

City of Berkeley

Department of Fire and Emergency Services
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Emergency: 911



Gary L. Cates
Chief of Department

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July 31, 1995

Dear Resident:

As Chief of the Berkeley Fire Department, I am deeply committed to the protection of life and property of all of the residents of our city, whatever the threat. I share your concerns about careless drivers speeding through neighborhoods, and the consequences of such behavior. However, I also have concerns about the recent proliferation of speed humps and their impact on public safety which I have been obligated to bring to the attention of the City's decision makers.

As a result of the City Council's consideration of a joint staff recommendation to thoroughly evaluate the impact of speed humps on public safety response, the City Council has decided to postpone the installation of all but a few additional speed humps for a period of about a year. During the year that the moratorium is in place, the City will be seriously evaluating alternatives for a strong speed control program. In addition to evaluating specific alternative engineering solutions, the City will also be exploring effective public education programs as well as better and more creative enforcement of existing regulations. Members of the community will be actively involved in all of these activities. The City is committed, as am I, to a strong speed control program, that will allow the effective movement of fire and emergency vehicles.

We know that many neighborhoods will be disappointed at not receiving speed humps which they had expected. Therefore I wanted to share with you directly some of the problems speed humps cause for public safety response so that you understand why the city has taken this serious step.

During an emergency it is important for the fire department to arrive quickly at the scene, whether the call is for a medical emergency or for a structure fire. Additional time for a response can have serious consequences, and can result in loss of life and additional structural damage. Fire equipment must slow down to a speed of about 5 mph to drive over speed humps and, due to the weight of the equipment, is not able to increase speed between the humps. This adds significantly to response times. In addition, fire equipment frequently



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responds to an incident from multiple locations at the same time. This coordinated response makes it difficult for the Department to restrict usage to only certain key routes. Key routes are often congested, particularly during peak hours. This further delays response times.

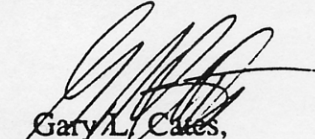
Paramedics also have difficulty with patient care due to speed humps. It is extremely difficult to begin certain necessary life saving activities, such as cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, administering drugs, installing an intravenous line or intubating a patient, while negotiating speed humps. In addition, patients may be further harmed by unexpected movement, and injured patients suffer additional pain.

Finally, fire equipment is quite heavy and costly. Driving over speed humps causes the frame of the equipment to flex, causing damage to the equipment and a shortened life. Damage has already been noted from existing speed humps.

One goal of the evaluation we will be doing is to closely define the criteria which will be used to install future speed humps so that they can be located where they will have a maximum benefit for speed control and have a minimal effect on Fire Department response.

I hope that this has answered some of the concerns expressed about the moratorium.

Sincerely,



Gary L. Cates,
Fire Chief