

# Fresno County Sheriff's Office will get a new helicopter

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The Fresno County Sheriff's Office got a big gift Tuesday from Fresno County supervisors: a new helicopter.

The \$3.5 million McDonnell Douglas policing helicopter will replace either Eagle One or Eagle Two, the county's existing aerial surveillance and crime-fighting helicopters.

Supervisors approved the new helicopter purchase in a 5-0 vote.

It will be paid for with savings from last year's budget, federal asset forfeiture funds and state Proposition 172 monies, Sheriff Margaret Mims told supervisors.

A new helicopter was among the sheriff's top priorities because the two current helicopters are 24 years old. They were pre-owned when the county acquired them in 1997.

Eagle One has 16,000 flight hours and Eagle Two has about 14,000 flight hours, Mims said.

And, they have become indispensable, Mims said, operating in 74 search and rescues and 1,137 calls for service where arrests were made in the past five years.

\$425,000

Annual maintenance costs for each county helicopter

Capt. Robert Kandarian told supervisors that the annual cost to operate and maintain the older helicopters totals \$425,000 each. The new helicopter will cost \$17,000 to maintain in its initial years of service.

In addition to being less costly to operate, the new helicopter has greater horsepower and a greater payload capacity.

On rescues, she said, it is sometimes necessary to leave an officer behind following a rescue because of the lower weight capacity in the older helicopters.

The new helicopter will likely be flying over Fresno County late next year, Kandarian said.

- In other action, supervisors approved an agreement with Kings View Behavioral Health for peer and family support at the county's Blue Sky Wellness Center and Youth Empowerment Centers.

The Blue Sky Wellness Center will incorporate vocational training to provide mentally ill clients and their families an opportunity to learn skills to improve their employment potential. The center's services include job readiness, social and recreational opportunities, literacy and other educational services. The six-month program's cost of \$798,198 will be funded under the state Mental Health Services Act.

Youth Empowerment Centers serve those between the ages of 10 and 18 who don't qualify for Blue Sky Wellness Center because of age restrictions. The center's services include support groups, life-skills training and other peer support. The program will serve Fresno, Firebaugh, Orange Cove, Tollhouse and Raisin City.

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