



ORANGE COUNTY FIRE AUTHORITY

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Brian Fennessy Fire Chief

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www.ocfa.org

Dear OCFA Family:

It's one thing to hear phrases like "double shifted" and "48 hours in the dirt" in relation to a wildland firefight in 110-degree heat, but it's a whole other thing to live it.

To put your life on the line when you could be at home, putting your kids to bed.

To hike towards an inferno with a chainsaw on your back and the hope of a community on your shoulders.

To commemorate the anniversary of 9/11 on a flame-filled mountain, honoring the legacy of the 343 firefighters we lost that day by doing what they did 23 years prior: Run toward danger while helping others escape it.

In other words, to put your shoulder to (and lay down your life for) the mission upon which this agency was founded: In Service of Others.

That is what so many of you have done (and continue to do) on the Airport Fire, but none with more commitment and courage than our Santiago Handcrew.

As you all know, eight members of that crew were hospitalized after the tragic accident that occurred on Thursday night. And while four of them are now home healing with their families, the other four remain in the hospital with hopeful but arduous roads to recovery ahead.

In addition to visiting with these firefighters (and their families) in the hospital the past few days, I have had the honor of traveling, hiking, and sharing meals with them in recent months. Trust me when I tell you that they don't put their lives on the line to do this work because they are paid to or ordered to; they do it because service and selflessness are baked into their DNA.

With that in mind, it is our turn to reciprocate those tenets with the same passion and commitment that they were protecting all of us for weeks on end until the accident occurred. Our turn to be strong and selfless for them; to keep them in our hearts and lift them up with our care; to stand with their families and help shoulder their burden; to support their healing and rally around their recoveries on each new step and in every way possible.

All while respecting their privacy and utilizing the family liaison.

As I stated at the press conference the morning after the accident, the term "OCFA Family" is not an empty or hyperbolic tagline; it is who we are, as the ties that bind us as firefighters and professional staff transcend rank, battalion, section, and responsibility.

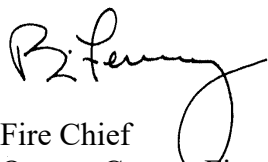
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RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLERS AND SMOKE ALARMS SAVE LIVES

Nothing compounds this truth more than tragedy, and my gratitude for all you have already done in fighting the Airport Fire is matched only by my pride in all we will continue to do to support our injured Handcrew members and their families during this difficult time.

That is what we mean when we say “OCFA Family,” and now more than ever, I am honored and grateful to be a part of it with all of you.

Brian Fennessy

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Fennessy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Fire Chief
Orange County Fire Authority