

# Vernon Quarterly

SUMMER 2013



# VERNON



# WEALTH

# Vernon Quarterly

SUMMER EDITION



3

3 VHEC: Vernon's Environmental Protectors



5

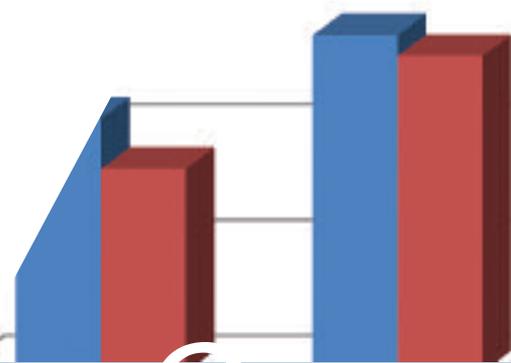
5 Michael A. Wilson—Vernon's New Fire Chief

7 Vernon Fire Department—At-A-Glance

9 Budget & Finance—Vernon Balances Its Books

10 Voter-Approved Tax Measures Preserve Key City Services

11 Good Neighbor—Salt Lake Park



7

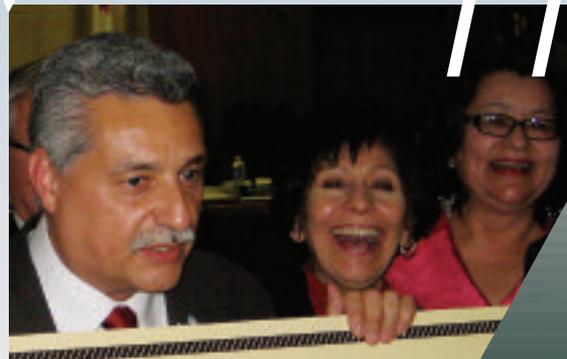


9

11

*Vernon Quarterly* is a newsletter for the residents, businesses and other community stakeholders in this city that "means business."

Produced by DDCC, Inc. • [ddcc.bz](http://ddcc.bz)



# VHEC: Vernon's Environmental Protectors

Vernon is one of only four cities in the State of California with its own health department. The Vernon Health & Environmental Control Department (VHEC) is focused on protecting the environment and ensuring the health and safety of its residents, workers, visitors and neighboring communities.

Guided by its Director Leonard Grossberg, VHEC provides comprehensive services to enforce health laws and environmental regulations at Vernon businesses, and meet the needs of the city's large industrial sector. Over the past three months, VHEC staff have been actively investigating and monitoring two significant environmental concerns in Vernon:

## FOUR STAR CHEMICAL

On June 14, 2013, citing an "imminent danger to health, public safety and the environment," VHEC officials ordered the immediate cleanup of flammable hazardous waste substances improperly stored at Four Star Chemical, a chemical blender, packager and aerosol manufacturer.

City health officials said hazardous waste at Four Star Chemical had been improperly stored in drums at the company's site, and leaking drums posed a substantial threat to public health, safety and the environment.

VHEC's administrative order required Four Star Chemical to safely remove and properly dispose of hazardous substances found stored in the drums.



The HazMat cleanup order followed a two-month VHEC investigation into allegations of criminal wrongdoing in the handling, safe management and disposal of hazardous substances at Four Star Chemical.

Due to VHEC stringent enforcement and hazardous substances cleanup order, including the prospect of assessing administrative fines of \$5,000 per day for failure to comply as ordered, Four Star Chemical is expected to achieve full compliance with the city's hazardous materials cleanup order by July 31, 2013.

## EXIDE TECHNOLOGIES

On April 24, 2013, in an unrelated environmental matter, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) temporarily halted operations at Exide Technologies' Vernon-based battery recycling plant due to a possible hazardous materials leak from a pipeline at the facility.

Exide Technologies filed corrective action plans with the DTSC to mitigate and resolve the toxic

substance issue. The pipeline matter remains under review. Exide challenged the DTSC shutdown order. VHEC and the Department of Community Services are monitoring state environmental enforcement developments at Exide.

On March 22, 2013, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) ordered Exide Technologies to cut arsenic air emissions generated by the plant. AQMD spokesman Sam Atwood said Exide's most recent assessment showed a higher cancer risk affecting a larger number of residents than any other of the more than 450 regulated facilities in Southern California over the 25-year history of a program to monitor toxic air contaminants. "There has been nothing close to this...never," Mr. Atwood said in a local news report.

On April 8, 2013, Vernon city officials formally requested that AQMD issue a health advisory for the Eastern and

*Continues on page 4*

# VHEC: Vernon's Environmental Protectors

*Continued from page 3*

Western Regions of the South Coast Air Basin.

In a letter to AQMD Executive Officer Dr. Barry Wallerstein, City Administrator Mark Whitworth wrote, "After we found out from newspaper stories—quoting AQMD officials—there was a potential problem of arsenic air emissions at Exide's plant that might affect upwards of 110,000 residents in Southeast L.A. County, we were alarmed. We believed nearby residents, that could potentially be affected, could become alarmed."

Mr. Whitworth said, "We felt an AQMD health advisory that explained the risks and detailed any preventative measures that residents should take to protect their health—particularly for seniors and young children—was a prudent and responsible step to take by our region's air quality regulatory authority.

Mr. Whitworth pledged Vernon would do everything within its municipal power to safeguard the lives of our residents, workers and residents of our neighboring communities. Despite Vernon's expressed concerns, AQMD did not act on the city's formal request for an air quality health advisory regarding Exide.

On May 30, 2013, VHEC Director Leonard Grossberg testified at an AQMD public hearing at City of Commerce City Hall on Exide Technologies' arsenic air emissions problem.

"Let me start by saying that the City of Vernon takes our health and environmental control authority seriously. We work to protect the health of 55,000 private sector employees who work in our city each

day, including among them residents of the cities of Bell, Bell Gardens, Cudahy, Maywood, Huntington Park and Commerce, as well as Vernon," Mr. Grossberg said.

"The City of Vernon Health & Environmental Control Department cooperates with both state regulatory entities—DTSC and AQMD—along with representatives from the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board to protect the health and safety of all residents and employees," he added.

"We continue to meet regularly with these entities to resolve ongoing issues and we are hopeful that a resolution can be reached with Exide, DTSC and AQMD that keeps

temporary restraining order against the DTSC and allowed Exide Technologies to resume plant operations. Exide Technologies employs 130 workers at its Vernon facility. Judge Lavin argued that a slow DTSC administrative hearing would irreparably harm Exide, and public interest would not suffer if Exide Technologies' plant in Vernon was brought back on line and its workers resumed their jobs.

On July 2, 2013, Judge Lavin issued a preliminary injunction barring the DTSC's Exide Technologies plant shutdown order, allowing the facility to remain fully operational, pending results from a state administrative law proceeding that is expected to conclude later this year.



workers employed, but more importantly, protects the community from exposure to harmful emissions. We share the public's concern regarding public health and safety," Mr. Grossberg said in concluding his public remarks.

On June 10, 2013, Exide Technologies filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. One of the circumstances cited in the company's court filing was the DTSC-ordered shutdown of its Vernon facility.

On June 17, 2013, Superior Court Judge Luis A. Lavin issued a

In a corporate statement, Exide Technologies said, "We are pleased with the judge's decision that allows us to remain open at our Vernon plant and continue full battery recycling production. Implementation of our planned storm water and air quality control improvements is under way. We have already completed installation of a temporary above-ground storm water piping system and are working with the South Coast Air Quality Management District to schedule appropriate testing to confirm our earlier efforts to significantly reduce air emissions."

# Michael A. Wilson: Vernon's New Fire Chief

**I**n May 2013, Vernon City Council members appointed Michael A. Wilson to serve as Chief of the Vernon Fire Department (VFD). Chief Wilson is a 25-year veteran of the Vernon Fire Department. He served VFD as a Battalion Chief for the past 17 years. He served as Assistant Chief from 2009 to 2011 and served as Incident Commander of the Alameda Corridor Transit Authority Drill in 2012.



Chief Wilson rose through the ranks of the VFD, starting his two-and-a-half decade fire service career in 1987 as a Vernon firefighter. He served VFD as Fire Captain, Battalion Chief and Training Chief. He was named Vernon's "Firefighter of the Year" in 1994.

Chief Wilson succeeds City Administrator Mark Whitworth, who previously held a dual executive role as Vernon City Administrator and Fire Chief.

*Vernon Quarterly* spoke with Chief Wilson about his new role as Chief of the Vernon Fire Department:

**VQ: You have a long tenure with the Vernon Fire Department. How has it changed over the years since you started as a firefighter?**

**MW:** Times have changed. When I started working for the Vernon Fire Department, captains were typing their reports on tri-colored carbon paper: white, yellow (Golden Rod) and pink. When you made a mistake, you needed three colors of 'white-out' to make the proper corrections.

Now we use computers and networks with specialized programs to prepare and complete our department reports. Technology has changed dramatically in the fire

service, not only in the clerical arena, but also in the operations portion of our job. Our work has really advanced in the pre-hospital treatment of patients, in our capability to identify unknown chemicals and with our use of graphic-detailed thermal imagers.

Fighting fires and responding to emergency medical calls was the foundation of our fire service. Now, we deal with more complex and sophisticated dangers and life-saving capabilities: hazardous materials (HazMat), urban search and rescue (USAR), and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The Vernon fire service has changed. Whenever new challenges arise, our area of responsibility increases. Our fire department has accepted those challenges.

We have adapted to those changes in every aspect of emergency response. We intend to continue to achieve our goal of protecting the men, women and children of Vernon and surrounding communities by providing excellent service whenever a call for service or mutual aid arrives in our dispatch center.

**VQ: What drew you to the Vernon Fire Service?**

**MW:** I was a senior at La Puente High

School and I did not have a clear career path. I had a high school career counselor who recommended that I think about the fire service. She arranged to have me a ride along with members of the Los Angeles County Fire Department at Station #43.

After that first-hand experience, I never looked back. After receiving an Associate in Science Degree in Fire Science at Mt. San Antonio College, I was hired as a volunteer firefighter for the City of La Habra Heights. Fire officials in La Habra Heights sponsored me through Santa Ana Fire Academy. I continued to volunteer at the La Habra Heights Fire Department and started work as an EMT for Aids Medical Enterprises (AME), a contract ambulance company.

AME contracted with the Vernon Fire Department to provide emergency medical services (EMS) to the city through its paramedic and emergency medical technicians (EMT). I worked as an EMT and responded to several EMS and structure fire incidents in Vernon while working for AME. I got to know the personnel in the Vernon Fire Department and enjoyed the camaraderie. I subsequently tested for the city fire service and was hired in August 1987.

**Continues on page 6**



# Michael A. Wilson: Vernon's New Fire Chief

*Continued from page 5*

**VQ: What lessons have you learned from your fire command experience that you feel are essential to managing a fire emergency or a disaster in an industrial city such as Vernon?**

**MW:** The main lesson I have learned is to quickly and aggressively attack an industrial fire, so it does not excel beyond your capabilities. This has to be accomplished in conjunction with understanding what type of company is occupying the building and what type of operations they undertake.

In an industrial city like Vernon, it is imperative to understand what type of fire we are fighting, so that a plan of attack can be formulated to precisely fit the specific fire at hand. In Vernon, there are many diversified businesses and a diverse array of manufactured products.

On any given day, we can find our crews fighting a chemical fire, plastics fire, metal fire, flammable liquid fire and even an animal byproduct fire. With these factors in mind, we must always be able to identify what type of fire we are encountering and determine the best method of extinguishing that fire.

**VQ: Vernon places a lot of significance—and pride—on the**

**Vernon Fire Department's Class 1 status. Why is the city's Class 1 emergency response capability important, and is that capability worth the money it costs?**

**MW:** The ISO Class 1 rating emphasizes the importance the city council places on their commitment to providing the absolute best service to the community, not only in the fire department, but also in our water department and 911-dispatch system. The ISO takes into account these three components to determine the Class rating.

The Class 1 rating lowers the business community's insurance premiums as determined by a study produced by the Vernon Chamber of Commerce. Should there be a reduction in the fire department class rating, the insurance premiums will raise significantly. For example, a Class 2 rating will cost the business community approximately \$8.4 million in premiums and approximately \$17 million for a Class 3 rating.

These figures do not include the business interruption insurance that most companies additionally pay or the contents of the building as that will vary with each business. I would say it is more than worth the money.

**VQ: What are your short- and long-term goals for your management of the Vernon Fire Department?**

**MW:** We have five immediate goals to reach in the short term:

1. Continue the rich tradition of providing Class 1 high-quality fire service to our community.
2. Identify potential new revenue streams and help our city maintain a balanced fiscal budget without compromising service.
3. Establish a departmental succession plan to account for the recent PARS retirements and adequately plan for the projected 40 percent reduction in fire personnel in the next five years due to regular PERS retirements.
4. Provide an updated fire service response model to account for the increase in private residential housing units that is planned in the city.
5. Utilize smart technology to improve service and efficiency.

Our department's goals in the long term are:

1. Establish a comprehensive plan to replace vital fire fighting apparatus and equipment.
2. Develop training programs for Vernon fire service personnel to support the state's certification process for various essential fire service functions, such as Hazardous Material and Urban Search and Rescue.
3. Develop educational programs to provide our business community with fundamental training in CPR, fire extinguishers, confined space and hazardous materials (HAZWOPER training).



# Vernon Fire Department— At-A-Glance

**T**he Vernon Fire Department is an ISO Rated Class 1 Fire Department serving a unique community comprised primarily of large-scale industrial and commercial companies, logistics businesses and food processors. Vernon is home to more than 126 miles of rail track, serving more than 1,800 business occupants at a population of more than 55,000 workers during the day. The Vernon Fire Department routinely responds to industrial-related accidents, commercial fires and traffic collisions.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Vernon Fire Department's purpose is to protect and preserve lives, property and the environment by providing dedicated and skillful emergency response services.

Through the dedicated provision of these services, our goal is to prevent and reduce the loss of life and property during fire, medical and environmental emergencies. We achieve our goal by providing the highest level of customer care, hazard reduction and fire protection services. The Vernon Fire Department routinely employs 67 sworn personnel and three civilian personnel.

*Continues on page 8*

# Vernon Fire Department – At-A-Glance

*Continued from page 7*

A Platoon Personnel	B Platoon Personnel	C Platoon Personnel
1 Battalion Chief	1 Battalion Chief	1 Battalion Chief
5 Captains	5 Captains	5 Captains
7 Engineers	7 Engineers	7 Engineers
4 Paramedic FF	4 Paramedic FF	4 Paramedic FF
5 Firefighters	5 Firefighters	5 Firefighters

## Administration

- 1 Fire Chief/Fire Marshal

## Civilian Employees

- 1 Fire Inspector
- 1 Secretary
- 1 Administrative Aide

## Apparatus

- 1 Command Vehicle (Battalion Chief)
- 4 Engines - NOTE: One Engine Company is a Paramedic Assessment Unit (PAU)
- 1 Truck
- 1 Squad (Paramedic Unit)
- 1 HazMat
- 1 USAR

## Reserve Apparatus

- 1 Command Vehicle (Battalion Chief)
- 4 Engines
- 1 Truck
- 1 Squad
- 1 HazMat Unit

## HazMat Personnel

All personnel are trained to the specialist level for Hazardous Material response. The State of California has typed the apparatus and personnel to the highest level (Type 1) and VFD Hazard Materials service is certified as a state resource.

## Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Personnel

97% of VFD personnel are trained to the highest level for USAR. The State of California has typed the apparatus and personnel to the highest level (Type 1) and VFD USAR is certified as a state resource. VFD USAR personnel and unit assets are part of the Area E Regional Task Force (CA RTF #2).

## Fire Service Headquarters and Training Facility 3375 Fruitland Ave. Station #1

State Certified Confined Space Site  
State Certified Rescue Systems 1



## Communication Center

Joint Powers Communication Center (located in the City of Downey)

## Fire Prevention Division

- 1 Fire Marshal
- 1 Fire Inspector
- 1 Public Educator/Civil Defense Coordinator

## Mutual Aid

Area E: Montebello Fire, Downey Fire, Santa Fe Springs Fire, Compton Fire, LA County Fire (Automatic Aid with Truck 164) and Los Angeles City Fire (Alameda Corridor)

# Budget & Finance— Vernon Balances Its Books



Vernon City Council members have approved a balanced general fund budget for 2013-2014, bringing a 16-month-long fiscal challenge that had threatened essential city services to a close.

With an added \$8 million in projected revenue from voter-approved tax measures, city officials were able to avoid having to make major cuts in public safety. Vernon police services have been budgeted at \$8.8 million in 2013-2014 compared to \$11 million in the previous year. Fire services were budgeted at \$14 million with modest year-over-year cuts compared to 2013. Health services have been budgeted at \$1.6 million. Public works has been budgeted at \$5.6 million for 2013-2014.

For more than a year and a half, Vernon's swift police response and Class 1 fire services had remained at risk due to a projected \$16 million budget deficit. Without new general fund revenue, substantial budget cuts to public safety appeared to be a near certainty. City officials appealed to city residents and business leaders to forestall painful cuts to virtually all city services.

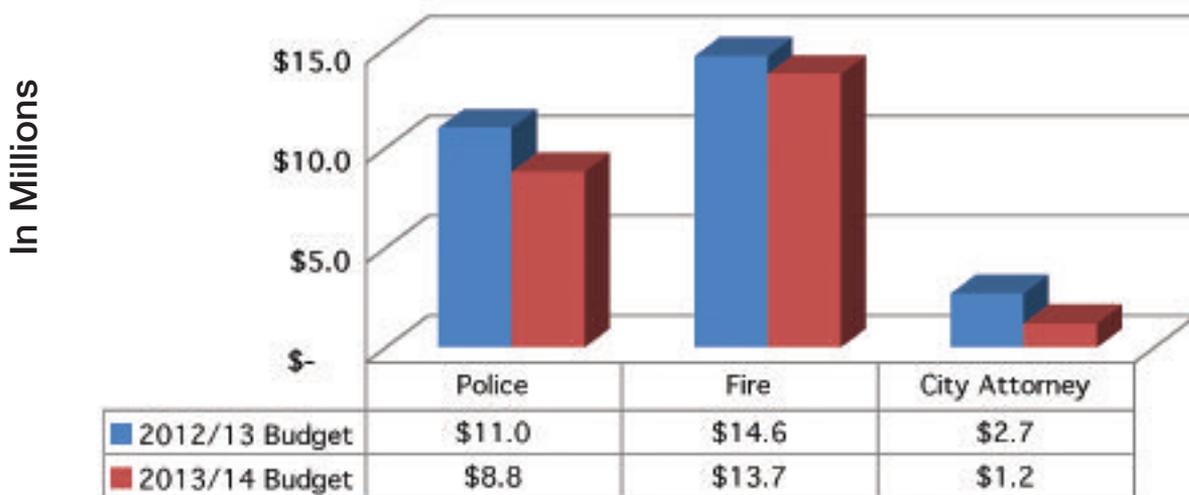
In February 2012, business leaders fought back against a proposal to impose a 23-cents-per-square-foot special parcel tax that would have been assessed on an estimated 900 Vernon property owners. In September 2012, Vernon's voters rejected a proposed utility users tax ballot measure.

City Administrator Mark Whitworth trimmed Vernon's expenditures. He

sold a portion of Vernon's excess water rights for an estimated \$6 million. He offered an early retirement program to long-term Vernon city employees that provided nearly \$2 million in savings.

When all was said and done, Vernon faced an \$8 million budget deficit for 2013. City officials appealed to residents and business leaders for their support of three smaller revenue-raising proposals—a business license tax increase, \$0.03-per-square-foot special parcel tax and a 1 percent utility user tax. In April 2013, Vernon's voters overwhelmingly approved the three revenue proposals in a ballot measure election to raise the estimated \$8 million needed to balance the city's budget.

## Public Safety



# Voter-Approved Tax Measures Preserve Key City Services

“We couldn’t have done it without them,” City Administrator Mark Whitworth proclaimed as he spoke of Vernon voters’ overwhelming support for three tax measures to raise an estimated \$8 million to fund police, fire and other essential city services.



Measure L is expected to generate an estimated \$1.9 million in revenue annually for 10 years through a special parcel tax rate of \$0.03 per square foot on non-residential parcels. The special parcel tax will be used to fund public safety services and municipal projects. The parcel tax will not be applied to the portion of a business’ square footage that is currently taxed under the city’s warehouse parcel tax.

Measure M is expected to generate an estimated \$1.6 million through a 1 percent tax assessed on customers’ use of electricity, natural gas, water and telecommunications services. The tax ends 10 years after its implementation date.

“I am extremely pleased our city’s voters recognized the pressing need to collect added taxes for our city’s general fund to support police and fire services, health and environmental control and other critically important city services. The voters sent a message that they want to maintain their city’s level of public safety and provide funds to maintain critical infrastructure throughout their city,” Mr. Whitworth said in April 2013 when Measures K, L and M were passed.

businesses engaged in multiple business activities in the city, and for contractors doing business at worksites throughout the city.

Measure K is expected to generate an estimated \$4.5 million in general fund revenues through increases to existing business license tax rates. Modifications will be made to the city’s method for calculating business license taxes to enhance clarity and streamline the administration of the tax for those





# Good Neighbor Salt Lake Park

In April 2013, Vernon officials presented a \$500,000 contribution from the city's "Vernon CommUNITY Fund" to Huntington Park city officials for their city's Salt Lake Park soccer field renovation project.

City officials noted that Salt Lake Park has been a site for outdoor activities for many Vernon residents. Vernon city officials received a standing ovation from Huntington Park City residents and youth sports leagues when they attended an April city council meeting at Huntington Park City Hall.



*Continues on page 12*



City of Vernon  
4305 South Santa Fe Ave  
Vernon, California 90058-1714

PRESORTED  
FIRST CLASS MAIL  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
LOS ANGELES CA  
PERMIT NO. 2492

# Good Neighbor Salt Lake Park

*Continued from page 11*

Vernon's \$500,000 contribution will be used to complete the planned \$750,000 major park renovation and artificial turf soccer field installation. The Salt Lake Park project is due to be completed in December 2013.

In addition to creating a new artificial turf soccer field at Salt Lake Park, contributions from the Vernon CommUNITY Fund resources will be used to advance a proposed renovation and refurbishment project at the Hazard Park Armory Youth Center in the Boyle Heights community in the City of Los Angeles.

