



# Just the Facts!

## Fire Fees & The Boston Tea Party (February 16, 2010)

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Taxation without representation is what the Boston Tea party was all about when the American Colonists chose to demonstrate their displeasure over unfair taxes imposed by the British Government. Today, the same is happening to the Garfield County taxpayer (as well as to the taxpayers in every other Colorado county) when it comes to the expenses of fighting wild land fires. YOU are being charged an extra 23% on top of the total firefighting costs for processing paperwork by Colorado State University (CSU) with NO input from your county officials! In fact, this fee was established between CSU and the Federal Department of Health and Human Services without one Garfield County government representative present at the negotiation.

The current system in place for billing county Sheriffs for resources used on wild land fires is for a fire agency, which comes to the aid of a Sheriff to help fight the fire, to submit a bill to the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) for its time and expenses. The CSFS in turn, passes the bill on to CSU, its parent agency. CSU processes the bill and sends the Sheriff an invoice for the assisting agency's services along with a 23% "*administrative*" fee!" This fee is commonly known as an "Indirect Overhead Charge," which simply means that CSU charges more than the actual costs associated with processing this bill. The remaining funds are used to offset the school's budget. In fact, CSU is proud of the fact that in previous years it has generated in excess of \$30 million per year from indirect cost recovery (from all sources). Specifically, in 2009 – a relatively light year for fires – they would have received \$604,900 just from the 23% assessment on wild land fire invoices they processed.

Not only is this sum an excessive amount to charge the county, but equally important is the fact that this fee is being imposed on us **without any representation**; exactly the reason that caused the Colonists to act.

As a steward of your county tax dollars, I am also taking action. With the support of the County Sheriffs of Colorado and the State Fire Chiefs' Association, we are proposing changes to this process and have informed representatives of CSU that we have a 3-pronged approach: negotiate, legislate or litigate. We are hoping for meaningful negotiations that result in a more reasonable administrative fee, but we are prepared to take the next steps as well.

The theme of our approach is that you, the Garfield County taxpayer, should not be expected to balance the shortfalls of CSU's budget; nor should ANY fees be imposed upon you without representation from your county government officials.