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## High fire danger prompts new MOFD ordinance

By Nick Marnell



MOFD conducts wildland training exercises at Painted Rock in June. Photo courtesy MOFD

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District bolstered its aggressive fire prevention program and took a major, unprecedented step to help reduce fire risk by passing a local ordinance banning open burning and recreational fires during periods of high fire danger.

"Every year, open burning, campfires, bonfires and recreational fires escape control and require an emergency response from fire agencies," Fire Marshal Jeff Isaacs wrote in a staff report. "By restricting the time of year that open burning is allowed, we can reduce the threat to our community posed by uncontrolled wildfire."

The 2020 fire season is off to an ominous start. A 2-acre grass fire east of the Highway 24 Wilder off-ramp June 11 required a second alarm fire response. Over the Independence Day weekend, the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District responded to 80 vegetation fires

and 13 structure fires. And the following week, the spread of a vegetation fire in Moraga was slowed by previously completed fuel mitigation efforts.

Historically, the worst is on the way. Which is why the district board passed an urgency ordinance at its July 15 meeting to ban open burning and recreational fires during periods of high fire danger, which the district considers as running from late July until the fall rains arrive.

"After attempts at education, the penalty will be \$500 for each day of violation," Fire Chief Dave Winnacker said.

The prohibition does not apply to manufactured products such as gas barbecues or fire pits that comply with the district fire code, or to campfires on private lands with an MOFD-issued fire permit. Enclosed barbecues do not produce embers, the chief said, and flying embers are a major problem during periods of high fire danger.

The ordinance takes effect Aug. 15.

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