

# Oil tax aids L.B. police, fire

**SAFETY:** City has purchased 14 police motorcycles, fire truck with funds from Prop. H.

By Paul Eakins  
Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — Residents have received "tangible" results from voter approval last year of a 25-cents-per-barrel tax increase on oil production in the form of new police officers, firefighters, police motorcycles and fire-trucks, city officials said Monday.

Mayor Bob Foster, Police Chief Anthony Batts and Fire Chief David Ellis showed off the new public safety resources funded by the Proposition H tax increase during a media event at Fire Station No. 14, 5200 Eliot St.

The Police Department has purchased 14 new BMW motorcycles and is training 14 veteran officers to use them, Batts said. The officers will be replaced by incoming police academy graduates, he said.

In addition, the Fire Department has recommissioned a ladder truck that had been taken out of service because of budget problems, is awaiting the arrival of another brand new ladder truck and has hired 12 new firefighters, according to Ellis.

"It's important to let the public know they're getting something tangible" when they approve a tax, Foster said.

Seventy percent of voters approved the Prop. H tax increase last May. The measure raised the oil production fee from 15 cents to 40 cents on each of the estimated 15 million barrels extracted from the city every year.

The increase had been suggested by City Auditor Laura Doud, and city officials pledged to use the extra revenue to bolster the fire and police departments.

According to the mayor's office, the city collected more than \$1.7 million in additional oil tax revenue from May 22, when the tax increase went into effect, to Dec. 31.

This year, the Prop. H oil tax is expected to bring in \$3.6 million, officials said.

Batts said the number of motorcycle officers had decreased steadily since he became police chief in 2002 as he moved officers into patrol cars and regular beats.

The city had 35 motorcycle officers then, but the number had dropped to 11, he said. The new officers and BMW motorcycles will bring the number of units up to 25.

Batts said motorcycle units have had a positive effect on high-crime neighborhoods beyond catching speeders.

"Because they were stationed in that area (and) they were giving citations, the gang members were getting off the street," Batts said. "They had an unexpected impact."

As a result, the motorcycle officers also are getting special gang training through the Prop. H funds, Batts said.

While the overall number of filled police officer positions is expected to increase from just under 1,000 in 2007 to 1,020 this year, the Police Department has been battling budget problems. Batts has been tasked with streamlining the department to help cut the \$11 million to \$12 million in extra, unbudgeted police expenses that are anticipated largely because of officers' overtime.

However, Foster and Batts said they wouldn't consider using Prop.

H revenue to help shore up the police budget. They said voters had approved the oil tax to improve public safety.

Budget issues also had forced cuts in the Fire Department almost two decades ago, and the city is rectifying the situation with the Prop. H money, Ellis said. It's long overdue, he said.

"We lost a (ladder) truck due to budget cuts in the 1990s, and we're talking almost 20 years to replace it," Ellis said.

The older ladder truck and a new one that is expected to arrive by the end of the summer have 100-foot ladders designed for rescues.

"You can actually take people off the seventh floor of a high-rise building," Ellis said. "It's an impressive piece of equipment that will serve the city well."

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Stephen Carr/Staff Photographer  
Mayor Bob Foster, center, stands with Fire Chief Dave Ellis, left, and Police Chief Anthony Batts in front of 14 new motorcycles and a ladder truck. Proposition H funded the purchase of the motorcycles, and enabled the fire department to recommission the truck, which the city owns but hasn't used in years because of budget shortfalls.