

WHY AREN'T THERE
MORE FEMALE FIREFIGHTERS
IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY?



2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury
of Santa Clara County

December 17, 2020

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GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

EMT	Emergency Medical Technician
Firefighter	Includes firefighters, EMTs and paramedics
National Report Card	<i>A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting</i> , April 2008, by Denise M. Hulett, et al.
SCC Region	Select fire departments located in Santa Clara County that were surveyed for this report: Santa Clara County Fire Department San José Fire Department Palo Alto Fire Department Mountain View Fire Department
Survey	Data from SCC Region in response to the Civil Grand Jury Survey, December 2019 - January 2020.



SUMMARY

Firefighting has been characterized as a calling as much as a career choice. It is demanding both physically and mentally. It requires knowledge of the latest firefighting techniques, lifesaving procedures, rigorous attention to physical fitness, and the demands of living away from family for days at a time. The profession should never favor one gender over another in qualifying for employment, but simply progress candidates who pass written and physical tests and the interview process. After surveying nine fire departments comprising 96 fire stations and nearly 1,500 firefighters, the Civil Grand Jury wondered: Why are there so few female firefighters in Santa Clara County?

While female firefighters have existed in the United States for over 200 years, the vast majority of firefighters in the nation are men.¹ The *National Report Card of Women in Firefighting* recommends that women should comprise 17% of the first responders' work force, but in Santa Clara County only 4% of firefighters are female.² The Civil Grand Jury (CGJ) selected four fire departments to analyze for this report. The CGJ conducted interviews, studied surveys, and researched local and nationwide data regarding the recruitment and retention of female firefighters and concluded that the absence of female firefighters in the SCC Region is due to:

- insufficient female recruitment
- gender bias
- lack of inclusivity

With the number of female firefighters lagging, the CGJ recommends four changes to increase the recruitment and hiring of more female firefighters in Santa Clara County:

1. Create and fund a recruitment process for female firefighters
2. Ensure an unbiased hiring process for female firefighter candidates
3. Ensure an equitable working environment for female firefighters with properly fitting gear, appropriate living conditions, and opportunities for promotion
4. Provide mentoring for prospective, new, and current firefighters

The CGJ proposes recommendations that would establish equal support, treatment, and opportunity for female firefighters as is provided for their male colleagues.

¹ RedZone, "History of Women in Firefighting," March 9, 2016, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.redzone.co/2016/03/09/history-of-women-in-firefighting>.

² Denise M. Hulett et al., *A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting*, p.1, accessed June 26, 2020, <https://www.womeninfire.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/35827WSP.pdf>.

BACKGROUND

In Santa Clara County, 887,791 female residents are nearly half of the 1.9 million total population.³ The county is widely recognized for its ethnic diversity and social inclusion. Known as a global leader for computer technology, Santa Clara County (the County) has been dubbed Silicon Valley and boasts the highest concentration of high-tech workers in the nation. Most would agree that Santa Clara County is inspirational as a trailblazer for those seeking a forward thinking and equitable way of life.

In the 1700's, the San José firefighters consisted of volunteers called Bucket Brigades. Nearly 100 years later, the first fire departments were formed, and firefighters were officially employed by the Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1. Since the founding of the County in 1850, the county has reorganized more than once to account for change and growth and today maintains nearly 100 fire stations that provide fire service support for the county.

The SCC Region

The CGJ conducted a survey requesting 10 years of firefighter hiring data from 2009-2019 from the following nine fire departments in Santa Clara County: CalFire, Gilroy, Milpitas, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San José, Santa Clara City, Santa Clara County, and Sunnyvale.

The CGJ chose four fire departments from the SCC to geographically represent the County. These fire departments are: Mountain View, Palo Alto, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District and San José. These four fire departments are hereafter referred to as the SCC Region. The data acquired from the 10-year survey also showed that year 2016 contained the largest number of firefighter applicants in the SCC Region and was thus used as the focus year for this report.

In 2016, nearly 2,000 candidates applied to be a firefighter in the SCC Region with a gender breakdown of 1,920 men, 68 women, and six no gender specified. The CGJ discovered that from this applicant pool, 40 male candidates and one female candidate were made conditional offers of employment. However, after the final subjective oral interview, 31 men were offered employment while the female applicant was not (See Table 3, Firefighting Hiring Data in SCC Region 2016).

³ Suburban Stats, "Population Demographics by Race and Gender," accessed June 28, 2020, <https://suburbanstats.org/population/california/how-many-people-live-in-santa-clara-county>.

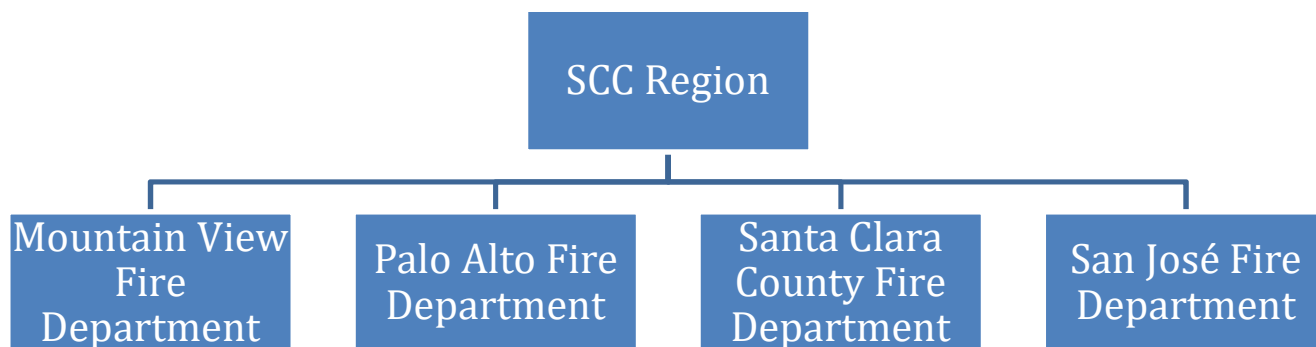


Figure 1: SCC Region: Largest Geographic Sample in the County Civil Grand Jury Survey

Currently, there are 62 fire stations accommodating 1,065 firefighters in the SCC Region, of which 44 firefighters are women (4.1%). The CGJ’s survey revealed that 4.1% of female firefighters is lower than the SCC Region’s ten-year average of 5.2%. Furthermore, the national average for female firefighters was 4.6% over a similar 5-year span.⁴ While the SCC Region has regressed over 10 years and is lower than the national average, the CGJ found that when departments – like Mountain View and San Francisco – make concerted efforts to recruit and hire female firefighters, more women are hired.

The Mountain View Fire Department funded a female recruitment program more than five years ago and has now achieved a 10% composition of female firefighters, the highest in the SCC Region. After a long legal battle, San Francisco Fire Department was required to hire more female firefighters with a goal of 10% recruitment, which it met and then exceeded by 5%. The CGJ recognized that efforts to recruit women in both fire departments resulted in more women being hired.

Gender Bias and Discrimination

The National Fire Academy claims more than 30% of women in fire service experience discrimination in their department.⁵ They further conclude the opportunity for women to achieve top-level positions has been a problem impacted by the attitudes and behaviors from their officers and peers. Similarly, data from the National Report Card found a majority of women firefighters nationwide revealed unfair treatment, including gender bias and harassment. Local lawsuits in the

⁴ 2017-2018 Los Angeles County Grand Jury Final Report, “Female Firefighters in Los Angeles County,” p. 91, accessed June 27, 2020, <http://grandjury.co.la.ca.us/pdf/2017-2018%20Los%20Angeles%20County%20Civil%20Grand%20Jury%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

⁵ Denise A. Giard, “Gender Bias and Its Impact on Women’s Advancement in the Fire Service,” October 2003, accessed June 27, 2020, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=489070>.

SCC Region claimed discrimination and retaliation, and the CGJ learned of narratives comparable to incidents mentioned in numerous articles found online nationwide.

A culture of gender inequality can also lead to expensive litigation. The City of San José has paid over a million dollars in a judgment and settlements to female firefighters in litigation involving gender-based retaliation, discrimination, and/or harassment per court records. Although the City denies wrongdoing in the settlements, one jury found the City liable for retaliation against a female firefighter. In that lawsuit, the jury found the City liable for retaliating against a female firefighter who had complained about alleged discriminatory conduct related to her being passed over for promotion despite scoring the highest on the objective portions of the examination.⁶

The CGJ learned that firefighters observed issues of gender bias, harassment, and lack of opportunity in the SCC Region, including:

1. a female firefighter could not get transferred to a particular fire station because that station allegedly did not want women working there
2. a female firefighter coped with inappropriate teasing and the telling of improper stories
3. a female firefighter shared that wives of male firefighters complained about their husbands working closely with female firefighters
4. a female firefighter described feeling unsupported at the male dominated union meeting where the atmosphere was not inclusive

Comparatively, in San Francisco, where eradicating gender-inequality has been a priority for numerous years, the CGJ learned that workplace propriety has changed over the years for the better and inappropriate behavior and improper conduct is not tolerated.

Recruitment and Hiring

The recruitment and hiring steps are similar for most fire departments nationwide.⁷ Candidates for firefighters are required to have a current Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT), a valid emergency medical technician (EMT) certificate (or certification as a National Registered EMT), and, depending on the assignment, a valid Paramedic License. Additionally, the candidate must possess a high school diploma or equivalent. The candidate must also pass a background check, a physical agility test, and a written test. If the candidate successfully completes the certification process and passes the mandatory tests, they may then proceed to the oral interview process depending on their test scores and the number of overall candidates applying. A score of 70% on

⁶ *Ward v. City of San José*, Case Number 2013-1-CV-253758 (Judgment)

⁷ FireRescue1, "Fire Recruits: 10 more must-do things to become a firefighter," November 20, 2014, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.firerescue1.com/career-1/articles/fire-recruits-10-more-must-do-things-to-become-a-firefighter-GFUbhkMmYrO2VFes/>.

the written test is generally passing; however, not all applicants may proceed to the next step if there are a large number of applicants with a higher score.

In 2016, 1,994 candidates applied to be firefighters in the SCC Region. The breakdown of applicants by gender was 96% men and 3% women. The CGJ found that the underrepresentation of women in the applicant pool is a function of the lack of recruitment methods and hiring practices in the region. Currently, a recruiting process for women does not exist in the County of Santa Clara, City of San José, and City of Palo Alto, where female firefighter numbers are lagging. Only Mountain View Fire Department was found to budget and actively recruit female candidates and now boasts the highest percent of women in the region (10%) since starting the process 5 years ago. The CGJ found that additional resources used for female recruitment in a department fosters the growth of female firefighters, while the lack of such a program results in fewer applicants, thus preventing the growth in the number of female candidates.

The CGJ recommends a defined recruiting process to actively engage and interest women in the fire service in County of Santa Clara, City of San José, and City of Palo Alto.

National Report Card

The *National Report Card on Women in Firefighting* (National Report Card) published the results of confidential written questionnaires returned by male and female firefighters in 48 states. The demographics include 114 fire departments ranging in size from 103 firefighters to more than 3,000, together employing 51,281 paid firefighters. Additionally, the study conducted in-depth interviews with 175 female firefighters in numerous major cities.

As shown in Table 1 below, the National Report Card surveyed both men and women regarding their recruitment and hiring experience.⁸ The National Report Card found from the recruitment and hiring data, the process was perceived differently by gender and highlights those statistical differences between a female firefighter and her male counterpart.

The Civil Grand Jury examined the National Report Card and results in Table 1 and observed that:

- Nearly 70% of male applicants believed their department recruits and hires women above and beyond its general recruiting efforts while only 36% of women agreed.
- More than twice as many men (40%) grew up wanting to be a firefighter compared to women (20%) due to the lack of female firefighter role models.

⁸ Hulett, et al., *A National Report Card*, p. 5.

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- Though more female applicants were former athletes (35% vs 15%) and more female applicants were college graduates (65% vs 47%), these physical and academic accomplishments did not increase the hiring numbers of women firefighters.

**Table 1: Firefighter Recruitment and Hiring
National Report Card Survey**

Operation	Survey Question	% of Women	% of Men
Recruitment	My department recruits and hires women above and beyond its general recruiting efforts	35.6	69.3
	I was actively recruited to become a firefighter	8.8	4.6
	In deciding to become a firefighter, I read about job opening in newspaper or flyer	14.2	12.8
	When growing up, I wanted to be a firefighter	20.9	40.1
	When growing up, I had family members or friends who were firefighters	47.5	48.6
	In deciding to become a firefighter, I was introduced by a family member or friend	60.6	67.4
	At the time I applied, I knew the requirements for the job	68.9	73.4
	Prior To My First Paid Fire Job:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was an EMT, medical technician, nurse, or other medical occupation 	46.6	34.4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was active in gym/athletic/sports 	35.0	15.6
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had firefighting experience 	11.4	15.6
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had construction background 	5.9	23.8
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had a fire degree 	5.0	8.2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had military experience 	4.2	18.4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am a college graduate 	65.2	47.0

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Hiring	My department's selection process included a written exam	85.8	87.2
	The written exam accurately measured my ability to perform the job	29.5	33.1
	My department's selection process included an oral board	81.6	85.3
	My department's selection process included a physical abilities test	91.0	89.3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of those taking a physical ability test, % who specifically trained to prepare 	78.4	55.2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of those taking the test, % passed the first time 	85.8	97.9
	My department's physical abilities test accurately measured my ability to perform the job	42.8	52.9

Work Environment

The CGJ observed that firefighters have a calling to serve their community when choosing their career. Firefighting is often a vocation long passed down in families for many generations for those wanting to demonstrate care for others on a daily basis.⁹ Firefighters know the demands on family life and the risk associated with the job. Unlike a traditional office job, with set hours and free weekends, firefighters work multiple 24-hour shifts and consequently miss family gatherings and holidays. Their coworkers become a second family as they train, work, and eat together many days in a row.

Because of the close proximity and long hours, the firefighter requires a faith and trust in their coworkers, especially when responding to emergencies where life is at risk. Like most professions, the job requires an equitable playing field in an impartial working environment. The National Report Card data revealed that, unlike their male colleagues, a majority of female firefighters experience bias in their work environment. The survey also revealed a significant difference of opinion between men and women about discrimination and harassment in their workplace.

Table 2 below details overwhelming discrimination or harassment experienced by women firefighters compared to men nationwide.¹⁰ Nearly 85% of the women surveyed claimed different treatment due to gender compared to 12% of the men. A majority of women encountered problems with ill-fitting equipment, witnessed a female supervisor's authority challenged, or experienced shunning and isolation due to gender. Though 30% of the women surveyed experienced inequitable treatment during their probationary period, unfair hiring processes, and barriers to career advancement, all due to gender, very few men experienced such treatment.

For example, while 7% of men believed their gender was a barrier to their career advancement, over 35% of women surveyed felt the same. Between 18% and 40% of women experienced verbal harassment, exposure to pornography, sexual advances, lack of training, unsuitable dorm accommodations, training denial, hazing or hostile notes compared to fewer than 5% of men.

Across the nation, women entering the force reported experiencing harassment and ridicule about their ability to handle the job, says Dr. Candice McDonald of the International Association of Women in Fire and Emergency Services.¹¹

⁹ Kelli Peacock Dunn, "Reasons to be a Firefighter," accessed October 14, 2020, <https://work.chron.com/reasons-firefighter-11613.html>.

¹⁰ Hulett, et al., *A National Report Card*, p. 5.

¹¹ Zara Stone, "Not Many Women Fought California's Deadly Fires," accessed December 13, 2020, <https://www.thelily.com/not-many-women-fought-californias-deadly-fires-we-spent-a-day-at-the-station-with-some-who-did/>.

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**Table 2: Discrimination or Harassment Experienced by Firefighters
National Report Card Survey**

Survey Question	% of Women	% of Men
I have experienced different treatment because of my gender	84.7	12.4
I have encountered problems with ill-fitting equipment	79.7	20.9
My department has no procedure of which I am aware for addressing discrimination complaints	65.0	42.7
I have seen supervisors' authority challenged because of the supervisor's gender	49.9	21.0
My gender has created barriers to my career advancement	36.5	7.4
Males and females are not treated the same during fire college and/or probation	33.9	17.8
Promotions are not decided upon fairly	33.9	30.6
Staff in my department are treated differently because of their sexual orientation	30.6	14.4
The hiring process in my department does not fairly select and hire applicants	30.3	22.6
I have not received coaching/mentoring from senior people in my department	25.4	20.4
My supervisor does not address complaints concerning gender-related incidents	23.4	5.6
Males and females are not treated the same during applicants' physical ability screening	13.3	10.5
I have experienced incidents because of my gender involving:		
• Shunning/isolation	50.8	2.3
• Privacy in showers, dormitory, or when changing clothes	46.2	2.8

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Survey Question	% of Women	% of Men
• Verbal harassment	42.9	2.8
• Pornography	31.9	1.4
• Sexual advances	30.2	0.5
• Dormitory accommodations	28.4	2.3
• Training denial or differences	24.3	4.1
• Other	21.2	5.5
• Station assignments	20.4	0.9
• Hazing	18.6	1.4
• Hostile notes, cartoons, or other written material	18.2	0.9
• Mealtime-related difficulties	13.1	0.9
• Assault	6.3	0.0
These Incidents continue in the present	30.6	6.0
Total Average	34.2	18.8



METHODOLOGY

The CGJ examined reports, held interviews, conducted surveys in the SCC Region, and reviewed data nationwide to identify:

- 1) Recruitment procedures used to improve gender balance
- 2) Hiring processes, including certification, tests, and interviews
- 3) Work experiences of both male and female firefighters
- 4) Mentoring for prospective, new, and current firefighters
- 5) Opportunities for promotion
- 6) Facility accommodations by gender
- 7) Firefighter gear allocation

The CGJ used the following methods to obtain data for this report:

- Interviewed numerous line-level male and female firefighters and fire department management leaders from the SCC Region
- Surveyed the SCC Region fire departments to determine:
 - Job Openings for Firefighter/EMT/Paramedic
 - Fire Academy Graduation Rates
 - Recruitment and Hiring Processes
 - Staffing by Gender
 - Staffing by Position
 - Facilities Retrofitted by Gender
- Surveyed Santa Clara County fire departments not included in the SCC Region (Gilroy, Milpitas, Sunnyvale, and the City of Santa Clara), as well as CalFire (headquartered in Sacramento)
- Received a panel presentation from the San Francisco Fire Department
- Reviewed local and national articles and reports about women firefighters
- Reviewed U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA)
- Reviewed International Association of Women in Firefighting¹²
- Reviewed 2017-2018 Civil Grand Jury Report: Female Firefighters in Los Angeles County¹³

¹² IAFC, “International Association Women in Fire & Emergency Services,” accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/resources/resource/international-association-of-women-in-fire-emergency-services>.

¹³ 2017-2018 Los Angeles County Grand Jury Final Report, p. 91.

DISCUSSION

The SCC Region survey data provided the CGJ with statistical results of staffing by gender, staffing by position, and fire stations lacking gender separate facilities. The data revealed a lack of gender diversity and a reduction of female firefighters over a 10-year span. The CGJ interviews further revealed firefighters’ descriptions of bias in recruitment and hiring, a lack of mentoring, improper conduct in the work environment, special female attributes and gender obstacles, ill-fitting gear for women, and the best practices found in and out of the SCC Region.

In 2016, there were 1,994 firefighter applicants in the SCC Region. Table 3 lists the hiring data with passing results for each gender. Forty male and one female candidate were made conditional offers of employment. As shown in Table 3, 44 of 68 women passed the objective physical and 37 of 68 passed the objective written tests, but that number decreased to 15 after the first subjective oral interview and decreased to zero after the final subjective oral interview. Thirty-one men were made offers of employment, but zero women who were made conditional offers were hired.

**Table 3: Firefighter Hiring Data in SCC Region (2016)
Civil Grand Jury Survey**

Year: 2016	Men	Women	Not Specified	Total
Applicants	1920	68	6	1994
Pass Written Test	1416	37	0	1453
Pass Physical Test	1315	44	0	1359
Pass First Oral Interview	408	15	1	424
Pass Background Check	91	1	0	92
Conditional Offers	40	1	0	41
Pass Final Oral Interview	31	0	0	31

The CGJ found though women were competitive in the testing phases, zero female applicants passed the final oral interview. Thirty-one male and zero female applicants received congratulatory letters with their fire academy start date, including 16-weeks of additional training hosted by their hiring department offering more classwork and drills.

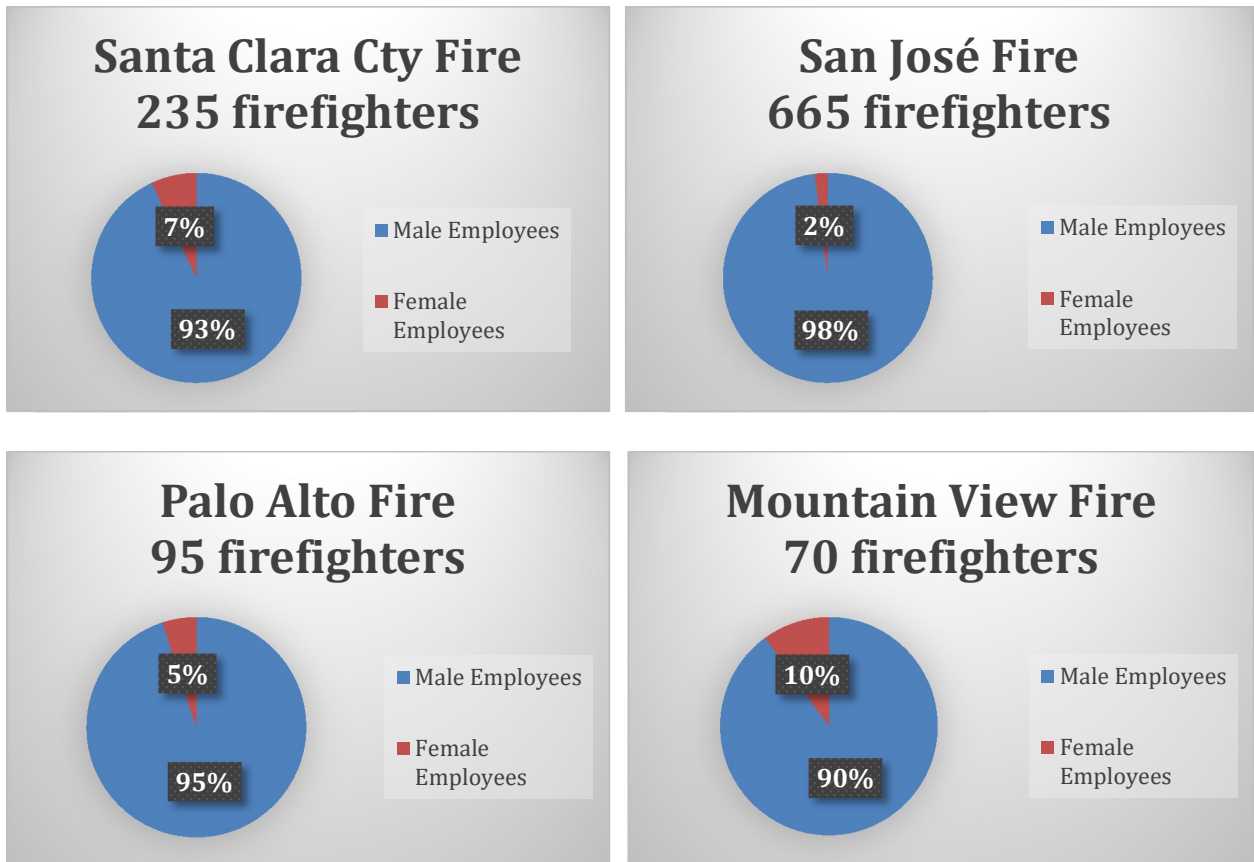
Staffing by Gender in SCC Region

The following four charts depict the current percentage of male and female firefighters in each fire department in the SCC Region. The data derived from the 2019-2020 CGJ survey shows that the number of male firefighters far exceed the number of female firefighters in all four departments in the SCC Region.

San José Fire, the largest department in the SCC region with 665 firefighters, has the lowest percent of female firefighters (2%).

Mountain View Fire has made a concerted effort to recruit women for five years and now boasts a 10% proportion of female firefighters, the highest in the region (see section Best Practices, Mountain View for more details).

**Charts 1-4: Firefighter Staffing by Gender in the SCC Region (2019)
Civil Grand Jury Survey**



WHY AREN'T THERE MORE FEMALE FIREFIGHTERS?

In 2018, 76 million women (47% of the labor force) represented nearly half the US Labor Force.¹⁴ The representation of female firefighters is currently 4% or 44 of 1,065 firefighters in the SCC Region. Table 4 depicts the number of firefighters and percentage by gender for each department in the SCC Region.

**Table 4: Firefighter Staffing by Gender in the SCC Region (2019)
Civil Grand Jury Survey**

Fire Department	Male		Female		Totals
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Santa Clara County	219	93%	16	7%	235
San José	649	98%	16	2%	665
Palo Alto	90	95%	5	5%	95
Mountain View	63	90%	7	10%	70
Total	1021	96%	44	4%	1065

Santa Clara County: With 235 firefighters, the percentage of female firefighters is 7%. There are 16 female firefighters, seven of whom hold management positions. The number of women firefighters has declined since 2009, from 22 to 16.

San José: With 665 firefighters, the percentage of female firefighters is 2%. There are 16 female firefighters, six of whom hold management positions. The number of women firefighters has declined since 2009, from 35 to 16.

Palo Alto: With 95 firefighters, the percentage of female firefighters is 5%. There are 5 female firefighters with one holding a management position. The number of women firefighters has declined since 2009, from 10 to 5.

Mountain View: With 70 firefighters, the percentage of female firefighters is 10%. There are seven female firefighters, one of whom holds a management position. The number of women firefighters has increased since 2009, from 4 to 7.

¹⁴ Catalyst, “Quick Take: Women in the Workforce—United States,” June 5, 2019, accessed August 13, 2020, <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-the-workforce-united-states/>.

Staffing by Position in SCC Region

The gender breakdown of managerial positions in the SCC Region (Chief to Captain) shows 319 men and 15 women. The gender breakdown of chief-level positions (Chief to Battalion Chief) shows 56 men and 4 women. From data in the previous section, Staffing by Gender, related to management positions, the CGJ found a proportionate number of female firefighters are being promoted in some departments in the SCC Region: **Santa Clara County Fire** 43% (7/16), **San José City Fire** 37% (6/16), **Palo Alto City Fire** 20% (1/5), and **Mountain View Fire** 14% (1/7).

The data in Table 5 shows the percentage of firefighters by position and gender from Chief to Firefighter/EMT/Paramedic. Forty-four (4%) of the 1065 firefighters in the SCC Region are women.

The CGJ found that although it is difficult for women to be hired in the SCC Region, a number of those women hired are being promoted, which is particularly true in both Santa Clara County and San José City Fire Departments.

**Table 5: Staffing by Position in SCC Region (2019)
Civil Grand Jury Survey**

Position		Male		Female		Totals
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Chief	Supervises officers and runs day to day operations	4	100%	0	0%	4
Deputy Chief	Supervises battalions, emergencies, and training	9	90%	1	10%	10
Assistant Chief	Plans, organizes, directs, and administers operations	3	100%	0	0%	3
Battalion Chief	Ensures safety, training, equipment and admin duties	40	93%	3	7%	43

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Position		Male		Female		Totals
Captain	Station manager	263	96%	11	4%	274
Engineer	Responsible for fire engine	249	97%	9	3%	258
Firefighter, EMT Paramedic	Fights fires, applies medical skills and life support	453	96%	20	4%	473
Total		1021	96%	44	4%	1065



Gender Separate Facilities

All fire departments in the SCC Region provide overnight accommodations (called dorms) for firefighters to bathe, sleep, and dress. Some of the departments' fire stations provide separate bathing and sleeping facilities for men and women. The CGJ appreciates that separate living spaces affords both genders more privacy. The lack of separate accommodations for female firefighters could detract from their recruitment or limit their willingness to work without separate facilities.

The breakdown of facilities for 62 fire stations housing 1,065 firefighters in the SCC Region are:

Santa Clara County Fire accommodations for 15 existing fire stations

- 2 include separate locker rooms for women
- 8 include separate dorms for women
- 11 have separate restrooms with showers for women
- 2 stations are scheduled for retrofitting
- 2 new stations are scheduled to be built

San José City Fire accommodations for 34 existing fire stations

- 31 have separate locker rooms for women
- 20 have separate dorms for women
- 30 have separate restrooms with showers for women
- 3 stations are scheduled for retrofitting
- 3 new stations are scheduled to be built

Palo Alto Fire accommodations status: No information provided for 8 fire stations

The CGJ did not receive survey-requested information from Palo Alto about their facilities. The CGJ believes privacy for female firefighters is important and encourages PAFD to make any necessary changes to include separate facilities for women.

Mountain View Fire accommodations for 5 existing fire stations

- 5 have separate locker rooms for women
- 0 have separate dorms for women
- 5 have separate restrooms with showers for women
- Unspecified stations are scheduled for retrofitting
- 0 new stations are scheduled to be built

Mentoring

A mentor is an experienced colleague who trains and counsels new employees or student trainees in a particular profession. In the firefighting culture, mentoring has informally existed for many years where seasoned firefighters share information and coach new recruits or a subordinate seeking promotion. The CGJ found that mentorship programs in the SCC Region were loosely defined and unpaid. While two firefighters expressed instances of informal mentoring offered by themselves off-duty, the CGJ found that the SCC Region offers no formal mentoring for prospects, new recruits, or firefighters seeking promotion.

Dr. Harry Carter is a fire protection consultant with 50 years in firefighting and 30 years as a chief. In the past, he was president of the International Society of Fire Service Instructors and president of the U.S. branch of the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE). Dr. Carter was asked if fire departments should develop an in-house mentoring program. He responded that the simple answer was yes, since talent and knowledge are lost or wasted if you do not create such a program. He suggested making the concept of mentoring a part of a fire department's organizational culture.¹⁵

The CGJ found that mentoring was both informal and arbitrary and often a stroke of luck for the recipient. Though unofficial mentoring exists in the SCC Region, firefighters do not know when or if they will receive it or how long it will last. The CGJ wondered:

1. Would formal, funded mentorship programs benefit firefighters and their departments?
2. Could pre-hire mentoring encourage more women to apply for firefighting careers?
3. Would new or potential female recruits benefit from mentoring?
4. Would a firefighter profit from a superior's mentoring when seeking promotion?
5. When should a mentorship program begin and end?
6. How long should a mentorship program last?
7. What should a mentorship program include?

The CGJ learned that there is agreement among firefighters that potential recruits would benefit highly from mentoring before they were hired, and that seasoned firefighters could benefit from their superior's knowledge when seeking advancement within the ranks. Although there are mentor training meetings for rookie firefighters, all training is informal and unpaid. Mentoring would be conducive to outreach for potential female trainees. The CGJ concludes that a formal, paid mentorship program established in all fire departments in the SCC Region would be a valuable

¹⁵ Dr. Harry Carter, "Command Post: Building a Culture of Mentoring," August 1, 2018, accessed June 27, 2020, <https://www.firehouse.com/careers-education/article/21009919/how-to-build-a-culture-of-mentoring-in-the-fire-department>.

resource for potential firefighter candidates as well as for experienced firefighters seeking promotion.

Women in Fire Service: Perspectives in the SCC Region

The CGJ learned that although there is consensus that women are as good as men in firefighting, male firefighters continue to far outnumber female firefighters in the SCC Region. The CGJ learned that female firefighters in the SCC Region face different obstacles as well as contribute differently than men to fire service.

Special attributes women bring to firefighting

Although many people believe most emergency calls to a fire department are about fires, the majority of calls are for emergency medical situations or transportation to a facility. The CGJ learned that there were numerous calls where the presence of a female firefighter brought a calming effect to medical situations. For example, having a female present during childbirth labor or after a sexual assault was seen as beneficial. Another example includes an instance where a naked, elderly woman fell in the shower and the victim's relief was noticeable as her shoulders relaxed upon seeing a female firefighter enter the room. The female firefighter entered first and covered her up. Comforting victims is a very important part of the job of a firefighter and the presence of a female firefighter can – for some victims – help defuse the trauma of the situation when a female firefighter is present. The presence of a gender-diverse department is lauded as beneficial to co-workers and the public as well.

Obstacles to hiring

The CGJ learned that many SCC Region firefighter recruits are selected from the EMT/paramedic pool, which is primarily male and therefore diminishes the chance of females being recruited from the very outset. The CGJ acknowledges that fire recruits are required to meet certain minimum requirements and the persons who have these qualifications may be predominately male, which reduces the number of eligible female recruits. To be successful in recruiting more women into firefighting, the SCC Region should also examine the eligibility requirements for fire recruits and evaluate whether the eligibility requirements are a further obstacle to recruiting women into fire service.

Many female firefighters feel undervalued

Female firefighters feel that they have to prove themselves in a male-dominated field and feel judged due to their gender. The CGJ learned that female firefighters feel as though their opinions

and ideas are less likely to be accepted by other firefighters than their male counterparts' opinions. Female firefighters feel as though their male counterparts question whether they can do the job.

Unconscious bias

The outreach and recruitment of women in the fire service is important to female firefighters in the SCC Region. For instance, agencies should plant the firefighting seed earlier than high school career fairs by addressing elementary and middle school assemblies and funding programs like the Women in Fire Boot Camps hosted by Bay Area female firefighters (see Best Practices, San José). These types of strategies may be helpful in avoiding the kind of unconscious bias that persists in the community as evidenced at a school assembly where a child who upon recognizing that a firefighter was female declared, "*Oh my gosh, it's a girl!*"

Proper fitting gear and uniforms for women

The National Report Card showed 80% of female firefighters have encountered problems with ill-fitting equipment including unfair struggles during physical testing, while male candidates test with properly fitting clothing and equipment. The CGJ learned of similar ill-fitting equipment for female firefighters in the SCC Region.

Female firefighters are expected to be strong from the start, but this can be difficult and unsafe if their gear and uniforms do not fit properly. Firefighters have everyday uniforms and formal uniforms. They wear bunker or turnout gear to respond to a fire (jacket, hats, pants, gloves, etc.). When responding to other types of incidents, they may be required to wear specialty gear (e.g., personal protective equipment or hazmat suits).

The CGJ finds that female fire fighters should receive the same well-fitting uniforms, everyday turnouts, formal wear, and specialty gear available to their male counterparts. This may be more complicated than ordering a smaller size. The Class A jacket used for formal events is double breasted and the Class B daily uniforms are a man's suit cut. Neither uniform fits women properly.

In all the jurisdictions in the SCC Region, new female recruits are assigned former male firefighter gear at the time of their arrival, also called turnouts or bunker gear. But the turnouts are often too large for women, including the gloves. While waiting for their gear to arrive, female firefighters must wear ill-fitting bunker gear. New recruits are immediately trying to prove themselves in their predominately male class of new recruits, and this is a disadvantage for female firefighters.

The hazmat team specialty gear is used when responding to an incident that involves hazardous materials, and requires that a firefighter put on boots, a suit, and built-in gloves that are also too large for most women. The CGJ finds that it is unfair and perhaps dangerous to require female

firefighters to wear ill-fitting gear while performing firefighter duties. Nevertheless, they must wear them.

In a world that is increasingly on fire, properly fitting firefighter gear is necessary to keep women safe on the job.¹⁶ Jennifer Taylor, director of the Center for Firefighter Injury Research and Safety Trends, states it is a wicked problem to get caught on branches in a blaze. She notes women have tried altering their gear to make it fit better, only for those alterations to fail in the midst of a rescue. Taylor adds that properly fitting gear protects firefighters from exposure to toxins often present in smoke and debris, and that ill-fitting gear exposes female firefighters to chemicals that can creep into gear, onto their skin and eventually inside the body. The CGJ concludes that ill-fitting gear is a problem that the SCC Region should remedy.

Advice for women

Female firefighters in the SCC Region are willing to aid and mentor new female recruits interested in the fire service profession. Tips for potential female recruits include:

- Get physically fit beforehand
- Understand it is a physically demanding job
- Talk with a female firefighter before committing and ask lots of questions

Firefighters in the SCC Region are willing to reach out to young people as they sympathize with the feeling of vulnerability and the fear of asking questions. The CGJ observed that firefighters *want* to give guidance to potential candidates because firefighting is all about wanting to help people.



¹⁶ Justine Calma, “Ill-Fitting Gear Puts Female Firefighters at Risk, But That’s Changing,” February 21, 2020, accessed November 18, 2020, <https://www.theverge.com/2020/2/21/21147087/female-firefighter-gear-risk-california-australia-wildfires-climate-change>.

Best Practices

The term *best practices* describes procedures that are effective. The CGJ found the following best practices used to recruit female firefighters.

Mountain View

The City of Mountain View has made a concerted effort to recruit female firefighters. In 2015, the Mountain View Fire Department (MVFD) requested and received a \$30,000 grant from the City of Mountain View to address the recruitment of female firefighters. The grant has since evolved into an annual line item in the city's general budget and covers time spent recruiting women firefighters, including cost of publications, program operations, and miscellaneous expenditures.

The MVFD female firefighter recruitment occurs at high schools, colleges, festivals, and other public events. The department sponsors fire camps called Camp Ignite, and with Mountain View Police Department, co-sponsors a joint recruitment fair entitled She Can!

MVFD hired one female firefighter in 2017 and two more in 2019. They currently employ seven female firefighters out of 72 and retain the largest percentage of women in the SCC Region (10%). In 2019, MVFD kicked off Women's History Month with an historic moment of its own, assembling an all-female crew of firefighters for the first time in the city's history.¹⁷

San José

Several San José Fire Department (SJFD) female firefighters set up their third free Women's Boot Camp in March 2020 for all persons interested in pursuing a career in firefighting.¹⁸ The majority of the instructors are female, and although the facility and training equipment are provided by SJFD, all boot camp trainers are unpaid volunteers. The boot camp provides first-hand fight-the-fire experience and a rare opportunity for women to see female firefighters in action. It was planned to coincide with International Women's Day in order to celebrate women's achievements while inspiring others to consider a career in the fire service.

The boot camp orients women to the fire service career path through physical fitness education, information sharing, and professional mentorship. Participants engage in a 90-minute firefighter's

¹⁷ Kevin Forestieri, "All-female Mountain View fire crew draws national attention," *Mountain View Voice*, March 28, 2019, accessed June 28, 2020, <https://www.mv-voice.com/news/2019/03/28/all-female-mountain-view-fire-crew-draws-national-attention>.

¹⁸ City of San José, "San José Fire Department Women's Boot Camp," March 4, 2020, accessed June 28, 2020, <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/Home/Components/News/News/845/4699>.

circuit-training workout, including hands-on experience with firefighting tools and equipment. Additionally, female firefighters from SJFD share their career journey and individual experiences working as firefighters.

San Francisco

The San Francisco Fire Department has more paid female firefighters than any other urban fire department in the country, however this was not always the case.¹⁹ Before 1976, no women were even allowed to apply to SFFD, and still none were hired until 1987.

In 1988, a consent decree issued by a federal court mandated San Francisco to attain a 10% hiring goal of female firefighters. The SFFD was ordered to eradicate past discriminatory hiring practices and to recruit, appoint, retain, and promote qualified women to increase the female composition of the SFFD so that it reflected the sexual composition of the work force in San Francisco.²⁰

Today, the SFFD employs 15.7% women, more than 5% above their required goal. Although San Francisco reached its goal because it was under court order to do so, now more than 270 women serve on their force, assisting nearly 900,000 people across San Francisco city and county.²¹ SFFD female firefighters attend community and school recruiting events, not as volunteers, but as paid firefighters. They join their male colleagues to recruit from high schools, community colleges, veteran and faith-based organizations, and the Emergency Training School (EMS Corps). These female firefighters serve as role models for young women interested in a firefighting career.

¹⁹ OH&S, “Female Firefighters Battle against Occupational Cancer,” March 3, 2020, accessed June 28, 2020, <https://ohsonline.com/articles/2020/03/03/female-firefighters-battle-against-occupational-cancer.aspx>.

²⁰ *United States of America v. The City and County of San Francisco*, June 10, 1988, accessed June 28, 2020, <https://www.clearinghouse.net/chDocs/public/EE-CA-0297-0004.pdf>.

²¹ Laura Mallonee, “The Trailblazing Women Who Fight California’s Fires,” June 6, 2018, accessed October 14, 2020, <https://www.wired.com/story/portraits-san-francisco-female-firefighters/>.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1a: Recruiting

A lack of effort to recruit female firefighter candidates to apply for positions in Palo Alto, Santa Clara County, and San José Fire Departments has resulted in very few female firefighters being hired.

Finding 1b: Recruiting

Mountain View Fire Department has made specific efforts to recruit female firefighters since 2015, resulting in a 5% increase over the last 5 years. Today, with 10% female firefighting staff, the CGJ applauds their efforts.

Recommendation 1

Palo Alto, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Departments should develop, fund, and implement a plan to increase recruiting efforts to grow their number of female firefighters. Individual plans should be developed by June 2021.

Finding 2: Mentoring

Talent and knowledge are lost or wasted if organizations do not create a mentoring program. Mentoring potential recruits and firefighters currently is voluntary, loosely defined, and unpaid, which hampers recruiting efforts in the SCC Region.

Recommendation 2

Fire departments in the SCC Region should develop, fund, and implement mentoring programs. Mentors should advise and guide potential recruits, new recruits, and current firefighters. Mentoring programs should include visits to local schools and organizations to demonstrate encouragement of female candidates. Individual plans should be developed by June 2021 by Mountain View, Palo Alto, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Departments.

Finding 3: Opportunity for Promotion

Although there is an insufficient pool of women firefighters, the SCC Region fire departments are promoting women to management positions.

No Recommendation

Finding 4a: Accommodations

There is a lack of gender-separate accommodations for bathing, sleeping, and dressing in fire stations in the Mountain View Fire Department, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Department, which can cause privacy concerns for all firefighters.

Finding 4b: Accommodations

The Palo Alto Fire Department did not respond to the CGJ requested survey regarding information about their facilities.

Recommendation 4a

Because Mountain View Fire Department has no separate dorms for women in its five fire stations, the City of Mountain View should develop a plan to create separate dorms in all fire stations for women to provide better privacy for all firefighters. This plan should be developed by June 2021.

Recommendation 4b

The Palo Alto Fire Department should perform a self-evaluation of its eight fire stations and report on whether separate locker rooms, dorms or restrooms with showers for women are available and, where those accommodations are lacking, the City of Palo Alto should develop a plan to create better privacy for all firefighters. This plan should be developed by June 2021.

Recommendation 4c

Because Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District has 13 stations with no separate locker rooms for women, seven stations with no separate dorms for women, and four stations with no separate restrooms with showers for women, the County of Santa Clara should develop a plan to create better privacy for all firefighters. This plan should be developed by June 2021.

Recommendation 4d

Because San José Fire Department has four stations with no separate locker rooms for women, 14 stations with no separate dorms for women, and four stations with no separate restrooms with showers for women, the City of San José should develop a plan to create better privacy for all firefighters. This plan should be developed by June 2021.

Finding 5: Work Environment

Although every SCC Region entity has a non-discrimination policy, the unique work setting of a fire department coupled with the low number of women in fire service presents out-of-the ordinary workplace challenges because they live together and rely on each other during life-or-death situations. These unique features of this workplace make it more challenging for women to report discrimination and/or harassment.

Recommendation 5

To address the unique challenges of promoting a gender-inclusive work culture for women in the setting of a fire department, each fire department in the SCC Region should develop city- or county- approved plans that focus on the remedies to the challenges of the fire service workplace for women. These plans should be developed by the Mountain View Fire Department, Palo Alto Fire Department, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Department by June 2021.

Finding 6: Gear

Due to ill-fitting uniforms and gear, women are not on a similar footing as their male counterparts. Women should feel secure in their everyday uniforms and formal wear and, for safety reasons, have properly fitting gear when engaged in firefighting.

Recommendation 6

All fire departments in the SCC Region should make correctly fitting uniforms for women available and ensure that a sufficient supply of firefighting and specialty gear is available in women's sizes at the time they begin work. This plan for procurement should be implemented by June 2021 by Mountain View Fire Department, Palo Alto Fire Department, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Department.

CONCLUSIONS

The current procedures for recruiting and hiring female firefighters in the SCC Region have resulted in maintaining a male-dominated fire service that does not reflect the face of the community it serves. For the SCC Region fire departments to have more female firefighters in the workforce, they must hire more women. This will require a concentrated and continuous effort. Furthermore, female firefighters should expect appropriate behavior from all colleagues, separate living accommodations for privacy, formal mentoring, opportunity for promotion, and properly fitting work gear.

The SCC Region can learn lessons from neighboring fire departments that have recruited more female firefighters. While San Francisco Fire Department continues to hire more female firefighters, it was required to do so by a mandatory decree, yet today it has exceeded its goal. The SCC Region can look to the SFFD for ideas on female recruitment and hiring.

Firefighting is one of the last professions to encourage women to participate.²² However, the CGJ found that when the Mountain View Fire Department funded its effort to recruit female firefighters, its efforts succeeded, and more women were hired.

Retired Deputy Fire Chief Curt Varone has worked more than 40 years as a firefighter and writes a blog on fire law. He stated:

How do you change that frat house culture? That's what we're wrestling with. We've been fiddling around with this for 40 years and we're continuing to have the same problems. We need to look at what is leading to the lack of women in the fire service. Hearts and minds have not changed on this issue and that's the only way we're going to see progress.²³

The heart of Silicon Valley lies in diversity and innovation. While the Office of Women's Policy in Santa Clara County states societal perception and governmental policies require deliberate and measured action, some county fire departments have fallen short.²⁴ If Santa Clara County can cultivate an environment that leads to hiring more women firefighters, it will find its way to equitable female representation in the county. More diverse fire departments in the SCC Region would encourage other Santa Clara County fire departments to change their view, and the balance of genders may inspire additional counties to do so as well.

²² 2017-2018 Los Angeles County Grand Jury Final Report, p. 9.

²³ Robert McCoppin, et al., "Female Firefighters Still Fight for Equality: 'We're Assumed Incompetent'," accessed June 27, 2020, <https://www.govtech.com/em/disaster/Female-Firefighter-Still-Fight-for-Equality-Were-assumed-Incompetent.html>.

²⁴ County of Santa Clara Office of Women's Policy, "Status of Women and Girls in Santa Clara County," August 2018, p. 3, accessed October 16, 2020, https://www.sccgov.org/sites/owp/publications/Documents/StatusofWomenandGirls2018pdf_web.pdf.

WHY AREN'T THERE MORE FEMALE FIREFIGHTERS?

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Civil Grand Jury request responses as follows:
From the following governing bodies:

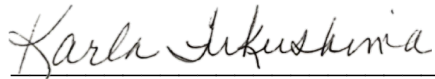
Responding Agency	Finding	Recommendation
City of Mountain View	1b, 2, 3, 4a, 5, 6	1, 2, 4a, 5, 6

Responding Agency	Finding	Recommendation
City of Palo Alto	1a, 2, 3, 4b, 5, 6	1, 2, 4b, 5, 6

Responding Agency	Finding	Recommendation
Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District	1a, 2, 3, 4a, 5, 6	1, 2, 4c, 5, 6

Responding Agency	Finding	Recommendation
City of San José	1a, 2, 3, 4a, 5, 6	1, 2, 4d, 5, 6

This report was **ADOPTED** by the 2019-2020 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury on this 17th day of December, 2020.



Ms. Karla Fukushima

Foreperson