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Trash Fire Consequences

By Cathy Dausman



Photo provided by Stephen Healy

It was only a small pile of charred trash - a couple of blackened catalogs lying along a packed earth Orinda roadway near Wilder - but in a hot, windy and dry fire season, it could easily have gotten out of hand. Lamorinda Weekly was alerted to the incident by a reader who remembers the Oakland hills fire. Moraga-Orinda Fire District chief Stephen Healy confirmed the site was under investigation.

"We are very concerned about this incident," said Kathy Leonard, MOFD fire marshal. "We are at a more severe drought than during the Oakland hills fire which distorted 3,500 homes, caused two deaths and resulted in one of the largest loss from fire in the history of the Bay Area," she said.

A back road like the one being investigated "can lend itself to illegal activities such as this," Leonard said, adding that this fire was in a particularly dangerous location due to the steep upslope, dry vegetation and apartment buildings atop the ridge.

"Parents need to be aware that fires that are determined to be started by their child are subject to fines and recovery costs as a result of the incident. Additionally, criminal charges for both the parent and the child may result. If parents suspect that their child is involved with juvenile fire setting, they may contact MOFD," said Leonard, whose direct line is (925) 258-4520. But law is the lead agency if a crime is determined and charges are pressed, she added.

Robert Priebe, Moraga's police chief, echoed the sentiment. "All police and fire [personnel] are very, very concerned about fire during this dry season," he said, adding that his department wants to be notified even if someone spots a person simply carrying fireworks, because all fireworks are illegal in Contra Costa County. "If anybody sees someone setting off fireworks in a dry field they should call 911," said Priebe.

Read a related article in this issue: Red Flag Fire Patrol - MOFD will deploy communication volunteers to watch for grass fires on at least one Lamorinda hill July 4 (page D12).

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