

An Emergency We Can't Ignore: North Lyon Fire Is Being Asked to Do More With Less

By Kerry R. Palmer

By any reasonable measure, the North Lyon County Fire Protection District is being pushed to the edge.

Call volume is rising. Staffing has been reduced. Funding is structurally constrained. And yet, the residents who rely on fire and emergency medical services every day are being told—implicitly—to trust that everything will be fine.

That is not a plan. That is hope masquerading as policy.

North Lyon Fire is primarily funded through property taxes. In theory, that should provide a stable revenue stream in a growing community like Fernley. In practice, Nevada's property-tax caps and abatements prevent fire-district revenue from keeping pace with population growth, inflation, and rising service demand.

For years, the district bridged that gap with temporary solutions: federal relief dollars, grants, mutual-aid billing, and other one-time funds. District leadership has been clear that these sources were never sustainable. When they expired, the outcome was predictable.

In February, North Lyon Fire reduced its minimum daily staffing to four firefighters and one battalion chief. This was not the result of mismanagement or a lack of foresight. It was the result of a funding system that does not align with operational reality.

When staffing decreases while call volume increases, response times inevitably come under pressure. District officials have acknowledged that delays may occur when multiple calls happen simultaneously or when resources are stretched thin.

What is missing is transparency. There are no current, publicly available response-time metrics for North Lyon Fire. Residents cannot compare today's performance to prior years or evaluate how the district measures against national standards. Without that information, assurances that service levels remain unaffected ring hollow.

Emergency services are not an abstract concept. Minutes matter. Lives depend on them.

The City of Fernley and the Lyon County Commission do not run the fire district, but their decisions and priorities directly affect it. County commissioners appoint members to the fire board, shaping governance and policy direction. At the same time, county budgets and federal relief funds have largely been directed toward courts, infrastructure, and facilities, while emergency response capacity remains financially fragile.

To be fair, not all local leaders have ignored the issue. Fernley City Councilmembers Felicity Zoberski and Joe Mendoza deserve credit for publicly acknowledging the strain on emergency

services and for working to elevate the conversation around public-safety funding and long-term sustainability. Their willingness to engage the problem is an important step.

But acknowledgement alone does not resolve a structural funding shortfall. Discussion must be followed by action.

Meanwhile, Fernley and North Lyon County continue to grow. New homes, businesses, and industrial sites are being added each year. Every new structure increases risk—fires, medical emergencies, traffic collisions, and industrial incidents.

Yet the agency responsible for protecting that growth is being forced to scale back.

This approach is neither sustainable nor responsible. It fails firefighters and paramedics who are asked to do more with fewer resources. And it fails residents who reasonably expect timely emergency response when they call for help.

This is not about assigning blame. It is about leadership—acknowledging reality and acting before tragedy forces the issue.

At a minimum, the public deserves transparent reporting of response times, honest discussion about funding limitations, and serious consideration of intergovernmental support or alternative funding mechanisms.

Emergency services are not optional. They are the foundation of a safe, functioning community.

If North Lyon Fire continues to be asked to do more with less, the math will eventually fail. When it does, the cost will not be measured in budgets, but in lives.