

# Chief Stefano announces he will be stepping down from his position after a 30-year career in the Fire Service

After a distinguished 30-year fire service career, Chief Dan Stefano announced he would be leaving his position with the City of Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue Department at the end of December 2025.

Stefano's 18-year career with Laguna Beach Fire and 12 with Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue culminated in him being elected as the president of the California Fire Chiefs Association and also inducted into the inaugural class of the California Fire Chiefs Hall of Fame in 2023.

"It has been my absolute honor and a true career highlight to serve the Costa Mesa community, the City, and the Costa Mesa Fire Family, start to finish," Chief Stefano said. "Throughout these past 12 years, I have been blessed and will always remain grateful for the many opportunities I was afforded to work alongside such incredible and dedicated professionals, partners, and stakeholders, and to be part of an organization that embodies excellence, community, and compassion in public service."

Stefano began serving as the Fire Chief for the City of Costa Mesa in 2013, arriving from the Laguna Beach Fire Department where he held a wide range of positions and roles as he worked his way up the ranks from Reserve Firefighter through Fire Division Chief, Training and EMS Chief, and Fire Marshal.

"Chief Stefano is a true leader who is highly regarded not only as part of our leadership team, but both in Orange County and throughout the State for his experience, leadership and

courage,” City Manager Cecilia Gallardo-Daly said. “I’m both proud and honored with the Chief’s service to our community and his leadership in the city, and also his friendship. Congratulations to Chief Stefano on this incredible career.”

Mayor John Stephens also commended Chief Stefano for his service.

“I’m very grateful for Chief Stefano’s service to Costa Mesa these many years,” Mayor Stephens said. “He is deservedly in the California Fire Chief Hall of Fame. Under his leadership, the Fire and Rescue Department has become a destination department attracting the best and brightest firefighters and paramedics who save lives every day. Chief Stefano has led our community through tragedy and extreme public health and safety crises with skill and compassion. He is our rock, our Papa Bear. We will miss Chief Stefano terribly, but we wish him well in his retirement. Costa Mesa is a better, safer place because of Chief Dan Stefano.”

Capt. Steve Cathey, who is the president of the Costa Mesa Firefighters Local 1465, had this to say about Chief Stefano.

“It has been an honor to stand beside Chief Stefano, as the Costa Mesa Firefighters President, tackling the tough issues together,” Cathey said. “His unwavering dedication to his team reflects what it truly means to be a Fire Chief. His dedication and leadership have made a lasting impact on our organization. I wish Chief Stefano a fulfilling and wonderful retirement and enjoy all the adventures that await him. Thank you for your strong leadership and friendship.”

Chief Stefano is proud of the collective team efforts and accomplishments during his tenure with the City of Costa Mesa, which include the following team highlights:

- Infrastructure improvements such as keeping Fire Station No. 6 open and the rebuild of Fire Station No. 1 completed and soon to be rebuilt Station No. 2 that is preparing for

construction in 2026, a regional Fire & Rescue training facility currently under construction, a completed fleet replacement plan and a technology plan.

- Jointly established a joint Emergency Communications Center (ECC) and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) between CMFR & CMPD, in collaboration with the City Manager's Office
- Development and implementation of a new ambulance transportation program that now brings in over \$7 million in cost recovery revenue annually
- Initiated and negotiated the separate assignments of three Cal OES fire engines (Type 1, III, & VI), establishing Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue as a highly respected regional and statewide wildland and "all hazard" resource
- Departmental programs focused on firefighter health and safety – peer support, fire chaplain, and health and wellness programs.
- Established active leadership, succession planning and professional development as an organizational priorities.
- Enhanced the Community Risk Reduction, Community Outreach, and Volunteer Programs, including CERT, Fire Cadets, Citizen's Fire Academy, Fire Corps, and Fire Interns.

Stefano also played a major role in Costa Mesa during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading City teams, as well as the countywide and statewide efforts in providing information on public safety and best practices to combat the spread of the virus and increase vaccination efforts..

Beyond his professional experience, training and education, Chief Stefano holds the distinction of being the 32nd Certified Fire Chief in California history through the Governor's Office of the State Fire Marshal and holds the designation of Chief Fire Officer (CFO) through the Center for

Public Safety Excellence.

Chief Stefano is an engaged fire service leader including noteworthy service as a Past President for the California Fire Chiefs Association and separately, serving as an appointed member on the League of California Cities (Cal Cities) Board of Directors, representing the Cal Cities Fire Chiefs throughout California.

He also served as the President for the Cal Cities Fire Chiefs Department and the Orange County Fire Chiefs Association, respectively.

He has also served or currently serves on a number of regional, state and national organizations, including as a member of the Board of Directors for the California's Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HASC), the California Fire Service Task Force on Behavioral Health, the Statewide Training and Education Advisory Committee (STEAC), the Public Safety Policy Committee for Cal Cities, the Orange County Commission to End Homelessness, the Santa Ana College Foundation, the Orange Coast College Foundation, and he is a graduate of the Orange County Leadership Tomorrow Program.

Stefano is a graduate of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. He earned his bachelor's of arts degree from Cal State Long Beach and went on to get a master's degree in Public Policy and Administration from California State University, Long Beach and a second master's degree in the Executive Leadership program at the University of Southern California. He is also a graduate of Orange Coast College and Santa Ana College, the latter of which he was an adjunct instructor for over two decades.