



Tuolumne County Fire Department

In Cooperation with **CAL FIRE**

Proudly serving the County of Tuolumne, Groveland, Jamestown, Columbia, and Columbia College

Nick Casci, County Fire Chief
Nathan Gorham, Assistant County Fire Chief

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Tuolumne County Fire Department FEMA SAFER Grant Success Report *March 2023 – March 2026 | \$9 Million Award*

In 2022, Tuolumne County Fire Department (TCFD) was awarded a nearly \$9 million, three-year Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant from FEMA. This funding has been a transformational force for fire and emergency services in the County. The grant enabled TCFD to add 19 full-time firefighting positions, directly increasing daily operational staffing and expanding the department's capacity to protect life, property, and the community at large.

Strengthening Response Capabilities

Before the SAFER grant, TCFD operated with just three staffed engines and six total personnel per shift, severely limiting its ability to meet the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) response standards and the County's adopted 12-minute response goal. Today, thanks to SAFER funding:

- The department was able to staff **five engines daily**, with **an average of 12 to 14 personnel per shift**.
- Two new engine companies were brought online.
- Response times improved significantly.
- Firefighter fatigue during incidents and extended shifts had been greatly reduced.
- Public and firefighter safety have both improved measurably.

Since the Period of Performance started in March 2023, these additional resources have proven crucial during numerous significant emergencies across Tuolumne County.

Real-World Impact: Notable Incidents

- **March 7, 2023 – 6700 Sq. Ft. Residential Fire:** Just one day after SAFER-funded engines went into service, and just prior to the POP, a SAFER-funded engine arrived simultaneously with Engine 511, enabling a rescue in zero-visibility conditions that saved two trapped victims. Without this grant, Engine 511 would have been alone on scene for over four minutes.
- **March 11, 2023 – Mobile Home Fire During Tornado Weather:** Amid severe inclement weather, SAFER-funded crews navigated live power lines to rescue



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- two trapped residents and contain a mobile home fire, preventing further devastation.
- **May 11 & May 26, 2023 – Structure Fires in Sonora:** SAFER-funded engines were instrumental in suppressing a multi-family apartment fire and a single-story residential fire, allowing for aggressive interior attacks while maintaining countywide coverage.
 - **June 25, 2023 – Groveland Community Hall Fire:** A SAFER-funded engine arrived within two minutes of dispatch to partially save the historic Groveland Community Hall and preserve the Groveland Historical Society archives. Without this engine, response times would have exceeded 40 minutes.
 - **July 15, 2023 – Hess Avenue Residential Fire:** Facing temperatures exceeding 106°F, a SAFER-funded engine assisted with fire attack and victim search. The extra staffing allowed for proper crew rotation, preventing extreme heat injuries to personnel.
 - **September 10 & October 10, 2023 – Vehicle Rescues:** SAFER-funded engines provided critical crew depth for an auto extrication on Highway 49 and a technical rope rescue on a steep embankment in Jamestown.
 - **February 18, 2024 – Mount Brow Road Structure Fire:** Firefighters encountered heavy smoke from a residential structure. Aggressive firefighting efforts made possible by the additional staffing provided by the SAFER grant directly resulted in saving approximately 60% of the home and its contents.
 - **March 6, 2024 – Mono Way Mobile Home Fire:** TCFD responded to a single-wide mobile home fire. Firefighters called for a full structure response, utilizing an additional SAFER-funded engine to quickly extinguish the fire, protect adjacent threatened homes, and treat two patients at the scene.
 - **March 28, 2024 – Charlotte Court Structure Fire:** Dispatched to a structure fire, the first arriving SAFER-funded engine was on scene within minutes. Crews discovered light smoke and quickly contained the incident with no injuries reported.
 - **April 25, 2024 – Greeley Hill Automatic Aid Fire:** SAFER-funded Engine 631 responded to a residential fire in Mariposa County via a pre-established automatic aid agreement. Without this grant-funded asset, the next closest arriving engine would have been delayed by 40 minutes.
 - **April 26, 2024 – Woods Way Garage Fire:** TCFD responded to a detached garage fully involved and threatening an adjacent home. Engine 511 and SAFER Engine 561 arrived simultaneously, quickly establishing a water supply and



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- pulling an exposure line to save the main house while an aggressive interior attack was executed.
- **May 23, 2024 – Highway 120 Vehicle & Vegetation Fire:** SAFER Engine 631 responded to a vehicle that sheared a power pole and rolled down an embankment, sparking a grass fire. The SAFER crew safely navigated the downed lines, hiking down to rescue two patients and two dogs while assisting with containment.
 - **May 28, 2024 – Highway 108 Vehicle Extrication:** SAFER staffed Reserve Engine 901 and Engine 511 responded to a vehicle accident with a patient pinned inside. SAFER personnel utilized electric "Jaws of Life" tools to free the victim in under 10 minutes. Without this staffed engine, extrication would have been delayed by more than 10 minutes, severely impacting the "Golden Hour."
 - **May 29, 2024 – Highway 120 Head-On Collision:** SAFER Engine 631 responded to a severe head-on accident involving three immediate patients, with one pinned-in. The SAFER engine company acted as first-due rescuers, executing extrication maneuvers and coordinating multiple air ambulances.
 - **June 17, 2024 – Statewide Wildfire Deployment & County Coverage:** While TCFD deployed resources to the Post Fire (LA County) and Aero Fire (Copperopolis), off-duty SAFER-funded personnel came in to backfill and maintain seamless fire and emergency coverage across Tuolumne County.
 - **June 21, 2024 – Petticoat Junction Structure Fire:** A SAFER-funded engine responded to a working residential structure fire. Crews initiated an aggressive interior attack, successfully containing the fire to its room of origin within 10 minutes of arrival.
 - **July 9, 2024 – Mid-Summer Incident Surge:** Over a two-week period, TCFD answered 512 calls (including 44 fires and 325 medical aids) while supporting out-of-county fires in Butte, Mariposa, and Calaveras counties. The presence of two SAFER engine companies significantly reduced response times and enhanced safety.
 - **August 5, 2024 – Ward's Ferry Road Attic Fire:** TCFD responded to a fully involved attic fire. Backed by SAFER-funded personnel, crews executed a swift interior knockdown within 30 minutes, preventing extension into surrounding vegetation.
 - **August 8, 2024 – Canyon Vegetation Fire:** TCFD SAFER engine companies responded to an 85-acre wildfire threatening the Stanislaus National Forest and local communities. SAFER crews provided critical containment line construction and hot-spot mitigation over an extended operations cycle.



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- **August 11, 2024 – Multi-Agency Wildfire Assistance:** While crews battled local emergencies, the depth provided by the SAFER grant allowed TCFD to simultaneously deploy engines to major state incidents (Park, Crozier, Murray, and Summit fires) without compromising county coverage.
 - **October 2-7, 2024 – Peak Fire Support:** TCFD assisted the Stanislaus National Forest on the Peak Fire near Pinecrest with a battalion chief, engine, and water tenders. SAFER grant staffing allowed TCFD to fulfill this mutual aid request while keeping local stations covered.
 - **October 5, 2024 – Bodenhammer Avenue Life Saving Rescue:** Responding to a heavily involved residential fire with a victim trapped inside, SAFER-funded firefighters forced entry through a bedroom window, navigated thick smoke and high heat, and successfully removed an unresponsive resident.
 - **December 12, 2024 – Parrott's Ferry Road Mobile Home Fire:** TCFD units, including a SAFER engine company, arrived within 6 minutes to a three-home fire. SAFER crews immediately engaged in exposure protection and assisted in treating a resident rescued from the burning structure.
 - **December 14, 2024 – Rolfe Road Carport Fire:** A SAFER-staffed engine was first on scene to an attached carport and garage fire. The immediate presence of the SAFER crew ensured standard "2-in, 2-out" safety compliance was met instantly, allowing an immediate, aggressive interior attack that saved the main home.
 - **December 14, 2024 – Extreme Wind Event System Surge:** High winds (gusts up to 73 mph) triggered a countywide emergency with 108 dispatches in a single day. Two SAFER-funded engine companies remained on the street continuously, mitigating a massive chunk of the 33 TCFD-specific hazards, fires, and medical calls.
 - **January 23, 2025 – Columbia Plane Crash Rescue:** Following a small aircraft crash, a SAFER-funded engine arrived as part of the initial response. Firefighters deployed hydraulic extrication tools under hazardous conditions due to an active fuel leak to successfully rescue a trapped occupant.
 - **January 2025 – Southern California Mutual Aid Mobilization:** TCFD rapidly mobilized four engines and a water tender to Los Angeles County during historic and devastating fires. The staffing depth provided by the SAFER grant allowed the department to send this crucial aid while keeping all Tuolumne County fire stations fully covered.
 - **February 9, 2025 – Dual Structure Fires:** On a high-volume day featuring a large mini-storage facility fire and a separate residential structure fire occurring



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- simultaneously, SAFER engines ensured TCFD could maintain full attack and coverage, which would have been impossible under previous staffing levels.
- **June 26, 2025 – Upper Highway 108 Technical Rope Rescue:** Following a multi-patient vehicle accident east of Kennedy Meadows, a SAFER-funded engine company worked alongside local volunteer units to execute a low-angle rope rescue, safely retrieving four victims from a steep creek bank.
 - **September 2-9, 2025 – Lightning Siege & "6-5 Fire":** A dry thunderstorm system ignited 22 vegetation fires across the region, including the devastating 7,000+ acre 6-5 Fire. Both TCFD SAFER-funded engines and all 19 grant-funded personnel (many returning on recall) were deployed. Their presence undoubtedly saved dozens of homes and lives amid widespread destruction including the loss of 94 homes.
 - **September 6, 2025 – Pine Mountain Lake Airport Hangar Fire:** A SAFER-funded engine co-located with Groveland CSD to tackle a fully involved hangar fire threatening adjacent structures. The joint response allowed crews to aggressively attack the seat of the fire while protecting immediate exposures.
 - **December 21, 2025 – Longeway Road Defensive Fire Operations:** A SAFER-funded engine arrived first to find a two-story home 50% involved with heavy fire. When the structure suffered a second-story collapse, SAFER crews transitioned efficiently to defensive operations, protecting surrounding vehicles and exposures during a 6-hour operation.
 - **February 28, 2026 – Ivy Drive Attic Fire:** First-due SAFER Engine 561 responded to a residential structure fire and immediately reported smoke showing from the eaves. SAFER crews coordinated an aggressive interior attack with vertical ventilation to isolate and cool the attic fire, preserving the home and preventing injuries.

Expanding Community Outreach

Beyond emergency response, the additional staffing has greatly expanded TCFD's ability to participate in public outreach:

- **2022:** 17 outreach events (with only two staffed engines covering 2,274 square miles)
- **2023:** 36 outreach events (due to increased engine availability)
- **2024:** 69 total community events
- **2025:** 134 total community events



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These events have strengthened relationships with the public, enhanced fire prevention education, and significantly improved community satisfaction with TCFD services.

A History of Strategic Growth

Tuolumne County has long recognized the need for additional fire resources. Since 2010, the county has been working to expand staffing and in 2012, FEMA funding helped staff Station 76 in Jamestown. This most recent SAFER grant is a continuation of that progress, reinforcing the department's mission to meet evolving demands with a strong, professional workforce.

Conclusion

The FEMA SAFER Grant has been a game-changer for Tuolumne County Fire Department. It has not only enhanced emergency response, increased the number of firefighters at scene, reduced response times, and improved firefighter safety, but also elevated the department's role in the community. From major structure fires to rope rescues and plane crashes, these added resources have saved lives, protected property, and ensured that Tuolumne County's residents receive the level of service they deserve. **On behalf of the entire TCFD team and the community we serve—thank you for supporting this vital investment.**