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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: July 12, 2012
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Key Peninsula Fire cuts non-essential services to balance budget

The Key Peninsula Fire Department is receiving \$315,400 less revenue than three years ago. In order to maintain a balanced budget, fire department personnel and its new Board of Fire Commissioners have eliminated or reduced non-essential services.

“Our first priority is public safety,” said Fire Chief Tom Lique. “While these items are not considered essential, some of them do impact the quality of emergency service we can provide.”

The fire department cut two chief officer positions earlier this year. It also moved trainings for fire fighters in house, or on line to save money on travel costs. The new Board of Fire Commissioners cut their own training and travel budgets until further notice, as well.

“We can’t justify attending a training on, say, board leadership when we can’t afford to hire enough fire fighters to keep people safe,” said Sheila Hunt, Board Chair.

The Key Peninsula Fire Department will have a levy on the November ballot to fund eight full-time fire fighter positions to provide an adequate response to fires and reduce responses times for medical calls. Three fires in April and May highlighted the challenges facing the fire department. While no lives were lost, one fire fighter was hospitalized for heat exhaustion and dehydration.

In addition to cutting travel and training budgets, the fire department started a new purchase order system to keep expenses in check, and rebid service contract for office equipment and supplies. In addition, it has actively participated in restructuring fees for dispatch services.

Energy efficiency measures have been implemented at local fire stations to save on utility costs. Fuel and maintenance costs for emergency vehicles and equipment have been reduced, as well. The fire district even has reduced the number of newsletters it produces and how they are delivered.

“We want our community to know that we are good stewards of their tax dollars,” said Chief Lique. “Yes, we had to make some tough decisions, but we cut \$315,400 and balanced our budget.”

The Key Peninsula Fire Department serves 17,000 people over 65 square miles. The fire district believes in paying cash whenever possible instead of borrowing money and paying interest charges, and has passed all financial and accountability audits by the state. For more information about the department, visit www.keypeninsulafire.org.

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