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(Neb.)-Commissioners Discuss Fire Reimbursements And Management Strategies

By: Chris Fankhauser Posted at: 11/07/2012 11:12 AM

(Chadron)-Dawes County Road Superintendent Larry Hankin appeared before the County Commissioners at their Wednesday morning meeting to discuss fire reimbursements and expenditures. Commissioner Stacy Swinney questioned the process of reimbursement for man hours of fire fighting.

Swinney's concern was that road crews were acquiring comp time for firefighting, which takes away from their attention to roads. He believes it should be a different job category as the work is much more difficult and dangerous. He also stated that federal money reimburses the county for those hours, and Swinney feels the county should not be making a profit from disasters such as these, especially considering the reimbursement is more than the employees make per hour.

County Clerk Cheryl Feist said that trying to keep track of the manhours for firefighting and paying at a different rate would be a nightmare and that maybe it should be addressed by budgeting. Swinney said that fires in our area are not over, and this issue needs to be addressed. Feist said it is too late to budget as the budgets are already set. She told Swinney she understands the issue of comp time, but changes must be made to personnel policies and budgets first and then go from there. She said personnel policies do not allow for overtime.

Swinney suggested changing those policies to allow for overtime during times of emergencies, such as fires, because county equipment is needed for the firefighting efforts, and operators are needed for the equipment. Deputy County Attorney Adam Edmund added that the personnel is not required to stay at the end of the day. He said that some of the employees go home, and others have no problem staying. According to Edmund, there are several volunteer firefighters in Sioux County who can run county equipment, and they are more than happy to do so when needed during fires.

Swinney also stated that the forest service will need to prepare as well by making fire lanes so that equipment can make its way through, but that is something the Board has no control over. No action was taken at the time, but it was agreed that the issue needs to be addressed.

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