

Commission Chair says situation 'blown out of proportion'

Written by Lauren Ohnesorge
Sunday, 08 July 2007 20:00

Fire Commission Chair Daryl Smith says he knows why fire departments have taken issue with this year's contracts in Avery County.

He thinks it's about a particular paragraph about property ownership.

That paragraph indicates that if a fire department should fold, all equipment will go back to the county. This is a problem because equipment purchased with state and federal grant money comes with a contract ensuring that property will go back to the state or federal

He doesn't feel comfortable signing a contract with the county when he already has a contract with the state.

That's not the only concern, however. Budget cuts are Banner Elk Assistant Fire Chief Pete Romanoski's dilemma. A leak in a water tanker left his department with problem he had hoped the Commission would help solve.

He says he is disappointed in the Fire Commission's decision not to grant his request for repair funds- and is unsure how to cope without the tanker. A temporary plug has been installed- but

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it's just that- temporary. Romanoski and others want to know where the money is going.

Smith believes a few outspoken firefighters are making a big issue out of a small problem.

He says he hates it when issues are 'blown out of proportion' by certain Fire Association members.

While the Fire Commission plans to address the controversy at its monthly meeting Thursday, the dilemma will not be solved without a meeting with County Commissioners, according to Smith.

He says 6 departments have refused to sign contracts instead of the 7 previously reported. Those departments are Newland, Elk Park, Crossnore, Green Valley, Banner Elk and the Ladder Company. While a representative at the Fire Association meeting last week said the contract had not been signed, Seven Devils has signed and returned the contract according to Smith

All departments will continue to serve the fire districts of Avery County while the situation is

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being resolved.