



Fire Berm Information for Community Members (Updated April 2025)

Prepared by Members of 2024 - 2025 Fire Berm Committee
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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 required 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. began losing water in fall 2021 and leaking accelerated over the next year. Inspections revealed corrosion and root penetration in weak spots (e.g., around the end caps). In 2023, the Board of Directors (BOD) 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 eight 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 tanks would most likely last only a few years, so this option is not cost-effective.
- **Replacement.** The Board ultimately opted to pursue a full replacement. The project will include (among other steps) removing the stone cladding; draining, excavating and disposing of the old tanks; installing new tanks and plumbing; testing the system; refilling the tanks using trucked-in water; and restoring the site.

Replacement Project: History and Status

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. Identifying someone to take on this role proved challenging. In 2023, one contractor provided a full proposal that included all aspects of the project, but in the absence of additional comparable bids, the Board decided a formal RFP process (based on County-approved drawings) was needed before a contract could be awarded. The FBC eventually found a fire systems engineer willing to work on the project.

In June 2024 the BOD voted to accept a proposal submitted by Aranda Consulting (in partnership with Accent Fire) to provide engineering and project management services. These services included 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. A contract with Aranda Consulting was formalized in July 2024.

The following milestones were met after the contract with Aranda Consulting was signed:

- The design for a new fire suppression system was approved by the Santa Fe County Fire Marshal's office on October 8 2024. The new system will have two 10,000 gallon tanks manufactured by Norwesco.
- A Request for Proposals was drafted by the Project Engineer with input from the FBC and BOD;;
- A list of 15 qualified companies/contractors was generated by Aranda Consulting, Accent Fire, and members of the HOA's Fire Berm Committee and Architectural Control Committee. Contractors were contacted individually by the Project Engineer to gauge their interest/availability and encourage them to submit bids.
- The Bid Package was sent on October 29 2024 to 10 contractors who expressed interest in the project. Two bids were received by the November 19 deadline, with additional information due December 10. A Review Committee consisting of the FBC and the Project Engineer reviewed the submitted proposals. At the Board organizational meeting on December 15 2024, the two proposals were discussed and one of the companies selected. Ultimately, however, that company did not pursue a contract with the HOA due to staffing shortages and other projects already lined up for the year.
- FBC members then reached out to companies that had expressed interest in the project but did not submit bids in response to the original RFP. One company (Cactus Rain) submitted a proposal that was accepted by the Board at its April 27 2025 meeting.
- A Notice of Award was issued to Cactus Rain on April 28 2025. As soon as a formal contract is signed, the replacement project will begin. The estimated time for completing the project is approximately 8 weeks from the time a contract is signed (5 weeks for tank manufacturing/delivery plus 2 weeks of active construction).

What Will the Project Cost?

The replacement system will cost at least \$215,000, based on the Cactus Rain proposal and bids obtained for other aspects that will be the responsibility of the HOA (e.g., stonework, survey, excavation permit). The total project amount cannot be determined in advance due to possible contingencies that may arise during the construction process and other unknown costs (e.g., site remediation). A large share of the cost of the project will be for materials (tanks, fittings, pipes) and the remainder for the excavation/removal of the old tanks, installation of the new tanks, and other construction costs. At the April 27 2025 meeting, the BOD voted on a funding plan to cover the costs of the replacement, with about half of the costs being covered by reserve funds and the remainder by a special assessment of the Members.

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 regular BOD Meetings and the 2023 and 2024 Annual Meetings; 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.

What type of tanks have we looked at? When the FBC started looking at replacement options, the SF County Fire Marshal's Office was only accepting fiberglass-reinforced plastic or steel tanks for use in community fire protection systems. More recently, the Fire Marshal's Office started accepting ribbed plastic tanks (like those used in cisterns). Tanks differ in their longevity, ease of installation, and price (e.g., fiberglass-reinforced plastic tanks have a long lifespan but are very expensive compared to plastic or steel tanks; steel tanks are subject to corrosion). The County-approved design specifies ribbed plastic tanks, which are lightweight and easy to place, lower in price than tanks made of other materials, and durable. Only underground systems were considered for esthetic reasons.