

# Fulton County poised to lay off firefighters

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Tuesday, September 09, 2008

Fulton County has notified 45 firefighters that their jobs are in peril.

With Johns Creek starting its Fire Department Oct. 7, the newly created city no longer will require protection from Fulton County. The loss of territory will mean a reduction in manpower, county officials say.

In a meeting with firefighters Monday, county leaders could not project how many firefighters might be laid off. They said those questions are hard to answer until the budget solidifies and they know how many people are going to retire or move to Johns Creek. Termination notices will be mailed next Tuesday. Cuts will be based on skills and seniority, said Fire Department spokesman Greg Chambers.

"They gave us very little information," said Wayne Hines, vice president of the Fulton County chapter of the firefighters union. "They gave us little to show they're going to do the right thing. I think this is a budget problem."

In 2006 when Sandy Springs started its department, the county told 81 firefighters that their jobs were on the block. After retirements and resignations, none were terminated, Chambers said.

If necessary, the department will try to transfer some of the firefighters to other government offices or help them find other firefighting jobs, Chambers said.

"It's a tough deal to have to deal with," he said.

Hines said staff logs show the county already is operating short-staffed, often fielding only three firefighters per truck, compared with the recommended four to five by national and international city manager and firefighter organizations.

County officials said the county has an adequate number of firefighters for the remaining area in south Fulton County to be covered.

"It's a goal, but there is the budget to deal with," Chambers said. "Our response times are still consistent."

The Johns Creek Fire Department, set to start with 78 firefighting personnel, will be the third municipal department created from unincorporated areas in the county since 2006.

The county Fire Department numbered 400 firefighters in 22 stations in 2006; it now has an estimated 165 firefighters in 13 stations, 125 of whom work in south Fulton.