



**Cambria Fire Fighter's Local 4635**  
**2850 Burton Drive**  
**Cambria, CA 93428**

**Cambria Fire Protection Committee**  
Cambria, CA

July 8, 2025

Dear Fire Protection Committee Members,

We are writing to bring your attention to the current staffing challenges and their impact on the Cambria Fire Department's ability to effectively and safely respond to emergencies. We are fully aligned with the direction of our Fire Chief and Administration, and we remain committed to providing the best possible service to the community. However, the limitations imposed by our current staffing model of 3 personnel per engine severely hinder our operational capacity.

As you are aware, Cambria's geographic isolation and unique operational environment present ongoing challenges for our department. The delays in mutual aid responses—ranging up to 50 minutes for a full first alarm to arrive, place us at a significant disadvantage when compared to surrounding communities. This is further compounded by the fact that we lost our FEMA-funded SAFER Firefighter staffing and are currently operating with only 3 personnel per engine, below the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 recommendation of 4 personnel.

The staffing shortfall significantly impacts our ability to execute aggressive firefighting tactics, particularly during structure fires. The OSHA 2-in, 2-out rule requires that two firefighters enter a building only if two remain outside as a backup. With only three firefighters on duty, we are forced to delay interior attacks or adopt less aggressive, defensive tactics. This limits our ability to mitigate damage quickly and protect lives effectively.

Additionally, during both structure and wildland fires, we will be establishing incident command, managing evacuations, and suppressing the fire simultaneously. With such limited staffing, these critical tasks often experience delays, which can jeopardize the safety of the community and undermine the effectiveness of our response.

Studies by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) show that 4-person crews can perform firefighting tasks up to 25% faster and more efficiently than 3-person crews. This increased efficiency is vital not only for reducing property loss but also for enhancing firefighter safety. Without sufficient staffing, we are left with no choice but to adopt less effective, slower tactics, ultimately putting the safety of both the community and our personnel at greater risk.

Our limited staffing is also impacting a wide range of other critical services. The increased demands concerning fire prevention and inspections, including the recently enacted fire prevention ordinance on improved properties, have stretched our already overburdened resources. The number of community inquiries regarding defensible space and fire preparedness has surged, further taxing our team. Combined with the need for ongoing emergency response training and an increasing administrative workload, the demands on our department are unsustainable with current staffing levels.

Additionally, our capacity for water rescues is severely constrained. The fire department's absorption of the North Coast Ocean Rescue team means we are now reliant on limited personnel to operate our rigid-hull inflatable boats, in which we are the only agency on the north coast available to effectively respond. These boats require at least 4 trained personnel to deploy safely, and without sufficient staffing, we are unable to respond effectively to water emergencies.

Further, there has been a reduction of key leadership positions in the past 10-15 years, such as the Fire Marshal and Assistant Fire Chief. These unfilled positions left vacant and eventually eliminated from the budget have led to a lack of strategic oversight in critical areas, such as fire prevention and incident management, adding to the workload of our already overstretched staff.

Beyond emergency response, our department's limited staffing is also affecting essential administrative functions. The reduction of a front desk position, in addition to the Fire Marshall and Assistant Chief, adds to decreased office productivity, leading to longer response times to public inquiries and a decline in our ability to address community concerns efficiently. The increasing demand for fire department administrative support, combined with the growing volume of public interaction, is causing significant strain on our first response personnel.

The NFPA 1710 staffing and response time recommendations are designed to ensure that fire departments can respond effectively to a variety of emergencies. For Cambria, this means that:

1. **First Engine Arrival:** At least 4 firefighters should be on scene within 4 minutes of dispatch for effective fire suppression, which includes 2 firefighters for interior operations and 2 firefighters for backup outside. Given our current staffing of 3, we cannot meet this benchmark, particularly with the delays in mutual aid.
2. **Full Alarm Assignment:** For medium to low-risk structures, NFPA 1710 recommends that 15 firefighters be on scene within 8 minutes. With only 3 personnel, we are unable to meet this requirement even with assistance from CAL FIRE Station 10 and cannot effectively manage all aspects of fireground operations.
3. **Additional Staffing for High-Risk Structures:** High-risk structures, such as those in wildfire-prone areas, like our community, designated by CAL FIRE as being within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, require additional staffing. In Cambria, the increasing risk of wildfires and seismic activity necessitates additional personnel for safe and effective emergency response. Many homes in our area are built on hillsides or stilts, which makes them particularly dangerous for firefighting operations. These homes, often three stories high and built into steep terrain, pose significant challenges for access, suppression, and rescue operations. According to the Firescope ICS 501 guidelines, fires in descending hillside homes—those built on the downhill side of a roadway—are among the most hazardous to firefighters. The unique construction and access limitations of these structures require specialized strategies and tactics to ensure firefighter safety and effective incident management.

We are proud of the service we provide and will continue to push forward. However, the reality is that the combination of low staffing and limited compensation is making it more difficult to meet the growing demands of the community. Cambria continues to lose qualified firefighters due to a wage gap with surrounding agencies, limited incentive pay, and basic benefit shortfalls. While vacancies are a concern, the real loss comes from the experience, training, and local knowledge that leave with those firefighters.

It takes years to truly understand how to protect and serve this unique community, and replacing that level of experience is not something we can do quickly. Unfortunately, each hiring process draws fewer applicants, and in the past 6 years, we've seen 7 full-time firefighters and 15 reserve firefighters leave for neighboring agencies. These challenges are not isolated—they reflect a system that needs adjustment to retain strong, local, career-minded professionals.

Despite these challenges, our team is unwavering in our commitment to the people of Cambria. We will continue to do as much as we can with the resources available, but the reality is that without an increase in staffing and compensation, we are unable to fully meet the needs of the community. We are asking for the Fire Protection Committee's support in acknowledging the constraints of our current staffing model and advocating for the resources necessary to ensure that we can operate safely, efficiently, and effectively in the face of the growing demands placed on our department.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for your ongoing support. We value the relationship we have with the Fire Protection Committee.

Sincerely,  
Local 4635  
Cambria Fire Department