

<https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/2017/sep/02/ticker-lifeguards-given-false-hope-help-houston/#>

Identified in **red font** are the factual inaccuracies in the article.

Eleven San Diego lifeguards, whose union rep Sgt. Ed Harris seemed to have embarrassed San Diego Fire and Rescue into allowing them to go to the flood zone after initially refusing to send them, were never deployed to Houston, Harris said on September 1st. **SD Fire-Rescue Dept. was not embarrassed; no request was ever received from the state. The state did communicate that they anticipated a request for all of California's OES SWR teams. Only two were ordered Long Beach & Ventura County Fire Departments.**

#"They [not sure who "they" are, but CalOES did say that airlift was possible if orders were received] said they were going to fly us out through March Air Force Base (actually CalOES indicated Los Alamitos as this would be a National Guard airlift) but the orders were never signed," [The orders were not received] Harris said. "Our guys were staged and ready all day Wednesday and all day Thursday, and then Thursday night they were told to stand down." [Not true. No one was ever "staged" and it was Wednesday not Thursday that CalOES contacted all the fire chiefs that oversee the CalOES swift water rescue teams and shared that they no longer anticipated receiving Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) requests for all California CalOES swift water rescue teams].

#On Saturday, August 26th, San Diego Fire and Rescue chief Brian Fennessy sent 35 rescue-trained firefighters and 10 drivers to Houston with a flotilla of boats and gear. The lifeguards had been ordered to give the firefighters their boats [These are State CalOES owned boats and motors assigned to the eight FEMA US&R Task Forces so that they can use when they are deployed to Texas type flood disasters] and gear [No lifeguard "gear" was given to US&R TF) because they weren't being deployed, which outraged them [Chief Fennessy had not heard before now that they were "outraged." He understands if they were "disappointed."]. When the lifeguards asked for permission to use their vacation time to go help on their own time, they were told that they would be disciplined for abandoning their San Diego jobs. [Proof exists that demonstrates that they did not ask for vacation time. In fact, Harris was on duty when he requested that he and another lifeguard be released from duty and that his and the other lifeguard's future shifts be covered so that they can voluntarily travel to Texas and assist. His request for abandoning his on-duty post was denied and he was told by his supervisors that if he wanted time off (vacation time), that all he had to do is request through the normal and labor/management agreed upon process. I did not see any threat of discipline being communicated, but had Harris and the other lifeguards abandoned their on-duty posts, I would expect that they be held accountable which would have likely included an investigation.]

#The Reader broke the story of the lifeguards being denied their request to go to Houston early Tuesday morning (August 29). By midday Tuesday, Fennessy was being called on to explain why rescuers whose specialty is water rescues, who routinely operate boats as part of the job, and who have special training in swift-water rescues [This team is not trained or experienced in structure forced entry, breach, rescue, etc. during flood conditions] were not being sent to the flooded Texas region.

#By Wednesday night [Not accurate; we received information from CalOES that the state anticipated a request for all CalOES swift water rescue teams on Tuesday, not Wednesday.],

the chief appeared to have either had either a change of heart **[No change of heart... fire chiefs cannot influence the request for orders]** or fresh orders, and he told the media the team was being sent. **[I never told the media that the SDFD swift water rescue team was being sent. I had no communication with the media. If I had, it would have been to say that the State anticipated receiving orders from Texas for all CalOES SWR teams]**. But, Harris says, they weren't.

#"It got the media off their backs," Harris said. "That's all they wanted." **[Not true. Media were not on our "backs." We were correcting the record.]** While the lifeguards said that they were being prevented **[They were not "prevented" because no orders for any of the CalOES swift water rescue teams were received]** from doing what they do best, the chief and mayor Kevin Faulconer blasted them **[Not true... criticism was never communicated and focused on lifeguards, it was specifically and publicly communicated that it was Ed Harris]** for what they described as politicizing decisions about how much help to send and who should go.

#Harris agrees that the conflict between the lifeguard wing **[Not the lifeguard rank and file; only Ed and the union board]** of fire and rescue and the policy decisions made by the chief goes deeper and longer than the current brawl over who goes to Houston. But, he said, the question in this situation comes down to two things: who has the training and gear **[SDFD firefighters assigned to FEMA US&R task force have the training and gear. 99% of all swift water rescue teams in US are made up of firefighters]**, and the lifeguards' desire to help people in the midst of the worst U.S. flooding disaster since Hurricane Sandy.

#Fennessy seemed more focused on command structure and the big picture. **[Chief Fennessy's focus was to adhere to the systems in place that provide for safe, effective and efficient resource deployment during disaster]** Command structure in fire departments — especially in mutual-aid situations — is critical in controlling and allocating resources, he explained in a written statement on September 1st **[Not true. Statement was written evening of Wednesday, August 30 and released via email at 8:30 p.m. on that same night]** "Late today **(meaning Wednesday; not Thursday)**, representatives from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) held a conference call with fire agency chief officers representing all of the CalOES designated and available swift water rescue teams, concerning an anticipated state-to-state Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) request to deploy to Texas. CalOES informed those on the conference call that they had not received, nor do they anticipate receiving an EMAC request from the State of Texas for more than two of the CalOES sponsored swiftwater rescue teams."

#San Diego's swift-water team wasn't asked, he said. Then he went on to say that the fire department has actively participated in mutual aid, and that the chief retains the authority to approve or disapprove mutual-aid requests from other agencies.

#"However, it is my sworn duty to NOT honor or approve any outside agency mutual aid request for resources if doing so would cause the department to unreasonably deplete its resources, facilities, and/or services which would then represent an unacceptable risk to the residents and visitors of the City of San Diego."

#Harris says that, for his team, it's not about orders — it's a cultural difference between lifeguards and firefighters. **[If "cultural differences" means a disregard for national, state and local public response policies, then I guess this is where the fire service differs from**

lifeguard agencies. That said, I didn't hear the LA County Fire Department lifeguards or other California lifeguard services assigned to fire departments complaining about not being requested to deploy) "If we waited until we had backup to rescue people, they would die," Harris said. "No matter how many people are there, once you start to swim, you're alone. We accept that as part of the job. Our first thought is saving people, not waiting for protocols and conditions."