



# MEMORANDUM

Milpitas Fire Department

**DATE:** August 25, 2021

**TO:** Mayor and Councilmembers

**THROUGH:** Steve McHarris, City Manager *Steve McHarris*

**FROM:** Brian Sherrard, Fire Chief *Brian Sherrard*

**SUBJECT: Analysis of Fires Potentially Caused by Unhoused**

This Information Memorandum is in response to a request that was made by Council during recess following the wildfire that occurred on McCarthy Blvd. on July 28, 2021. It is intended to provide a brief description on how fire cause/determination data is collected and an analysis of the total number of fires which have occurred in Milpitas from January 1, 2017 – June 30, 2021.

## **Background**

The Milpitas Fire Department is required to investigate and determine the cause of every fire that occurred within the City. The investigating officer analyzes the scene to determine the circumstances that caused the fire, location of the fire, what material was on fire, and the size/spread of the fire. In many cases it is not possible to determine the actual cause of a fire and it is listed as "undetermined". The information collected at the scene of the fire is entered into the Fire Department record management system. This system is designed to capture information that is required to be submitted to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). There is no requirement within NFIRS to document the housing status of an individual who may have been responsible for starting a fire.

The information that is included within this memorandum was collected by analyzing the narrative section of the fire reports. If the investigating officer noted that the fire was most likely started by an unhoused individual than this incident was included in the data. It is possible that there were more fires that may have been caused by an unhoused individual than have been included in this data. To ensure consistent data collection, all fire investigators have now been instructed to include information related to the unhoused in the narrative section of their fire reports. This will enable more accurate tracking of future fire incidents that involve unhoused individuals.

## **Data Analysis**

There has been a total of 722 fires in the City of Milpitas from January 1, 2017 – June 30, 2021. Of those fires, 59 fires, or about 8%, were potentially caused by unhoused individuals. The majority of these fires were located along highways, railways or open lots. The charts on the next page and the [link to a map](#) depict the types and locations of the fires. The first chart shows all of the fires which occurred each calendar year and then breaks the fires into the most common categories for the type of fire. The second chart depicts the location of where each of the 59 fires occurred. The below link provides access to an interactive map which depicts the date, location, and the type of property for all 59 fires for the last 3 ½ years. The data shows that fires related to unhoused individuals represent a small percentage of overall fires. The location of the fires corresponds to where unhoused encampments are typically found. The fires most commonly occur on public land or transit system right of ways.

