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Expert: "Credibility" Issue Calculating Fire Response Times

Statistics expert tells panel that software problem makes response times a mystery

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"If we can't get the response times right, we're going to have issues, as far as credibility," said newly-appointed statistics expert Jeff Godown, speaking to the Los Angeles Fire Commission on Tuesday.

Godown said two software platforms used to crunch response numbers are flawed. While the problem doesn't mean earlier reports showing slow LAFD response times is wrong, it doesn't mean it's right, either.

Fire Chief Brian Cummings' prior statement

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Department critics had already blamed massive city budget cuts for the perceived slow response time.

Godown, appointed by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, said the problems go much deeper than a simple miscalculation. The discrepancies could be anywhere from a few seconds to several minutes.

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So, the real response times remain a mystery.

Critics, like the firefighters' union, contend that's no comfort at all to people who have lost loved ones. Statistics expert tells panel that software problem makes response times a mystery

By Gordon Tokumatsu and Bill French

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Gordon Tokumatsu, Scott Spiro

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Critics, like the firefighters' union, contend that's no comfort at all to people who have lost loved ones in fires and other situations that required an LAFD response.

Jack Mocaer was burned over 60 percent of his body in a fire earlier this year. Union officials have made the Mocaer case a rallying cry for better funding and staffing.

"The fire chief people came and told us they took way too long," said Mocaer's daughter, Monica.

The Union said it took nine minutes to reach the Mocaer house, in part because the closest fire station had lost an engine company to budget cuts.