

NEWS

From the County of San Bernardino
www.sbcounty.gov



SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

AT YOUR SERVICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 12, 2012

For more information, contact
David Wert, Public Information Officer
(909) 387-4717

dwert@sbcounty.gov



Residents will soon receive contested State tax bills

This month more than 62,000 San Bernardino County homeowners will receive a bill from the State of California demanding a \$150 Fire Protection "Fee". The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors aggressively opposed the State's imposition of this "fee", which in the County's opinion is not a fee but a legally questionable tax that will provide no additional benefit to those who pay it.

"This so-called fee is nothing but a gimmick to plug holes in the State's chronically deficit-ridden budget, and the residents who are being forced to pay it are receiving no additional benefits or services in return," said Supervisor Janice Rutherford.

The State created the tax last year and imposed it on "state responsibility areas", defined as areas where the State is primarily responsible for fire services. In San Bernardino County, these areas include virtually all of the county's mountain communities. A detailed map of the areas subject to the tax can be found at <http://firepreventionfee.org/srviewer.php>.

"This tax is arguably the most blatant and transparent theft from taxpayers I have ever witnessed," said Supervisor Neil Derry, one of the leading opponents of the tax. "Most of our residents subject to this tax will not benefit one iota because this money is actually going to fund the state budget deficit."

In opposing this tax, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors pointed out that property owners in these areas already pay an assessment for fire protection and prevention services, making the new State tax "double taxation" without any additional benefit. The situation will "create long-term fiscal uncertainty as well as the disruption of mutual aid between local, state and federal agencies" during times of emergency, the Board said.

-MORE-

"This is one of the most egregious examples of the majority party in Sacramento balancing its out-of-control state budget on the backs of our overtaxed residents," said San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors Vice Chairman Brad Mitzelfelt. "I support every effort to challenge and fight this clearly illegal tax, especially since it provides no additional benefit to the safety of those paying it."

The Board of Supervisors authorized County attorneys to explore the possibility of legal action against the state to protect residents against the tax.

Prior to receiving the bill from the State, those who will be charged should also receive a pre-billing notice and an informational brochure from the state. A draft can be viewed at http://www.boe.ca.gov/meetings/pdf/072412_P4_4_Fire_Prevention_Fee_Program.pdf. The brochure advises taxpayers that they will have 30 days to either pay the tax or protest the amount of the bill in writing. Questions are referred to a toll-free phone number, 888-310-6447, or www.firepreventionfee.org.

State Board of Equalization member George Runner has established a website with additional information about the tax and how taxpayers can appeal: <http://www.calfirefee.com/>.