



# NEWS



## News Headlines 3/09-12/2018

- COUNTY FIRE BATTALION CHIEF MIKE SNOW RETIRING
- TWO SUSPECTED THC EXTRACTION LABS CAUSE TWO HOUSE FIRES IN TWO DAYS
- Fumes from stored pool chemicals at Chino home bring hazmat team
- SUSPECTED DRUG LAB STARTS HOUSE FIRE IN YUCCA VALLEY FRIDAY AFTERNOON
- Facing ballooning pensions, Victorville plans to hire 63 city employees
- 9-year-old boy airlifted after being struck by vehicle near Park View Elementary
- Boy, 9, struck by vehicle outside Park View Elementary in Victorville

## COUNTY FIRE BATTALION CHIEF MIKE SNOW RETIRING

Staff Writer, Z1077

Posted: March 12, 2018



After more than 36 years of serving as a firefighter, **County Fire** Battalion Chief Mike Snow is retiring, effective March 15. Snow began his firefighting career in 1986 in Hesperia, and rose to the rank of division chief. When Hesperia contracted with San Bernardino County for its firefighting services in 2004, Snow became a battalion chief for the county fire department. He spent most of the next 14 years serving the Morongo Basin. Snow has served as a paramedic, hazardous materials specialist, state fire officer, and chief fire officer. Snow and his wife Jennifer, who have five children, plan to move out of state following his retirement to be closer to family.

<http://z1077fm.com/local-news/todays-full-newscast/>

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## TWO SUSPECTED THC EXTRACTION LABS CAUSE TWO HOUSE FIRES IN TWO DAYS

Staff Writer, Z1077

Posted: March 12, 2018

Two suspected THC extraction labs caused two house fires in two days in the Morongo Basin. On Friday, a suspected illegal marijuana grow and drug lab are blamed for a house fire in Yucca Valley. Firefighters were called to the 54800 block of Navajo Trail at 2:32 p.m. **County Fire** Battalion Chief Donnie Vilorio said firefighters saw flames coming from windows on the north and west sides of the home when they arrived.

After the fire was extinguished, firefighters noted equipment for a drug lab inside the house. Investigators found a THC extraction lab and an indoor marijuana grow with about 80 plants. Neighbors told Z107.7 News that they heard several popping noises before the fire started and the smell of burning marijuana was noticeable in the air. A resident, Larry Evans, 35, was arrested for investigation of manufacturing a controlled substance. Larry Evans was booked into the Morongo Basin Jail with his bail set at \$500,000.

And Wednesday, a butane honey oil lab caused a fire in Morongo Valley. Firefighters were called to the 49800 block of Visnaga Avenue just after 9:30 p.m. where they found the back bedroom and contents on fire. Firefighters managed to contain the blaze and keep it from spreading to a nearby fence and adjacent residence. No arrests have been announced yet.

<http://z1077fm.com/local-news/todays-full-newscast/>

## **Fumes from stored pool chemicals at Chino home bring hazmat team**

**RICHARD K. DE ATLEY, The Press-Enterprise**

Posted: March 11, 2018, 9:22 a.m.

A hazardous materials unit went to a home in Chino early Sunday, March 11 after several large storage containers of pool chemicals in the garage began giving off what was described as large amount of smoke, the Chino Valley Fire District reported.

Residents of the home in the 12000 block of Roswell Avenue were evacuated after the 4:15 a.m. call, and neighbors were advised to shelter in place while the hazardous materials team got the fuming chemicals under control. No injuries to residents or firefighters were reported.

Because of the large amount of chemicals at the home, the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department Hazardous Materials Division and the City of Chino Building Division were each notified, according to a news release from the district.

<https://www.dailybulletin.com/2018/03/11/fumes-from-stored-pool-chemicals-at-chino-home-bring-hazmat-team/>

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## **SUSPECTED DRUG LAB STARTS HOUSE FIRE IN YUCCA VALLEY FRIDAY AFTERNOON**

**Staff Writer, Z1077**

Posted: March 10, 2018

This story was updated at 6 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. Saturday with more information about the fire and the arrest.

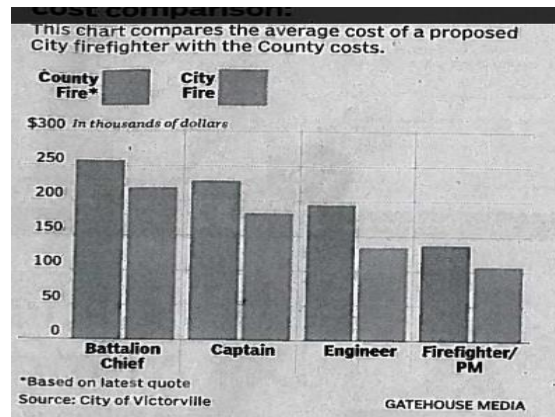
Two suspected THC extraction labs have caused two house fires in two days in the Morongo Basin. A suspected illegal marijuana grow and drug lab are believed to be responsible for a house fire in Yucca Valley Friday afternoon, and a 35-year-old resident was arrested. Firefighters from Yucca Valley, Yucca Mesa, Joshua Tree, Twentynine Palms and the Combat Center were called to the 54800 block of Navajo Trail at 2:32 p.m. Smoke was visible from miles away, and **County Fire** Battalion Chief Donnie Viloría said firefighters saw flames coming from windows on the north and west sides of the home when they arrived. All the occupants got out of the house safely. Yucca Valley firefighters began an aggressive attack on the exterior of the house while waiting for the back-up firefighters. According to Viloría, challenging building construction, concealed spaces, and multiple layers of roofing sheeting hampered efforts to ventilate the house. After the fire was extinguished, firefighters noted what appeared to be equipment for a drug lab inside the house. Investigators from the fire department and the Sheriff's arson and bomb detail were called in and deputies found a THC extraction lab and an indoor marijuana grow with about 80 plants. Neighbors told Z107.7 News that they heard several popping noises before the fire started and the smell of burning marijuana was noticeable in the air. A resident, Larry Evans, was arrested for investigation of manufacturing a controlled substance. Larry Evans was booked into the Morongo Basin Jail with his bail set at \$500,000. Just Wednesday another THC extraction lab caused a fire in a Morongo Valley home.

<http://z1077fm.com/local-news/todays-full-newscast/>

## Facing ballooning pensions, Victorville plans to hire 63 city employees

Shea Johnson, Daily Press

Posted: March 10, 2018 at 8:10 AM



A San Bernardino County Fire Department Captain lights a back fire while battling the narrows Fire in Victorville on March 30. Rising pension costs have been a major point of concern when considering annexing fire services. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

A top official assured this week that pensions weren't merely just a consideration in the decision to depart from a 10-year **San Bernardino County Fire** contract. It was a large impetus.

VICTORVILLE — Councilman Jim Kennedy, reviewing an auditor's report this week on the city's finances, offered a grim observation.

"The public has got to know that the pension obligation is threatening the existence of this city," he said. Mushrooming pensions, in fact, are hurting cities everywhere across the state. As reported by the Sacramento Bee last month, the League of California Cities said most of its members anticipate costs to balloon in seven years by at least 50 percent.

Entering into the current fiscal year, Victorville's net pension obligation grew by \$11 million over the prior fiscal year to \$50 million. Its pension liability was 75 percent funded.

"It's definitely not the lowest I've seen, but it's not high either and I don't want to speculate on what the right percentage is," said Jennifer Farr, a partner with Davis Farr LLP, which conducted the audit.

Farr noted that the liability is likely to continue to increase as CalPERS investments underperform projections and the discount rate drops from 7.5 to 7 percent. Separately, the retiree medical benefit liability is also rising.

City officials have bluntly positioned the pension issue as one to contend with for the foreseeable future. At the same time, they're moving forward with plans to add 63 new city employees to the payroll amid the reactivation of the city Fire Department.

The coupling of acknowledging a dire situation while simultaneously embarking on a massive hiring effort, has befuddled a minority of the Council who have questioned its rationale.

"I'm very uncomfortable when we talk about pension liability," Councilman Eric Negrete said, "and then making a switch" to a city Fire Department.

But a top official assured this week that pensions weren't merely just a consideration in the decision to depart from a 10-year San Bernardino County Fire contract. It was a large impetus.

“In a world where all cities in the state of California, all agencies that have pensions, are fighting this growing unfunded liability problem and can’t escape it,” Deputy City Manager George Harris II said, “we have a very unique opportunity to move forward with a zero — you know, hit the reset button for our Fire Department.” Harris pointed to two specific elements of the change-over that officials are viewing as positives: The city’s ability to start fresh with fire service pension liability and the fact that safety employee pension rates in CalPERS will be lower than those in the San Bernardino County Employees’ Retirement Association (SBCERA), the system used by County Fire and the Sheriff’s Department.

County Fire officials have said the agency’s unfunded liability was \$33 million. Yet despite concerns from city officials that the department would seek to levy that burden onto Victorville, County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig told the Daily Press he had been clear that such a provision would not be pursued in a contract. City officials still believe they will be essentially shielding taxpayers from the \$33 million liability by re-launching their own department, where the current liability is roughly only \$2.7 million, the leftover from before 2008 when Victorville last performed fire services in house.

The city’s thinking is they’ll have that \$2.7 million liability anyway, whether they re-up with County Fire or not, so it’s basically a moot point. Starting anew with city employees would enable them to move forward without owed benefits to those personnel on day one or, in other words, zero liability.

Additionally, Harris said CalPERS-provided estimates for both classic employees (those who would transition from an approved plan elsewhere) and PEPRA employees (those hired into any system after January 2013) were less than SBCERA rates.

Using inflated rates to account for CalPERS fluctuation, Harris said city pension rates were projected to be 23.2 percent for classic and 15.1 percent for PEPRA employees.

That is compared to 60.9 percent for classic and 53.91 percent for PEPRA employees in the county’s plan. Tracey Martinez, a County Fire spokeswoman, said those rates would continue to drop over the next four years, however, as bonds are paid off.

“SBCERA is also projecting the rates to decrease,” Martinez said via email. “As expected, we are budgeting for a rate reduction again this year. As mentioned (Thursday), that’s a big contrast to PERS rates.”

If the city has emphasized pensions as a key stimulant to shift to its own Fire Department, then County Fire will suggest that they also account for future volatility.

“I would tell you we believe that SBCERA is very solvent, very stable and well-funded,” Hartwig said, “and at the end of the day, the cost projection over the next 10 years, or 20, shows retirement obligations going into a different direction than PERS ... I mean significantly different.”

“People aren’t leaving us,” he continued, “because they believe PERS is a better pension future for them.” County Fire also doesn’t have retiree medical benefit liabilities to deal with. And an argument could be made that the county’s retirement plan — 3 percent of salary for every year of service at age 50 — could hamper city recruitment efforts because theirs is only 2 percent. But Harris said city officials don’t believe the retirement plans are really so different, revealing that it certainly hadn’t hurt the ability to attract applicants both locally and from out of state.

Harris warned the decision to shift from County Fire was not the end all to be all, yet merely a chance to survive what promises to be a temperamental wave affecting cities across the state.

The city must work out funding solutions to accommodate expected increases, lobby against certain provisions of CalPERS like fixed cost-of-living increases that aren't conducive to the economic climate, and cope with recent discount rate decreases that project to almost double yearly pension costs to \$9.2 million in five years.

“This action, in and of itself, doesn't completely take us out of the water and save us money overall and make our current financial situation solvent,” he said, “because pension costs are going to grow no matter what.”

But city officials do say it will ultimately enable them to have 12 more bodies in the field — 63 versus County Fire's 51 — for the same costs, although there has been serious debate over whether overall services would be better by operating in house, independent of the personnel uptick.

“We believe strongly we could demonstrate that you're actually increasing your level of service,” Hartwig said of County Fire's recent \$12.2 million contract offer.

Even as it appears improbable the city would revert from its current course, Hartwig summed: “We haven't given up. We're hopeful we would get back to the table.”

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20180310/facing-ballooning-pensions-victorville-plans-to-hire-63-city-employees>

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## **9-year-old boy airlifted after being struck by vehicle near Park View Elementary**

**Paola Baker , Daily Press**

Posted: March 9, 2018, 4:41 p.m.

VICTORVILLE — Authorities rushed a 9-year-old boy to a trauma center after he was struck by a vehicle Friday afternoon.

The incident occurred at the intersection of Coalinga and Cahuenga roads at 12:09 p.m. Friday, according to California Highway Patrol officials. The boy sustained lacerations to his head from the impact.

CHP officials said the crash occurred as 36-year-old woman in a 2009 Nissan Armada was headed east on Coalinga Road, approaching the intersection with Cahuenga Road. She stopped at the intersection and slowly continued east across the road.

According to officials, the boy then ran across Coalinga Road, directly into the left front side of the Nissan Armada.

“After this impact, the boy fell backwards onto the ground next to a silver Kia Forte being driven by a 23-year old female from Victorville,” officials said.

The boy was treated on scene before he was taken to Liberty Park, where a **San Bernardino County Fire** Department air ambulance took him to Loma Linda University Medical Center for treatment. No other injuries were reported.

CHP officials said alcohol and drugs are not suspected to be factors in the crash, which remains under investigation.

Anyone who may have witnessed the crash or has information is urged to contact the CHP's Victorville office at 760-241-1186.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20180309/9-year-old-boy-airlifted-after-being-struck-by-vehicle-near-park-view-elementary>

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## **Boy, 9, struck by vehicle outside Park View Elementary in Victorville**

Staff Writer, VVNG

Posted: March 9, 2018

**VICTORVILLE, Calif. (VVNG.com)** — A 9-year-old boy was flown to a trauma center after he was hit by a vehicle as he walked home from school Friday afternoon.

It happened on March 9, 2018, near Park View Elementary School in the 13000 block of Cahuenga Road in Victorville.

At about 12:10 pm, 911 communications center received reports that a child had been struck by a vehicle near the intersection of Coalinga Road. The vehicle involved, a 2009 Nissan Armada driven by a 36-year-old Victorville woman remained at the scene.

Victor Valley News Member Miesha Carillo Hartzig witnessed the incident and said she was picking up her own children when the boy was hit by a vehicle as he crossed the street but she wasn't sure if he darted across. After the impact, the boy fell backwards onto the ground next to a silver Kia Forte.

"He was laying next to the car face down saying he don't want to die," stated Miesha. The boy's older sister, also a student at the school, was by her brother's side and was hysterical.

According to the California Highway Patrol, the crash happened as the SUV traveled eastbound on Coalinga Road and once the driver of the Nissan completed her stop, she slowly continued east across Cahuenga Road when the nine-year-old male pedestrian ran across Coalinga Road, into the left front side of the Nissan Armada.

Miesha says the boy sustained a laceration to his head but was alert and talking as she grabbed a jacket to cover the child. "I told them to put pressure on the wound and to keep him calm until an ambulance came," stated Miesha.

Due to the child's injuries firefighters with San Bernardino County requested the boy be flown to Loma Linda University Medical Center. The designated landing zone for the helicopter was established on the field at Liberty Park.

"It's so sad how these people drive over there. I seen parents fly down the street trying to beat other cars. They do have guards at the cross walk but they can only do so much," stated Keisha Ronelle Montes whose daughter attends the school.

According to a California Highway Patrol, alcohol and drugs are not suspected to be a factor in the collision.

Anyone with information regarding this traffic collision is urged to call the Victorville CHP-Area office at (760) 241-1186.

<http://www.vvng.com/boy-8-struck-by-vehicle-outside-park-view-elementary-in-victorville/>