

# Fire districts outline how they will spend new tax dollars

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Funding from a sales tax increase approved in March by Calaveras County voters will contribute to the hiring of more than two dozen new firefighters, according to a report released Monday by the Calaveras County Fire Joint Powers Authority.

Beginning in October, the sales tax in Calaveras County will increase by 1 cent for every dollar in taxable sales. Funds for this tax increase will go to the county's nine fire districts and the Angels Camp Fire Department. The sales tax in unincorporated Calaveras County will go from 7.25 to 8.25 percent beginning in October, while the sales tax in Angels Camp will move from 7.75 to 8.75 percent.

Calaveras County Auditor Kathy Gomes estimates the tax increase will generate \$2.5 million in the current fiscal year that ends June 30, 2025. Actual receipts could be higher or lower depending on the volume of retail sales in the county.

The voter-approved "Calaveras Local Fire Protection Tax" requires the fire agencies receiving the money to file plans indicating how they will use the additional revenue, which they will begin receiving in December.

In addition to hiring more firefighters, many of the agencies plan to improve firefighter compensation to reduce high rates of turnover. In some cases, such as the San Andreas Fire Protection District, firefighters are paid hourly wages rather than the modest stipends they previously received for working shifts at the fire station.

In all, the fire agencies reported they had 115 paid firefighters in the fiscal year that ended June 30, but expect to hire 32 more for a total of 147 by the end of the current fiscal year that began July 1. Paid firefighters include those receiving hourly wages and those paid flat stipends for working shifts or responding to calls.

The Calaveras County [sic; should read "Consolidated"] Fire Protection District, which covers roughly a 163-square-mile area in the western portion of Calaveras County serving the communities of Valley Springs, Burson, Wallace, Campo Seco, Milton, Rancho Calaveras, La Contenta and Jenny Lind, plans to increase its paid firefighter roster from a staff of 12 to 18 in fiscal year 2024-25.

Three of the districts also reported they will add paramedics. Ebbetts Pass Fire Protection District expects to hire three paramedics and Copperopolis Fire Protection District expects to hire one. Mokelumne Hill will add one part-time paramedic.

The voter-approved tax requires that at least 70 percent of the revenue be spent on staffing, with up to 30 percent going for equipment or facilities. The reporting agencies in the current fiscal year expect to spend \$2 million on staffing and \$417,078 on equipment and facilities.

West Point Fire Protection District, for example, budgeted \$64,260 in tax revenue to do remodeling or construction to provide firefighter sleeping accommodations. West Point firefighters currently sleep in the same room used for district board meetings, class sessions and meal breaks.