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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cooperative Fire Agreement Sustains, Clarifies Emergency Response Services

Joint Training Exercises to be Conducted This Week.

(COLUMBIA, MO) – “No matter where you live, you’ll still call 9-1-1 in an emergency,” according to Columbia City Manager Bill Watkins and Boone County Fire Protection District Interim Chief Scott Olsen. “The City of Columbia and the Fire District are working under a new cooperative agreement, but 9-1-1 is the first thing people should remember.”

The new agreement has taken effect and replaces the previous agreement that had governed fire safety response for the last 15 years. Watkins and Chief Olsen said that changes were needed to better define service areas, update financing structures and reflect closer cooperation.

Responding to calls in service areas

According to the agreement, for fire protection, emergency rescue service, first response emergency medical service and hazardous material response service...

- The Columbia Fire Department will always respond to calls within the city limits;
- The Fire District will always respond to calls within its jurisdiction;
- Both units will respond to calls from “automatic aid” areas, which shall be determined by the Columbia Fire Chief and the District Fire Chief. One unit may arrive before the other.

According to information available from the Insurance Services Office, “Automatic aid is assistance dispatched automatically by contractual agreement between two communities or fire districts. That differs from mutual aid or assistance arranged case by case.”

Automatic aid areas surround Columbia and represent past annexation patterns. The new model assures timely response to emergencies and can be changed, by mutual consent, when statistics demonstrate a need. Response data will be reviewed at least twice each year.

Financing structures

Under the previous agreement, the Fire District responded to calls in areas as they were annexed into Columbia, and last year the City repaid the District more than \$672,000 for that service. Watkins said that those costs climbed by 15 percent each year and made residents in those areas feel that they were taxed by the City without getting the benefits of City fire protection. The new agreement sets the cost of automatic aid at \$350,000 annually, plus an escalator for additional annexed territory.

Closer cooperation

The agreement requires the City and Fire District chiefs to determine any changes needed in designated automatic aid areas. Both organizations will use

a joint reporting system to track responses to service calls, review the data and provide written reports on their findings. They will conduct regular, joint training sessions and work toward similar training certifications and uniform fire code enforcement for urban areas.

Watkins and Chief Olsen said that citizens have a right to expect a close working relationship between the two fire service agencies. "It only makes sense, from a taxpayer and professional point of view that you try to deliver what you promise in a cost-efficient way. We promise that we'll be there when you call, and that we'll spend money wisely."

As part of the relationship, joint training exercises will take place this week on Wednesday, May 27, 2009 at 7:00 PM at the Boone County Fire District Training Center located at 5225 North Roger I. Wilson Memorial Drive and again on Saturday, May 30, 2009 at 9:00 am and 2:00 PM at the Boone County Fire District Training Center located at 5225 North Roger I. Wilson Memorial Drive.

The training will center on live burns with the goal to familiarize fire fighters from both departments with one another, how each department operates, and how each department's apparatus and equipment functions.

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