



## Fire Berm Information for Community Members

(Prepared by Members of 2024 Fire Berm Committee – October 25, 2024)

### What is the Sundance Estates Fire Protection System?

Sundance Estates has a fire protection system consisting of three separate units (the fire berms at Eagle Dancer Ct., Sundance Ct., and White Bear Ct.). Each unit has a storage capacity of 20,000 gallons (two 10,000 steel tanks) and is connected to a hydrant. The fire protection system was approved by the County at the time Sundance Estates was established over 20 years ago and (per our governing documents) must be maintained by the HOA. Because our development is not connected to a municipal water source, this water represents a critical resource in the event of a house fire or wildfire.

### What Happened to the Eagle Dancer Ct. Unit?

The unit at Eagle Dancer Ct. developed a leak in Fall 2022 and became nonfunctional shortly thereafter. Inspections revealed corrosion and root penetration in weak spots (e.g., around the end caps). In 2023, the Board of Directors established the Fire Berm Committee (FBC) to investigate remediation options. The FBC contacted multiple contractors and fire protection system companies, and consulted with Santa Fe County officials to identify possible remediation strategies. The main options that were identified were repair and replacement.

### What Are the Options for Repair vs. Replacement?

- Repair. Given the extent of damage and corrosion in the tanks, most of the 8 outfits contacted by the FBC felt that repair was not a viable option. Seven declined to provide an estimate for the job. One estimate was ultimately secured, but the estimated cost was nearly as high as replacing the tanks with new ones. Moreover, the repaired unit would most likely last only a few years, so this option is not cost-effective.
- Replacement. This option will represent a major undertaking. The existing tanks are steel cylinders approximately 8' in diameter and 20' in length, encased within the berm and covered with stone cladding. The unit is located within an easement whose boundaries must be observed. The project would include (among other steps) removing the stone cladding, excavating and disposing of the old tanks, installing new tanks and plumbing, testing the system, and restoring the site. Information on replacement options (e.g., alternative tank materials) and cost estimates from various contractors was compiled and presented to the Board.

### Who Would Do the Work?

Given the complexity of the project and regulatory/compliance aspects, the Fire Berm Committee suggested (and the Board agreed) that someone with expertise in designing and installing fire protection systems in Santa Fe County should carry out the work. In June the Board of Directors voted to accept a proposal submitted by Aranda Consulting, which will work in partnership with Accent Fire

to provide engineering and project management services. These services will include designing the new system, working with the County on approvals, developing and disseminating a Request for Proposals (RFP), managing the bidding process, and providing construction oversight.

## **What Will the Project Cost?**

A full replacement is estimated to cost somewhere between \$175,000 - \$250,000. A large share of the cost of the project will be for materials (primarily the tanks themselves) and the remainder for the actual installation, permits, etc. However, the actual cost will not be known until the new system has been approved by the County and formal bids are received from Contractors later this year.

## **Other Frequently Asked Questions**

The Fire Berm Committee and HOA members have had numerous meetings and conversations with officials from the Santa Fe County Fire Department and Santa Fe County Growth Management/Land Use Department. These meetings have generated information pertaining to the Eagle Dancer Ct remediation and fire response issues, including questions that community members have raised at various points. This information was reported at Board Meetings and the 2023 Annual Meeting; key points are summarized below.

**Why Do We Have a Fire Protection System?** The existing community fire protection system was approved by the County at the time the development was established. The overarching parameters of the system (e.g., number, volume, and locations of the tanks) were based on, among other considerations, the number and location of residences, and the location of the subdivision outside a municipal water district.

**Do We Have to Comply with County Regulations to Maintain the Fire Protection System?** Several HOA members have asked whether the County has jurisdiction over Sundance Estates. According to officials from the Santa Fe County Fire Department, because we are in the County and rely on local Fire Departments to respond to fires in our community, we have to comply with all relevant codes they have established for fire protection systems.

**What Happens If There Is a Fire in Sundance Estates?** SEHOA is in the Tesuque fire district (and on the border of the Pojoaque district). In the event of a fire, the Fire Department's focus is on containing/preventing spread to adjacent houses (individual homes are protected by their internal sprinkler systems). Responding units bring water in trucks. Engines typically contain 1,000 gallons and tanker trucks (tenders) can contain 2,000 – 3,000 gallons. If needed, additional water is obtained from nearby sources, including community water tanks. Outside of SEHOA, the nearest water tanks are located in Heartstone, Las Cordilleras, and Sundance Ridge. Las Campanas has a hydrant system, and there are municipal hydrants along Ridgetop Rd.

**Can We Lower Our Water Storage Capacity?** Given increased wildfire risk in New Mexico, the County has indicated we must maintain the originally approved water storage capacity. (In fact, one Santa Fe County Fire Department official encouraged the HOA to consider increasing its water storage capacity.) Furthermore, obtaining homeowners insurance is dependent on access/proximity to

hydrants that are part of the community's fire protection system. Finally, HOA members purchased their homes with an understanding of the fire protection capability in our development.