




MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Chief Joel Baker, Austin Fire Department Chief 

DATE: April 7, 2022

SUBJECT: **Resolution No. 20220303-026 – Staff Update: Process to Notify Appropriate City Departments of Austin Fire Department Firefighting Activities that may Adversely Impact Waterways**

On March 3, 2022, Council approved [Resolution No. 20220303-026](#) which directed the City Manager to create a process to notify appropriate city departments of Austin Fire Department (AFD) firefighting activities that may adversely impact waterways.

Austin Fire Department and Watershed Protection Department (WPD) met on February 17, 2022, to discuss which types of fire incidents have a higher potential of affecting sensitive waterways. The departments agreed to apply specific criteria for a working fire, defined as a fire which AFD actively attacks by pulling firefighting hose and applying water, as the preliminary filter to identify which incidents to notify WPD on. A review of historical data indicates a call volume of approximately 200 working fires per year. On March 22, 2022, AFD configured and implemented the automated system for the WPD Spill Response program to receive notification of working fires. The departments will monitor this system to ensure it is working correctly.

WPD recognizes there is limited data available to understand the frequency of firefighting discharges to waterways, the extent of their impacts, the specific cause(s) of impacts, and the ability for prevention and mitigation. WPD plans to conduct a study that will include field responses to all working fire notifications from AFD. Response efforts during the study period will collect data and document any impacts or threats to water quality or aquatic life, in accordance with a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP). The QAPP will be complete and data collection will begin in May 2022. The study will provide a better understanding of the relationship between firefighting discharges and watershed health, as well as practical measures WPD can implement to limit impacts. Results of the study will inform the optimal communications and response protocol. WPD will provide a follow-up memorandum to Mayor and Council with results of the study and a description of the final protocol in March 2023.

Should you have additional comments or questions, please contact Assistant Chief Andre de la Reza at 512-974-0147.

CC: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager
Jorge Morales, Watershed Protection Department Director