

August 2nd, 2010

Board of Commissioners
Belfair Water District # 1

Dear 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) installed approximately 50 locking devices on 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, by phone, in person or by 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 and 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 hydrant locks have 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 at a fire scene. Any obstruction to using hydrants could cause a delay in saving lives and reducing property damage. 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 Commissioners of Mason County Fire District 2 are requesting a joint Board meeting with the Commissioners of Belfair Water District #1 to discuss mutually beneficial options in regard to the locking of fire hydrants. With continued communication and cooperation we feel that a resolution can be found that addresses the concerns of both Districts and also protects lives, homes, and businesses in our community. Due to the public and life safety implications we ask that a meeting be held without delay. Please contact me at 360-801-6481 to establish meeting arrangements or if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

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

Cc: Canfield & Associates, Mason County Board of Commissioners, WA State
Department of Health, Mason County Fire Marshal