

## **Grant program helps district buy engine for wildland fires**

By Bob Brownne

Tracy Press, Friday, May 13, 2022

Tracy Rural County Fire Protection District took possession of a new fire engine on Wednesday, and while the \$393,000 engine, designed primarily for wildland fire response, wasn't in this year's budget, district directors expect the purchase will turn out to be one of their more prudent fiscal decisions.

District director Craig Miller explained that the purchase of the BME (Boise Mobile Equipment) Type III engine takes advantage of a program designed to promote clean-air vehicles for public agencies. A grant from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District translates to a discount of about 17% on a piece of equipment that the district would have needed to buy eventually anyway.

"In July they offered grants for emergency vehicles, so I saw it. I brought it to the rest of the board and I asked them for approval to explore it," Miller said, adding that the air district's program was designed to encourage agencies like fire departments to replace older vehicles with new, cleaner diesel vehicles, and three of the fire district's engines were due for replacement.

"Part of the grant was, if you had older engines, 2008 and older, they are good to be put into the grant," he said. "They'd collect information on the old engine, we'd give them information on the new engine we like, and they calculate what the grand would be."

The fire district learned that two of its older Pierce Type I engines, a 2003 model and a 2000 model, were good for a \$207,481 grant from the air district. That grant will be applied to purchase of a new Pierce Type I engine, which costs about \$780,000. The district approved the purchase back in January. That engine is being built in Wisconsin and it will take about 2 years for it to be delivered.

Another Pierce 2008 model that the district will retire translates to another grant for \$67,147, which the district used to purchase the Type III engine that Golden State Fire Apparatus out of Sacramento delivered to the South San Joaquin County Fire Authority headquarters on Central Avenue on Wednesday.

Miller said that once the grant money became available earlier this year the purchase of the new Type III engine quickly became a top priority.

"The money was not enough to buy it, but it was too much to pass up," he said.

Tracy Rural County Fire Protection District serves most of southwestern San Joaquin County with three stations, including Station 93 on Durham Ferry Road in the New Jerusalem community, Station 94 at Schulte and Hansen Roads, and Station 95 in Tracy Hills. Soon to come is Station 98, which will be on Valpico Road just north of the Ellis development.

Those are the crews that respond to fires in the hills where San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties meet, as well as the hills west of town up to the Altamont Pass.

The new Type III engine will be based at the New Jerusalem station, so that all three of the district's stations will have at least a Type I and Type III engine, with other vehicles, including another truck and a water tender, also available.

The rural stations and four fire stations owned by the city of Tracy and within Tracy city limits are staffed by firefighters from the South San Joaquin County Fire Authority, which started as a joint powers agency of the city and rural district and is now a stand-alone agency serving both entities.

Fire district director Jeff Ramsey added that the Type III engine will end up saving the district money in maintenance, repairs and wear-and-tear in the long run.

"This kind of machine is a lot less expensive than a regular fire engine, and it's built to go off-road," Ramsey said, adding that previously the district would send Type I engines, designed to run primarily on improved roads, to grass fires, wildland fires and river bottom fires, resulting in stress on the engine that it wasn't designed to bear. The Type III is smaller and more compact, and BME designs them to operate in remote areas.

“This is the same spec that the state uses for Cal Fire. It’s stronger and it’s also four-wheel drive,” Ramsey said. “We do offer mutual aid to other departments in the area, or the state. I would imagine that this is going to be pretty busy this summer.”

Ramsey added that the older engines lose their value as the state’s emissions standards get stricter.

“They would have had to have been sold out of state. That’s a huge expense to us. We would not have gotten \$60,000 for them. We could have salvaged them, which is eventually what’s going to happen to them,” he said. “This was a really good way to put those old engines back into new equipment.”