

July 29th, 2010

Mason County Board of Commissioners
411 N. 5th St
Shelton, WA 98584

Dear Board of Commissioners,

The Mason County Fire District 2 Board of Fire Commissioners seeks your assistance in a matter that poses an immediate threat to public safety within our fire protection jurisdiction. On July 15, 2010, the Belfair Water District (BWD) took unilateral action by installing fire hydrant locking devices on a significant number of fire hydrants within the District. The BWD decision to place locks on fire hydrants demonstrates a flagrant disregard for public and firefighter safety.

The Fire District first became aware of the hydrant locks as BWD crews placed a locking device on a fire hydrant in front of the Fire District headquarters station. As locks were applied, there was no correspondence from BWD, either by phone, in person or letter. The BWD failed to advise the Fire District that hydrant locks were put in place. The Fire District is troubled to think what may have happened in the event of a fire had our fire crews been unaware until reaching an emergency scene that hydrant locks were in place.

When the Fire District became aware that locks were placed on the hydrants, the Fire District immediately contacted BWD manager Dave Tipton by phone. Manager Tipton refused to give the Fire District a key and advised us to cut locks in the event of a fire. We are deeply concerned with the heightened risk that these locks place on safety, both for our citizens and firefighters. Many of the surrounding Fire Districts, are mutual aid partners, may need to use the hydrants in the event of a fire in Belfair. They are unfamiliar with the locks and do not have the tools necessary to cut locks. In many of our emergency operating procedures it is our medical units that hook our fire engines up to the

fire hydrants. This allows our fire engine and its firefighters to immediately get to the task of making rescues and attacking a fire without delay. The Fire District has now had to revise our operating procedures to meet the less than optimal operational conditions that the BWD action has created.

The Fire District has experienced three fire fatalities in the last two years and three significant house fires in the last two months. Mason County has recently implemented a burn ban based on severe outdoor fire conditions. The fire threat and risk to public safety is at an elevated “high” in Mason County. The BWD’s locking of hydrants only adds to the difficulties and challenges that the Fire District faces in protecting our community. The recent high profile fatality fire in Seattle highlights the difference that just a few seconds or minutes can make to emergency responders in the event of a fire.

The Fire District seeks assistance from the Board of Commissioners in protecting the North Mason community and its firefighters. In accordance with state statute (RCW 19.27.110) the Fire District asks that the Board of Commissioners, through the office of the Fire Marshal, administer and enforce the state and county adopted 2009 International Fire Code. Specifically, we ask that the county enforce International Fire Code 508.5.4 which states the following:

- **Obstruction.** Posts, fences, vehicles, growth, trash, storage, and other materials or objects shall not be placed or kept near fire hydrants, fire department inlet connections or fire protection system control valves in a manner that would prevent such equipment or fire hydrants from being immediately discernable. *The fire department shall not be deterred or hindered from gaining immediate access to fire protection equipment or fire hydrants.*

The Fire District appreciates the Board’s commitment to community safety and with the Board’s assistance we hope that a safe and expedient resolution of the matter can be found. We look forward to hearing back from the Board of Commissioners on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Kelley McIntosh, Chairperson
Mason County Fire District 2
Board of Fire Commissioners

cc: Washington State Department of Health, Mason County Fire Marshall,

