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## **San Diego Fire-Rescue Statement**

### **CHIEF FENNESSY'S RESPONSE REGARDING DISASTER ASSISTANCE**

San Diego – In short, Ed Harris' claim is false. It's absolutely inappropriate to politicize and personalize this disaster when Texans are suffering and this disaster isn't over yet.

The San Diego Fire-Rescue Department responds quickly and professionally to all emergencies.

The training and certification requirements to be a member of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Urban Search & Rescue California Task Force 8 (CA-TF8) are very strict. Our lifeguards do not meet the minimum qualifications. No one is allowed on the team if they do not have the appropriate minimum qualifications. These are not our rules, these are FEMA rules, and they are meant to ensure standardization of responses in emergencies.

The majority of the work performed by these teams is outside of the scope of lifeguard aquatic duties. The task force responds to all types of disasters. For example: CA-TF8 was deployed to New York City and Washington, DC after September 11, 2001 and Atlanta during the Olympic Games. The 210 members of CA-TF8 train year round and have done so for more than 20 years.

It is accurate that our lifeguards responded during Hurricane Katrina, but this was not because of a FEMA activation. It was through a state to state agreement called the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). The lifeguards were part of the ten member swift water rescue (SWR) team for this event. This team was led by a San Diego Fire-Rescue battalion chief and included four firefighters who provided paramedic services, logistics and communications support.

As it stands now, all eight Urban Search & Rescue teams in California are deployed to Texas and are required to take CalOES boats on deployment. This means our CalOES SWR team would not be called because they don't have the required equipment. Again, there are strict rules to follow with regard to the equipment used on these teams. They will not accept boats not provided by the state. In addition, California must maintain capacity in the event SWR teams are needed in our state.

There are 13 total swift water rescue teams in California. All teams are staffed by firefighters; even Los Angeles County's team which has a larger lifeguard division than ours.

On August 28, 2017, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services Fire and Rescue Division shared a statement from the International Association of Fire Chiefs regarding self-dispatching to emergency response and recovery locations. The statement reads in part, "In major disasters, such as Hurricane Harvey, the fire service needs

to be disciplined in its response, ready and available to the local community and, when requested, ready and available to respond to a major disaster, should a call for assistance be received from that jurisdiction.”

The statement also includes, “FEMA encourages those who wish to volunteer in response to Hurricane Harvey to [visit National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster \(NVOAD\) to find members taking volunteers.](#)”

SDFD is proud and honored to be members of the FEMA team and will continue to meet and maintain the high level of standards and training required so that we may continue to support cities in their time of need.

California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services PIO Brad Alexander can be reached at 916-502-5717. Here is a link to information about the teams <http://www.caloes.ca.gov/cal-oes-divisions/fire-rescue/special-operations/urban-search-rescue-task-forces>

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