

Madera County Public Safety Sales Tax Frequently Asked Questions



Financial

1. Why does Madera County need a public safety sales tax? As National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, State, and Federal laws have changed, Madera County has not had the funding to improve:

- Staffing
- Equipment
- Training

This has left the County behind in:

- Standards of coverage and response times
- Essential service structures
- Up-to-date equipment
- High homeowners insurance policies

2. I already pay enough taxes; can't Madera County make spending cuts to augment fire department needs and put more deputy sheriffs on the street. The existing budget does not allow for additional expenditures for public safety except for existing fire and Sheriff services, replacement fire engines, and other necessary equipment.

3. Twice, voters have passed a transportation sales tax in Madera County. Shouldn't that have relieved financial pressures on Madera County enough to allow adequate funding of public safety? Transportation improvement projects and costs far outweigh the funding available from federal, state and local Measure T funding. In addition, transportation funding cannot be applied for public safety purposes.

4. We were promised roads would be repaired when we passed Measure T. You promised to fix my road and haven't. Why should I believe the County will spend this money on what it says it's going to? If I vote for the tax, couldn't the County just cut the current fire and sheriff funding paid by the general fund and divert the money to some other wasteful purpose? In order to guarantee that all funds are spent as promised, the proposed tax plan will include strong fiscal accountability requirements including:

- Annual, independent financial audits
- Citizen's Oversight Committee
A committee will be formed to inform the public and to ensure that the Public Safety Sales Tax Measure's funding program revenues and expenditures are spent as promised to Madera County residents.
- Separate Public Safety Trust Fund

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5. I don't really trust the Board of Supervisors to do what they say they are going to do. Will there be any oversight of how this money is spent? **In order to guarantee that all funds are spent as promised, the proposed tax plan will include strong fiscal accountability requirements including:**
- Annual, independent financial audits
 - Citizen's Oversight Committee
A committee will be formed to inform the public and to ensure that the Public Safety Sales Tax Measure's funding program revenues and expenditures are spent as promised to Madera County residents.
 - Separate Public Safety Trust Fund
6. I see all the new development being built on Hwy. 41 near Rolling Hills and Madera Ranchos. Is the County simply asking us for a tax to pay for services needed in that area? **No, revenues received by the proposed Safety Sales Tax will benefit all unincorporated areas of Madera County.**
7. I pay about \$130 year to the State already for CAL FIRE. Why do I need to pay another fire tax? **The Fire Prevention Fee is an annual fee for fire prevention services that owners of habitable structures in the States' Responsibility Area (SRA) are required to pay. The SRA is the area where the State of California (CAL FIRE) is financially responsible for the prevention and suppression of wildfires. The SRA does not include lands within incorporated city boundaries or federally owned land. The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection may adjust the fee annually. Currently, the fee is \$152.33 per habitable structure located within the SRA. If the habitable structure is also within the boundaries of a local agency that provides fire protection services, the property owner will receive a \$35.00 reduction.**

Residents in the eastern parts of the County pay a State Responsibility Area fee ranging from \$117 to \$152 per year. These fees fund a variety of important fire prevention services with the SRA, including brush clearance and activities to improve forest health so the forest can better withstand a forest fire. Other activities funded include fire break construction, defensible space inspections, fire prevention engineering, emergency evacuation planning, fire prevention education, fire hazard severity mapping, fire related law enforcement, and implementation of the State Fire Plan.

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8. Is it true the County is just going to give all this money to CAL FIRE? It's just going to go to pay higher salaries and retirement for CAL FIRE. **No, approximately 80 percent of the monies will go to the Madera County Fire Department and 20 percent will go to the Madera County Sheriff's Office. Examples of planned expenditures Year 1:**

- Madera County Fire Department in Cooperation with CAL FIRE
 - ✓ Purchase one (1) fire engine (one-time purchase) for the new Bass Lake Fire Station
 - ✓ Staff the new Bass Lake Fire Station with two (2) person Firefighter coverage (equivalent to 5 full-time positions)
 - ✓ Hire 6 additional firefighter personnel (provides for two (2) person Firefighter coverage at 3 existing fire stations)
- Madera County Department Paid Call Firefighters (PCF)
 - ✓ PCF training
 - ✓ PCF medical call reimbursement
 - ✓ PCF gear
- Madera County Sheriff's Office
 - ✓ Hire 7 additional sheriff personnel (10% increase over current staffing)

Years 2 and 3 provide for new fire station personnel and engines in North Fork and in the North Madera (Chowchilla/Fairmead). Year 2 also provides for one additional Sheriff Deputy for a total of eight (8) deputies. In Year 3, an additional two firefighters are added to one more of the existing five (5) stations. In Year 6 one additional Sheriff Deputy is added for a total of nine (9) over the life of the Measure. Also in Year 6, an additional two firefighters are added to one more of the existing five (5) stations for a total of ten (10) new firefighters at the existing five (5) stations over the life of the Measure.

9. My neighbor is a volunteer/Paid-Call Firefighter (PCF). He says it won't help our volunteers at all because all the new tax money will just go to CAL FIRE? **Revenues from the Safety Sales Tax, as noted above, will be distributed through an approved Expenditure Plan and will benefit the Madera County Fire Department in cooperation with CAL FIRE, Madera County Fire Department PCFs, and the Madera County Sheriff's Office. Planned expenditures for PCFs include: training, medical call reimbursement, and gear.**

10. I live in the mountains. Why should I pay a fire tax that is only going to benefit the valley? *(or)*, I live in valley. Why should I pay a fire tax that is only going to benefit the mountain residents? **The sales tax will be collected in the unincorporated area of Madera County and revenues and expenditure plans will cover all of the unincorporated areas where the sales tax has been collected.**

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11. My fire insurance premiums have gone up 300% in the last two years. Will my fire insurance premiums go down if this tax passes? **With improvements to fire services (increased staffing, improved response times, updated equipment, and additional training) in the unincorporated areas of the County, that Insurance Service Office's (ISO) Public Protection Classification (PPC) ratings may improve allowing insurance companies to reassess rates with homeowners seeing a decrease in premiums.**
12. Why do the fire insurance companies keep raising my premiums? **Mountain Area homeowners have been experiencing increases in their homeowner's insurance premiums due to changes in reassessment of ratings provided by the ISO PPC rating. They say it is because of the ISO rating. What is ISO? ISO was formed in 1971 as an advisory and rating organization for the property/casualty insurance industry to provide statistical and actuarial services, to develop insurance programs, and to assist insurance companies in meeting state regulatory requirements. What do they have to do with my insurance costs? The ISO provides a PPC fire department rating for more than 45,000 fire districts nationwide. The ISO examines fire department call items, including how long it takes the department to reach area, what is the coverage area size, what is the water pressure, how many fire hydrants are located in the coverage area, and what types of fire training are available/have been complete. Can the fire department do something to get us a better ISO rating? Yes, by improving firefighting services.**
13. What affects the ISO rating?
- 10 percent of the ISO rating reflects the community's emergency communications capabilities, including 911 telephone systems, adequacy of telephone lines, operator supervision and staffing, and dispatching systems.
 - 50 percent of the rating reflects the quality of the fire department, including adequacy of equipment, sufficiency of staffing, levels of training, and the geographic distribution of fire companies.
 - 40 percent reflects the evaluation of the water supply including, the condition and maintenance of hydrants, existence of alternative water sources, and the amount of available water, both in terms of volume and pressure, compared with the amount needed to suppress fires.

The ISO evaluates this information and assigns an advisory number from 1 to 10. Class 1 generally represents exemplary fire protection, and Class 10 indicates that the community's fire suppression program does not meet ISO's minimum criteria. The detailed grading results are provided to the highest-ranking community official as well as to participating insurance carriers.

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Property owners in the Mountain Area of Madera County who are within 5 driving miles of an approved fire station and within 1,000-feet of an approved fire hydrant are generally assessed an ISO rating of 6, while those outside the five miles or more than 1,000-feet from a hydrant are assessed an ISO rating of 9 or 10.

14. How much more will I pay in sales taxes in a year? In the unincorporated areas of the County, the sales tax rate will increase from 8 percent to 9 percent
 - 6.5% State
 - 1.5% County (1.0% county and 0.5% special district tax used to fund transportation districts and local attractions)
 - 1.0% Public Safety
15. What items do I actually pay sales tax on? The Madera County Sales Tax is collected by merchants on all qualifying sales made within Madera County. What items are exempt from sales tax? Essential purchases such as medicine and groceries are exempted from the sales tax.
16. Why a sales tax rather than property or parcel tax? Funds from a sales tax measure will be a stable source of locally controlled funding. Property tax revenues are collected and used exclusively by local governments and controlled by the State. State laws control the allocation of property tax revenues with distribution varying by locality. Parcel taxes are an assessment based on the characteristics of a parcel with revenues restricted to the public programs, services, and projects approved when enacting a parcel tax. Parcel taxes are often thought to be regressive (requiring owners of smaller, or lower valued properties to pay the same amount as owners of larger or higher valued properties) or unfair because they single out property owners to bear the burden for financing services and programs that provide general benefits to community at large including nonresidents who pay little or no taxes.
17. The Board of Supervisors recently voted to double their pay. Why don't they just use that money instead to hire more firefighters buy new fire engines? The Madera County Board of Supervisors salaries are tied to those of Superior Court judges and had been set at 40 percent of the judges' compensation. Between 2007 and 2012, judges' sitting on the bench received no annual increase in pay, with the first increase in 2013. In 2013 and again in 2014, the Madera County Board of Supervisors voted to forego increases in their salaries "in light of the sacrifices made by Madera County employees during difficult fiscal times." The board accepted their first cost of living adjustment in over seven years in January 2015. The cost of living adjustment afforded to the board of supervisors is not enough to make a dent in the delinquent fire and sheriff protection services.

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18. Why can't the State just put more firefighters up here in the mountains? **Lack of available funding.**
19. Wait a minute, I thought we have volunteer firefighters. Now you call them Paid-Call Fire fighters. Why do they get paid if they are volunteers? **Volunteers, now referred to as "paid-call firefighters" are paid minimum wage. This in part is due to new laws (Assembly Bill 2118 and Senate Bill 1207) which require paid-call firefighters to receive the same level of training that a full-time firefighter receives. Most departments feel that it takes 80 to 120 hours of training per year to meet safety minimums, and this time is before a paid-call firefighter responds on a single emergency call.**
20. I live in Bass Lake. We pay more property tax than other homeowners, and get very little in return. If I vote for this tax, will Bass Lake get a paid staff fire engine? **Planned expenditures for Year 1 of the Safety Sales Tax include the purchase of one fire engine (a one-time purchase) and staffing (2 firefighters with 24/7 coverage the equivalent of 5 full-time firefighters) for the new Bass Lake station.**
21. Can't we just wait and see if the economy stays better, or let another casino in Madera pay for what we need in the County? **Fire and sheriff protection services have remained relatively unchanged since the 1920s. Staffing levels remain the same now, with a population of 152,000 as they were in the 1920s with a population of 17,000. The economy improvements will not generate the shortfall we have in providing adequate fire and sheriff protection services.**
22. If we pass this tax, will it be enough money to make a difference? Will it do everything we need to do to fix our fire department and get more deputy sheriffs on patrol? **Yes, the proposed, dedicated 20-year revenue stream is needed to maintain new staffing levels and enhanced services. Based on information provided by an independent financial analysis, a ½ cent tax would not provide adequate revenue to make significant enhancements.**

Fire Department

1. I called the Fire Department before. When the fire engine got there, why was there only one firefighter on the engine? Why don't our fire engines have three or four firefighters on them like in other areas? **A lack of funding, PCF's (volunteers), and closure of volunteer stations has led to fire engines staffed with a single firefighter.**
2. I live in YLP (or the Ranchos), and we have our own volunteer fire department. We seem to have plenty of volunteers. Why should I support this tax? **The revenues from the Safety Sales Tax will ensure that your volunteers:**

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- Have the financial means to provide your volunteers/PCFs with required training courses
 - Will be reimbursed for EMS first responder services
 - Will be reimbursed for required protective gear to complete their jobs
3. What is all this talk about volunteer fire stations that have closed, or might close? Sounds like this might be a scare tactic to get us to vote for a new tax. **The reality is that volunteer fire stations have seen a decrease in volunteers and in some areas volunteer stations are no longer staffed/open. The decrease is due in part to:**
- Economic pressures resulting in two-income families, reduces time available to serve as a paid-call firefighter
 - Rural communities, such as ours, increasingly have residents who work elsewhere and the younger generations are too busy to volunteer
 - Increase in training hours for paid-call firefighters
4. Which volunteer stations have closed? Which ones are at risk for closure?
- Bass Lake, Cedar Valley, Ahwahnee are at risk for closure
 - Coarsegold closed
5. Are PCFs going to get paid for training and medical calls if this tax passes? **Yes, as part of the planned expenditures, PCFs will receive training and be reimbursed for their medical calls.**
6. I live in the mountains, isn't CAL FIRE our fire department? **Yes, through a contract with Madera County, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) operates as the Madera County Fire Department with services to the Mountain Areas.**
7. I saw a firefighter driving a Madera County Fire engine. He was wearing a CAL FIRE uniform. Why is there a CAL FIRE firefighter on a County Fire engine? **The Madera County Fire Department exists through an agreement between Madera County and the CAL FIRE and operates six stations for County responses in addition to the state-funded CAL FIRE stations for SRAs. Under an "Amador Plan" contract, the County also funds the wintertime staffing of four-fire seasonal CAL FIRE stations.**
8. Why doesn't Madera County hire its own firefighters? Wouldn't that be a lot cheaper than paying the high salaries and benefits of state employees (CAL FIRE)? **Due to the beneficial agreement-for-service partnership with CAL FIRE, Madera County has a "blended" staffing plan that takes a cost-effective advantage of providing and paying for firefighters.**

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The State is the negotiating agent for CAL FIRE salaries and currently County units salaries are 30 percent below others of the same size in the state due to their 72-hour shifts. Most units have 53-hour shifts. If Madera County splits from CAL FIRE, they would have to come up with local dollars, hire personnel, and pay for things like negotiation and fire investigation. Currently, that is all paid for by the State.

It is estimated that State Battalion Chiefs and Division Chiefs spend up to 80 percent of their time handling County issues. Those are services that are currently provided at not cast to the County's General Fund.

9. What are the benefits of having CAL FIRE run our fire department? **Shared costs and improved coverage leading to more staffing and improved response times.**
10. I see the fire department going on medical calls. Why don't we just let the ambulance handle that? **Current funding doesn't allow for a separate service. So firefighters and PCFs must also serve as Emergency Medical Services (EMS) first responders.**
11. Why do the firefighters drive a fire engine to a medical call? Can't they just go in a smaller vehicle? **With limited staffing, firefighters must respond in a vehicle that is able to respond to any unforeseen emergencies. While the call may turn out to be strictly a medical call, the responding engine must be prepared for the worst case scenario.**
12. Why do the PCFs need all this training they are getting? Why can't they just be taught how to fight house fire? **New laws related to training requirements were put in place due to rising firefighter injuries and death especially in the paid-call ranks.**
13. Why does the fire department need new fire stations? What's wrong with the ones they have? **Currently the County does not have enough fire stations to cover the geographic area or population especially in the unincorporated areas.**
14. Where will new fire stations go? **The County plans on opening new fire stations in Bass Lake, North Fork and North Madera (Chowchilla/Fairmead). The proposed Safety Sales Tax expenditure plan would provide a fire engine for each station (Year 1 – Fire Engine for Bass Lake (one-time purchase); Year 2 – Fire Engine for North Fork (one-time purchase); Year 3 – Fire Engine for North Madera (Chowchilla/Fairmead) and staffing for each station consisting of two (2) Firefighter coverage (equivalent of five (5) full-time positions).**
15. I see fire engines responding to calls. They look just fine to me, so why does the County need new ones? **New fire engines will be purchased for new fire stations planned at Bass Lake, North Fork and North Madera (Chowchilla/Fairmead).**