



NEWS RELEASE

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FIREFIGHTERS GO ABOVE THE CALL OF DUTY WHEN DISASTER STRIKES SAVE Cards Offer Immediate Aid to Victims of Catastrophic Loss

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, CA. - A young family stands helplessly at the curb as firefighters battle a blaze that has engulfed their home. They're alive, but heartsick as they watch their life and memories go up in flames before their eyes.

As the first responders, it is firefighters who are called upon to provide comfort to such a family on the worst day of their lives. Now, a partnership which began this July called **Supplying Aid to Victims of Emergency (SAVE)** allows our firefighters to help those victims take the first step towards healing. Funded by the California Fire Foundation through private donations, SAVE lets incident commanders on scene of a disaster offer immediate financial assistance to victims who suffer a substantial property loss.

"When someone loses their home in a fire or disaster, they're sometimes only left with the clothes on their back—they don't know where to turn," says San Bernardino County Professional Firefighters Local 935 President Jim Grigoli. "As San Bernardino County firefighters, we're in a unique position to offer a little extra assistance to victims of fire or disaster in the communities we serve."

Under the innovative program, all County Fire battalion chiefs carry \$100 Mastercard SAVE gift cards on calls that threaten significant property damage. If the property loss is judged to be greater than 25 percent of total value, the chief is authorized to immediately issue a SAVE card to the individual or family affected by the disaster. At a time when victims may have lost credit cards, IDs and other essentials, the SAVE card allows them to purchase medicine, a hot meal, clothing or maybe a place to stay the night.

"Our job as firefighters requires that we have a personal investment in the outcome of every call—we want to be there to provide whatever support we can for disaster victims," says Fire Chief Mark Hartwig. "We can't restore all that they have lost, but a SAVE card can help victims feel less alone during that first 24 hours of the difficult process of recovery."

The SAVE program was developed in partnership with the California Fire Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit foundation dedicated to providing comfort and support to fallen firefighter families and the communities they protect. The California Fire Foundation continues to raise funds and seek additional sponsorships to bring SAVE cards to more communities and, eventually, increase the face value of the cards.

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The San Bernardino County Fire Protection District is a multi-hazard response agency, providing professional fire, rescue and EMS service, as well as fire prevention, investigation, public education and household hazardous waste disposal. Specialty programs within the agency include training, wildland fire suppression (hand crews, dozer operations, etc.), helicopter-rescue/firefighting/transport, Hazmat emergency response, technical rescue (USAR) and escalated threat (terrorism, etc.). The agency also features a Type 3 incident management team, comprising County Fire members who assemble to manage major incidents.

San Bernardino County Fire operates 67 fire stations, including 49 with full-time career firefighters. It is the largest fire district in the United States, covering an area of 19,278 square miles and a population over 1 million. County Fire serves rural communities, towns and larger cities, responding to 166,544 calls countywide in 2017.

SAVE is open to all Professional California fire departments. Participating departments must agree to a Memorandum of Understanding-signed by both a Fire Chief and Union President.

“Firefighters do what we do because of a desire to serve,” said Brian K. Rice, chair of the California Fire Foundation and a retired Sacramento Metro firefighter with more than three decades of service. “By offering SAVE cards to those who have lost so much, San Bernardino County Professional Firefighters Local 935 and San Bernardino County Fire are able to continue providing comfort and support after the fire is out.”

Courtesy photos can be located at www.sbcfire.org or on the department social media sites.

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