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County to Charge Fee for Lots not Meeting Minimum Fire Standards

SAN JOSE, CALIF.— Today, Santa Clara County Supervisors voted to adopt a new fee to recover costs of inspecting parcels that do not meet the minimum fire standards during the annual weed abatement process. The anticipated fee will be \$298 for each parcel that fails the initial inspection. Property owners who meet the weed abatement standards at the time of initial parcel inspection will not be charged an inspection fee.

“The County’s Weed Abatement Program staff inspects parcels throughout the year to ensure their compliance with minimum fire safety standards,” said Supervisor Pete McHugh, Chair of the Board of Supervisors. “Without the new fee, the program will not have enough funding to continue to serve the public.”

The Weed Abatement Program is anticipating a deficit of approximately \$20,000 in 2009, and a deficit of \$100,000 in 2010, without the fee. The new fee will generate approximately \$208,000 in on-going revenue. Although the revenue of \$208,000 is more than the projected deficit in 2009, it is expected to decrease over time as the rate of compliance continues to increase – especially as parcel owners are charged for failing to comply with the initial inspection.

“It’s important for parcel owners to be aware of the need to maintain their properties to reduce the risk

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of fire," said Greg Van Wassenhove, Director of Agriculture and Environmental Management. "We hope that owners will eventually be able to perform the abatement work themselves before the work is performed by the County."

The new fee will be applied to the County's unincorporated areas and 11 contract cities participating in the County Program. These cities include Morgan Hill, Los Gatos, Los Altos Hills, Monte Sereno, Cupertino, Saratoga, Campbell, San Jose, Milpitas, Santa Clara and Palo Alto.

In December, the County Weed Abatement Program will send out a notice to parcel owners to make sure that they take efforts to maintain their properties. An annual notification package, which includes the new fee schedule, will be mailed to all parcel owners in the Weed Abatement Program. For more information, call the Santa Clara County Weed Abatement Program at (408) 282-3145.

Background

Each year, the Board of Supervisors declares weeds, brush or rubbish a public nuisance on certain described properties in the unincorporated areas as part of a fire prevention program, and authorizes the nuisance to be abated by the Weed Abatement Program.

Currently, if a property owner provides his/her own abatement prior to the deadline, then he/she is not assessed a fee for inspection services. The property owner incurs costs only if he/she chooses not to maintain their property according to the minimum fire safety standards, and the County provides weed abatement services using its licensed contractor.

The County Department of Agriculture mails notices to each property owner that fails to comply with the weed abatement standards. The property owners are advised that weeds must be removed, and that public hearings will be set for objections to the proposed abatement.

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