



**Central Coast Fire & Rescue District**  
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**From the Central Oregon Coast Fire and Rescue Board  
to the community of Waldport and the surrounding area**

**September 21, 2023**

### **Statement about the Independent Investigation Regarding the Incident on July 2, 2023**

In the last 15 months, the Fire District has made significant progress on multiple fronts, all of which would not have been possible without the knowledge, expertise, collaborative nature, and management that Chief Jamie Mason brings to this district. The support he receives from his personnel also speaks volumes about his skill as a leader. He has our unqualified gratitude for all that he has done for the residents of our fire district.

As a sampling of the results we have achieved with Chief Mason as our governing partner:

- We have collaborated with the city on a water flow plan that will improve the water availability to hydrants and brought ownership of the firehall to the district.
- We were awarded numerous grants for equipment and funding for additional personnel during wildland fire season, which provided not one but two pieces of apparatus to the district. All of this was at no cost to the constituents of the district.
- The Tidewater station, important to provide increased range of safety protection, is now complete and fully operational.
- A new union agreement was hammered out and ratified that allows our firefighters to feel more valued and appreciated.

When allegations from a citizen complaint were presented at the regular board meeting on July 20, 2023, regarding events at the scene of a vehicular accident on July 2, 2023, the fire board took this situation seriously. On August 3, 2023, an executive meeting was held to weigh the need to hire an outside investigator to look into the allegations against Chief Mason and by extension the district. It was decided unanimously to move forward with an independent investigation.

When the board made the ethical and transparent choice to go with an outside investigation, it was our hope that citizens would await the outcome; instead we were disturbed to find a few community members felt the need to continue to attack the district and its employees and officers with unfounded and, as it turns out, verifiably false information even as the investigation was underway. Numerous false accusations and statements continued to be made to the press and on social media by these citizens. We deplore this attempt to use the media to defame a valuable district employee, and we urge the public to disregard statements made by clearly biased and manipulative sources.

Now that the investigation is complete, the report shows, in summary, that while Chief Mason did use profanity in some heated exchanges in what was a personally very stressful situation, there is no evidence that racial or defamatory language was used. The report also indicates there were no attempts to influence the Oregon State Police at the scene to alter the facts, as was alleged in the original complaint. The report will be available on the district website upon finalization for any citizen to review at [www.centralcoastfire.net](http://www.centralcoastfire.net). As you will see from the report, at every moment, Chief Mason conducted himself according to the highest ethical standards of his profession.

Per ORS 478.260, section 1, "The district board shall select a fire chief qualified by actual experience as a firefighter and person who is trained in fire prevention." We believe the board did so with the selection of the professional and highly qualified Chief Mason, who has 24 years in fire service and is a state and federally qualified incident command instructor. Our community is lucky to have him.

Additionally, false statements have been made about the tax levy. We diligently look at the budget annually with a separate committee to review real expenditures and apply metrics and forecast models to refine the next year's budget. The budget is discussed at every meeting and modification of line items may occur based on real-time circumstances. We operate on balanced budgets. The new levy that passed in the November 2022 election asked for a \$0.10 per \$1,000 increase on the prior 5-year levies, which had not been increased for 10 years. In addition, the state, by law, limits our share of the annual permanent property tax to just 3%. Our real cost of business last year alone was impacted by 8.7% inflation. Fuel, cost of services, and consumables are major drivers. So, we are actually 5.7% down in revenues, even with the levy.

Even more egregious have been the highly personal, despicable, and public comments made regarding district personnel. Our firefighters, who are highly certified and expert at their work, are ready to risk their lives for us, and they have in fact saved the lives of many in this district through their professional emergency medical and fire response. They do not deserve to be maligned or insulted by disgruntled citizens on top of this faithful service to our community. The board calls for this type of malignant language to cease immediately and asks any citizen who sees such language to stand up for and defend the men and women who serve us so faithfully.

Although our faith in Chief Mason never wavered, the board did initiate the investigation. In the time since then, Chief Mason, his staff, and family members have had to endure continued harassment that they could not defend themselves from while the investigation was underway. Our firefighters respected the investigation process even at great personal cost. We hope this community will now rally behind our firefighters in a way that will help heal the hurt that has been caused by this entire situation.

We encourage the public to come to meetings, ask questions, show support. What can't be tolerated anymore is the steady drumbeat of a disgruntled few indulging in inflammatory, shameful untruths about the district, the Chief, employees, and officers. It's not good for the district or the community as a whole. We ask that you join us in refusing to accept such behavior.

The entire community has received and will continue to receive professional, empathetic, quality care and services from their fire district 24/7, 365 days a year. For this, we owe Chief Mason and his team our gratitude.

Signed,

Central Oregon Coast Fire and Rescue Board