



Fire Watch

Los Angeles Fire Department Newsletter

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Los Angeles Fire Department
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Visit Our Website
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Our Mission

"To preserve life and property, promote public safety, foster economic growth through leadership, management and actions, as an all-risk fire and life safety response provider."

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Los Angeles Fire Department Bureau of Fire Prevention & Public Safety

Yesterday and Today... A Significant Contrast

Many may not know that, for over 118 years, the Fire Department has been responsible for fire prevention activities within the City of Los Angeles. On February 1, 1886, Ordinance No. 205 stated, "The Chief Engineer shall act as Fire Marshal and attend to all the duties thereof for such office." These duties were confined almost exclusively to ordinances dealing with "fire limits" and the storage of "inflammables", which were primary concerns of the day. In February 1888, the Board of Fire Commissioners requested that the City Council make an appropriation for the position of Assistant Chief Engineer. This new position would have the power to enforce codes and ordinances and would be known as the Fire Marshal.



CHIEF WALTER LIPS
CHIEF ENGINEER 1905

The Hydrant Unit was formed in 1891 when the Board of Fire Commissioners requested that the City Council place manholes at strategic locations over "zanjas" (ditches and pipelines) for the purpose of obtaining water for fire engines. In 1910, Chief Engineer Walter Lips, the Department's fifth Chief Engineer, requested that the Water Department replace 2-1/2 inch hydrants with double 4-inch hydrants whenever they were connected to 8-inch mains. In December 1933, Department records indicated that 20,028 fire hydrants existed within the City. Today, the total number of City-owned fire hydrants exceeds 57,840! Interestingly, the Hydrant Unit actually preceded the development of the Fire Prevention Bureau by 25 years.

Ongoing building development necessitated passage of new laws dealing with exits, "fireproof construction," and fire escapes. To assist the Chief Engineer, the position of Public Safety Inspector was instituted with duties commensurate with a Deputy Fire Marshal. The purpose of this new position was to inspect all downtown buildings. Further growth of the City caused sprinkler systems to become objects of considerable controversy with the Fire Commission. In 1906,



Chief Engineer Archie J. Eley was authorized to enforce an ordinance requiring sprinkler systems in any



CHIEF ARCHIE J. ELEY
CHIEF ENGINEER 1910

building constituting, in his opinion, a "fire menace."

On June 16, 1916, the City Council approved Ordinance No. 34,352 creating a Bureau of Fire Prevention and Public Safety. Chief Engineer Eley placed Captain Charles Hawley in command. Captain Hawley's staff included only a fire prevention engineer, a deputy fire prevention engineer and a few fire inspectors. However, six unpaid inspectors, selected from outside the Department, assisted them.

Sharply contrasting today's wide-ranging responsibilities for the Bureau, its early historical workload was without enforcement powers and was mostly limited to reducing fire problems in garages, elevators and commercial occupancies. To aid Inspectors' work, in 1916, Chief Eley created what was then referred to as Drafting and Maps

(later the Maps and Drafting Unit). The Bureau's lack of enforcement powers was corrected by Council action in 1917. That year, inspectors made fire prevention presentations in 283 City schools and to workers in motion picture studios, department stores and other business and commercial establishments. By April 16, 1918, the Bureau had grown to 25 inspectors. As fire prevention efforts and responsibilities increased, Chief Eley formed an Arson Bureau and made it part of fire prevention. Lieutenant Eugene H. Enos, a firefighter recovering from injuries, was appointed as the first arson investigator with Commission approval on January 18, 1918. Assisting him was a Police Department detective. During the arson bureau's first years, 125 fires classified as of unknown origin were investigated

and 29 of them were found to be incendiary. Arrests and convictions resulted from nearly every case.

What a difference only 86 years can make! The current mission statement of the Bureau of Fire



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Prevention and Public Safety is: "The Bureau of Fire Prevention and Public Safety, through the leadership of the Fire Marshal, a Deputy Chief, is assigned the responsibility of accomplishing several objectives. The primary objectives are as follows; the elimination of fire and life safety hazards in buildings, marine vessels, aircraft, and vehicles; the maintenance of fire protection equipment and systems; the regulation of storage, use, and handling of hazardous materials and hazardous substances; and enforcement of the basic building regulations of the State Fire Marshal as they apply to the City of Los Angeles in matters regarding fire, panic, and explosion safety. In addition, the Bureau is dedicated to enhancing environmental



MARVIN BRAUDE BUILDING
VALLEY SATELLITE OFFICE



protection and creating a more “business-friendly environment.”

Today, staff assigned to the Bureau of Fire Prevention and Public Safety totals 160 uniformed members and 53 civilians. To provide needed customer service, these members are assigned to five offices located strategically throughout the City. Considering the Bureau’s historical beginnings, it is obvious the responsibilities of the Department’s fire prevention personnel have dramatically changed.

In an effort to meet the demands of constituents, the role of the Bureau has continued to evolve. Changing roles for fire prevention personnel are driven not only by the resident of Los Angeles, but also by outside governmental agencies, new regulations and enacted legislation, and the ever-increasing advances in technology.

Increased demands for timely customer service have been met by consolidating counter operations at the Bureau’s Figueroa Plaza office. Providing inspectors who have been trained in the various construction

be served within fifteen minutes. Amazingly, this goal is met on a daily basis approximately 75% of the time!

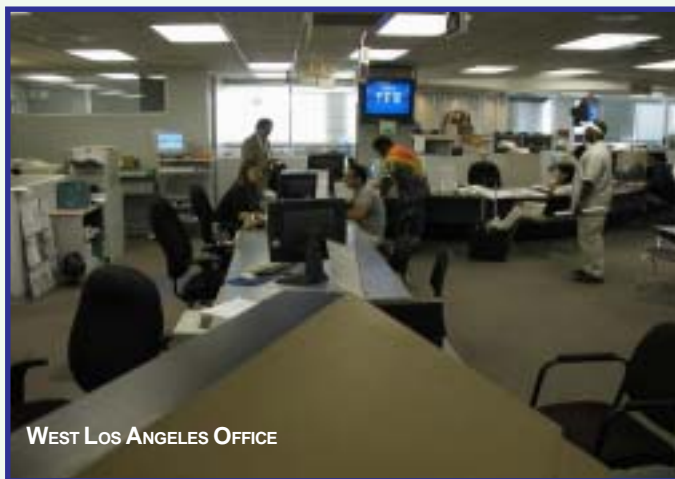
The Citywide construction service workload in the Bureau has also doubled during the past two years. An average of 600 plan checks per month are reviewed at the counters and 400 new construction “final inspections” are completed. Delays to a potential business in obtaining a final inspection can result in hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost business revenue per day.

Just two years ago, a service request for a “final inspection” by a fire inspector could take up to two weeks; this is done now within 48 hours. The Technical Section has received numerous accolades from members of the business community for their

time inspector and a fire protection engineer are tasked with assisting downtown building owners in converting old office buildings into new multi-unit, residential occupancies.



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WEST LOS ANGELES OFFICE

services disciplines facilitated this improvement. The Bureau’s goal for timely counter service in all offices is that waiting constituents should

outstanding responsiveness. “Adaptive Reuse” is a term the public may hear more about in the future. Currently, one full-

The Department’s 105 Inspector I and 28 Inspector II positions form the foundation of the Bureau’s daily operations. Today’s fire inspector has successfully negotiated a challenging promotional process and is also certified in fire prevention by the California State Fire Marshal. After promotion, Inspectors receive orientation training that includes information found in the Bureau’s Inspector Manual. The newly assigned Inspector then begins to gain the valuable education and experience which will be used regardless of Bureau assignment. One visit to the Bureau’s Research Library where hundreds of fire prevention books and resources are located truly demonstrates the amount of information our inspectors may be required to use.



During 2002/2003 inspectors made 22,400 inspections and corrected 20,032 hazards. In addition to their actual fire prevention responsibilities, intra-Department issues facing personnel assigned to the Bureau of Fire Prevention and Public Safety include: reducing the overall costs of IOD injuries; reducing the liability of, and further preventing, Department traffic accidents; and scheduling and attending on going training programs. The role of Department Fire Inspectors has also dramatically changed due to increasing environmental legislation. The Department's oversight of environmentally related programs began in 1983 with the adoption of a local Underground Tank Ordinance. The Hazardous Materials Disclosure Program was



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FIGUEROA PLAZA OFFICE
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implemented in 1985 to identify hazardous materials used, stored and processed by City businesses. Subsequent State legislation created the Unified Hazardous Waste and Hazardous Materials Management Regulatory Program (Unified Program). Senate Bill 1082 (1994) created a single environmental control program to be managed by a Certified Unified Program Agency (CUPA) at the city or county level. The Fire Department was certified by the State as the City's CUPA in 1997.

From a tiny pueblo, the City of Los Angeles has grown to America's second largest city. This growth could never have been realized without the vigilance and efforts of Department members, both past and present, ensuring that fire prevention and public safety activities are properly addressed. For more information on the Bureau of Fire Prevention and Public Safety, go to www.lafd.org/prevention/index.html.

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