to mitigate exposure.

R9: The Grand Jury recommends the Kern County Fire Department should apply for funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill immediately for Air Operations and Fire Stations in need of repair or replacement.

We appreciate the Grand Jury's recommendation and the department will review the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill and evaluate how funding might be made available at the county level.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

SUPERVISORS

Phillip PetersDistrict 1
VacantDistrict 2
Jeff FloresDistrict 3
David CouchDistrict 4
Leticia PerezDistrict 5



KATHLEEN KRAUSE
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
Kern County Administrative Center
1115 Truxtun Avenue, 5th Floor
Bakersfield, CA 93301
Telephone (661) 868-3585
TTY Relay (800) 735-2929

December 3, 2024

The Honorable J. Eric Bradshaw, Presiding Judge
Kern County Superior Court
1415 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Dear Judge Bradshaw:

Transmitted herewith is the Board of Supervisors' response to the 2024-2025 Grand Jury's Final Report titled Kern County Fire Department – 21st Century Demands; 20th Century Infrastructure, a follow up to the 2021-22 Grand Jury report.

The Board of Supervisors appreciates the Grand Jury's review and input.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Couch", is written over a horizontal line.

David Couch, Chair
Kern County Board of Supervisors

NA/SH/COMPL_GJ FIRE A

Attachment

cc: Grand Jury

Kern County Board of Supervisors
Response to Grand Jury Final Report
Kern County Fire Department – 21st Century Demands; 20th Century Infrastructure – Follow-up to 2021-
2022 Grand Jury Report

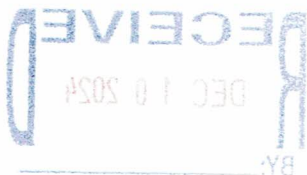
Response to Findings F1-F3:

Kern County agrees with the Grand Jury's Findings 2 and 3 and disagrees with the Grand Jury's Finding 1. Finding 1, states Feral Cats are a good vermin control solution for many facilities, including the proposed fire station at Hart Flat. We disagree that feral cats should be used as vermin control at the stated fire station. The Fire department has discussed the pros and cons of feral cats with Animal Services and decided not to move forward with this recommendation. Feral cats would require station staff to provide care for the cats, and the cats would live around the fire stations and engine houses, creating an unnecessary distraction for staff. Additionally, heavy equipment and rapid activity for emergency response may create a hazard for the cats.

Response to Recommendation:

R1: *The Grand Jury recommends that The Kern County Fire Department should continue the process to implement all recommendations outlined in the 2021-2022 report.*

Where applicable, the department has implemented all the recommendations except the recommendation related to feral cats (R7 from 2021-2022 report). This recommendation will not be implemented as discussed above. The department will continue to use other methods currently in place to control vermin.



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF KERN

TRACKING PAGE

December 3, 2024

TUESDAY - 2:00 P.M.

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COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

CA-52) Proposed response to Grand Jury report titled Kern County Fire Department -
21st Century Demands; 20th Century Infrastructure (Fiscal Impact: None) -
APPROVED; AUTHORIZED CHAIRMAN TO SIGN CORRESPONDENCE
Perez-Flores: All Ayes