

New tax adds more firefighters

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Calaveras County's local fire protection agencies hired more full time firefighters last year and plan to do so again in the current fiscal year that began July 1. That increase was in part thanks to the Calaveras Local Fire Protection Tax, a 1 percent sales tax that county voters approved in March of 2024.

Agencies reported 101 paid full time local agency firefighters in Calaveras County in the 2024-25 fiscal year that ended June 30. That is up dramatically from the 48 paid full time firefighters reported in the 2023-24 fiscal year. Agencies reported that they will boost the number of paid full time firefighters to 114 this year. In addition, some agencies also deploy volunteer firefighters and part-time firefighters.

State officials began collecting the tax in the fall of 2024 and made the first regular payment to Calaveras County in December 2024. Calaveras County Auditor Kathy Gomes had estimated the tax would bring in \$2,550,000 during the seven monthly distributions during the 2024-25 fiscal year. In fact, the tax brought in more than \$4.3 million. Under conservative budgeting practices required in the measure voters approved, the agencies were only allowed to spend up to the \$2.55 million estimated amount and the additional revenue from FY 24-25 was rolled over to be budgeted and used by the fire agencies in either the current or future fiscal years.

Auditor Kathy Gomes estimated the fire agencies should budget for \$6.1 million on Calaveras Local Fire Protection Tax revenue in the 2025-26 fiscal year, including both new sales tax receipts and amounts rolled over from last year. Agencies reported that they expect to spend \$5.1 million of that on staffing. They expect to spend about \$545,000 on facilities and equipment. The agencies include nine fire protection districts and the Angels Camp Fire Department.

In related news, Murphys Fire Protection District in July celebrated the re-opening of its fire station in Vallecito, which means the district now has two stations staffed full time.