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Wildfire preparation plans in full swing for fire season

By Sora O'Doherty



Firefighters from across the Bay Area joined for a training exercise June 17 at Painted Rock in Moraga. Photos Sora O'Doherty

Francisco Fire, and the Livermore Pleasanton Fire Department joined together at a training exercise June 17 at Painted Rock in Moraga. Other actions being taken now include the prescribed burns of the meadow at Wagner Ranch, lower Wildcat, Bear Ridge, and ridgetop fuel breaks around Sleepy Hollow in Orinda.

There will be a Lamorinda virtual community evacuation exercise on Saturday, Sept. 3, starting at 7:30 a.m. Residents can expect to begin receiving alerts about 8 a.m. Police, fire, and Office of Emergency Services personnel will meet at a fire station to conduct this test of the community warning system.

Rein also talked about a proposal scheduled to come before the MOFD board to establish the purchase of fire mesh which would be provided at no cost to residents. He explained that while 1/16-inch mesh is more effective at preventing embers from entering attic spaces, it also requires more maintenance to allow air flow; 1/8-inch mesh is a little less effective at preventing embers but provides better air flow to the attic.

While MOFD is focused on what they can do in the event of fires, what Chief Dave Winnacker really wants to communicate is what residents can do to help themselves. As Rein explained, there are three factors that affect the behavior of wildfires: fuel, weather, and topography. The only one that we can control is fuel, it is the one component we have some ability to deal with. To that end, Winnacker has been urging residents to cut grass to a maximum of 3 inches in height, to break up non-irrigated shrubs and bushes so that they do not form a continuous fuel bed, to trim and limb tree branches to provide a minimum of 5 feet of clearance from the ground, to remove dead or dying trees, and to maintain roadside clearances 15 feet vertically and 3 feet horizontally from the asphalt roadway.

Under the Fire Adapted Community Ambassadors program, volunteers from the community will, upon request, come to your home to evaluate your property for fire code compliance, with tips on how to make your home safer, Rein explained. This involves no enforcement, and is only an educational program. With 14,000 parcels in the MOFD area, it is not possible for MOFD to get to each parcel, so this volunteer program helps.

Also, residents can request help from the chipper program. Residents can create large piles of trimmed and pruned vegetation, preferably together with their neighbors, and call for an appointment for the chipper to come and dispose of the material, thereby reducing the fuel available to a fire.

By the end of June, residents in Lamorinda will receive a revised version of the Lamorinda Resident's Guide to Wildfire Preparedness and Evacuation. Rein mentioned that community.zonehaven.com is an excellent resource that shows by area what the status of a particular evacuation is. You can enter your address and find your zone and the website will tell you the status of an evacuation in your zone.

Another interesting resource are the wildfire alert cameras around Lamorinda. On the Fourth of July, MOFD will tile the nearly one dozen camera displays to provide a virtual fire watch that the public will be able to join. The cameras can pan, tilt and zoom. However, Rein did note that the usefulness of the cameras could be negatively impacted by smoke from fires in other places in the state.

Residents are urged to sign up for the Contra Costa County Community Warning System at <https://alerts5.athoc.com/SelfService/CCCCWS/Register> It is also recommended that you adjust your "do not disturb" setting on your cellphone to allow exceptions to prevent emergency warnings from being

If you are a very early riser, on Memorial Day morning you might have seen Moraga-Orinda Fire District's Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Dennis Rein and volunteer Charles McNulty driving around in a little all terrain vehicle with a 14-foot pole strapped to it. They were mapping all of the places where trees were overhanging evacuation routes.

MOFD is laser focused on evacuation routes, because, as Rein said at the June monthly meeting of the Lamorinda Citizen's Emergency Response Team, "We don't have a fire season anymore, we have fire danger all year round." Like so many, MOFD exists in a world where a single stopped vehicle can cause others to perish, as they did in the fires at Paradise, and, 31 years ago, in the Oakland Hills fire, just over the hill from Orinda.

Firefighters from all over the Bay Area including from MOFD, Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, East Bay Regional Parks, San Mateo Central County Fire, San

silenced at night. For instructions on how to do that, see www.lamorindacert.org/resources/cell-phone-do-not-disturb/

In the event of an actual evacuation, residents are urged, if there is time and if it is safe, to go to one neighbor on each side of their homes to make sure they know about the evacuation.

The links referenced in this story and other links are available on the CERT resources page at

www.lamorindacert.org/resource/. The link for the Alert cameras is <https://www.alertwildfire.org>.

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