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Local authorities continue to stress importance of evacuation planning

By Vera Kochan

The Moraga Police Department and Moraga-Orinda Fire District have banded together to ensure that residents are prepared in the event of an evacuation, with police and fire officials conducting coordinated drills in Moraga, Lafayette and Orinda. The early morning fire on Oct. 10, christened the Merrill Fire, was the wake-up call authorities have been warning residents about for nearly a year.

While evacuation routes are mapped out in great detail, they can change due to shifting winds and weather conditions, according to the MPD, so alerts from the Contra Costa County Community Warning System become a vital tool. Residents are advised to follow directions from first responders and to heed alerts during any emergency.

The town of Moraga has been divided into 23 separate evacuation zones, according to the MPD website. This allows emergency responders to notify a specific geographical area of the need to evacuate, using the Community Warning System. Names such as Campolindo, Rheem West, Moraga Shopping, Camino Pablo and Sanders Ranch have been attached to the zones as their area designations. The Merrill Fire was located in Zone 23 Sanders Ranch.

During the Oct. 10 town council meeting Police Chief Jon King praised the evacuees for an orderly and calm exodus during the Merrill Fire. In the true spirit of neighbor helping neighbor, the residents of Zone 23 went above and beyond the call of duty to alert their fellow zone residents of the fire. Most if not all were fast asleep, most likely having gone to bed early due to Pacific Gas and Electric Company's imposed power shutoff. During the evacuation King said residents went door-to-door waking up their neighbors or honking their car horns for optimum noise.

Last spring, Lamorinda residents were mailed the yellow Lamorinda Resident's Guide to Wildfire Preparedness and Evacuation (MPD has extra copies available at 329 Rheem Blvd.) and emergency information is also posted on the MPD and MOFD websites. Residents are encouraged to sign up for the Contra Costa County Community Warning System for evacuation alerts at <http://cococws.com/>. The Nixle site transmits messages to area residents from Lamorinda's police departments. To register, visit www.Nixle.com.

Evacuation planning can save a lot of stress and uncertainty when an emergency strikes. Within a matter of days Moraga experienced a fire and an earthquake. Predesignate an out-of-area contact and pre-program their number in all family cell phones.

Prepare a Go-Bag for each member of the family (see related article on Page A9). It should contain clothing, sturdy shoes, toiletries, flashlight, jacket, hat, cell phone charger and cable, spare eyeglasses and medications.

Store copies of important documents such as insurance, mortgage papers and title. Personal ID including drivers license, social security card and passport along with health insurance cards and prescription info are important. Remember if power is out, getting cash at ATMs will be difficult, so include a small amount of cash in your Go-Bag.

Predetermine anyone on your street who may need assistance in the event of an evacuation and make sure they have a Go-Bag ready. When evacuating make sure neighbors are aware of the situation and alert everyone that you can.

Have a Go-Bag for your pets containing food, leash, water dish and medications. Have all of your animals micro-chipped for easy identification and return.

When evacuating, take a single vehicle to prevent road congestion and keep at least a half tank of fuel in your car. Remember that power might be out during an evacuation, due to potential PG&E power shutoffs, so make sure car keys are always in the same location, keep clothes next to your bed, and keep drinking water in your vehicle along with an emergency kit. Know how to manually open automatic garage doors and gates, and consider installing an analog landline phone that will work during any power outage.

Plan to evacuate before the mandatory evacuation order from authorities by placing your Go-Bags in each of your cars (you may not know which car you can take). Communicate via text with your out-of-area contact to let them know you are evacuating. Do not attempt to evacuate on foot.

When leaving your home make sure to leave the outside lights on for first responders. Also, leave gates open for easy access to your property. Drive safely and cautiously. Authorities will be on hand to direct traffic flow to a collection point. Check in at the collection point to obtain sheltering information.

Being prepared can keep a bad situation from becoming worse.

Tracking power outages

The San Francisco Chronicle has an interactive map that offers visitors the ability to enter their addresses, and see if their location is within a potential outage area, how many customers are affected in that area, and the fire risks for that location. Real time outage data is collected from PG&E and is updated every 15 minutes or as it becomes available. <https://projects.sfchronicle.com/trackers/power-outages/>

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