How Ready and Set to Go Were You?

By Norm Walker, Board President & Retired Division Chief of the San Jacinto Ranger District

The Ready-Set-Go program developed by Cal Fire is endorsed by all fire and emergency services organizations. You can get the brochure at fire stations, MCFSC, Forest Service offices and on line.

There are lessons to be learned from those who have been evacuated during a fast moving wildfire (like the recent Cranston Fire) and one of the most common comments has to do with how little time the occupants had to get out. A review of your personal or family plan of escape is still valuable to determine if your plan is quick and easy or cumbersome and slower than you thought. Remember, there is a lot of summer left and the Cranston Fire only burned a small portion of the San Jacinto/Santa Rosa mountain range.

A few years ago I watched a man in northern California destroying his yard with a chainsaw as a fire came towards his property alongside a river. I and my Operations Section Chief were driving out to assess how dangerous the situation was. A couple of hours later we drove back by this man’s house and saw that he had knocked down almost everything on his property and then evacuated. The irony was that during that two hours we had organized an aggressive air tanker and helicopter attack and actually stopped the spread of the fire along the river. The fire never made it to this man’s house.

Obviously the better plan would have been to have done all the necessary abatement during the Spring before the fire so all he had to do was get in his car and drive away and come back later to his house and yard looking exactly as he had left it.

Fire abatement is well advertised in the San Jacinto Mountains communities. However, having a look inside your home for those things that might cost you time is something more of us should do more often.

Where do you keep the pink slips and insurance documents for your automobiles? If they’re not in a pre-packed “to go” kit, then they should be in a safe deposit box in your bank. What about your home owners insurance? Do you have pictures of the interior of your house? Are those pictures on a flash drive or in a drawer somewhere in the den? Where is the flash drive? The safest place is in that safe deposit box I just mentioned. Everything of real importance for post fire recovery (especially if your house burns down) should be secured so you don’t have to look for it.

Getting your loved ones into the evacuation vehicle is the most important thing you can do. How long does that take? Have you tried it? Does it take longer than you thought it would? Have you tried it at night? How much time did that add to your escape?

Most people will place a value on their pets that rivals human life. No judgment here but how long does that take? Which car or truck are they going in? Do you have cages? Where are they? I won’t get into the movement of large animals. Many people have died trying to save their horses. Again, no judgment here, but it takes preplanning with multiple individuals, trailers and tow vehicles to move horses.

The entire point here is preparation, not hours or minutes in advance, but months in advance. There are many publications of lists of things to do in an evacuation but the key is to have the shortest list possible. We don’t know whether we will have an hour to evacuate or 10 minutes when the next big fire hits. If it’s ten minutes and your “to do” list is too long, the chances for survival are minimal. If your list has only “get in the car and go” on it, you will probably be OK.
WOODIES

After their Weekly Safety Meeting, the Woodies paused for a moment for a photo. Pictured from left to right: Sara Stiles, Norm Walker, Dennis Pahuta, Mark Hunter, Elliott Taylor, Janice Fast, Pat Smith and Ron Perry. In front, Kim Fryer.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS
During the past year this volunteer crew:

♦ Donated 1,100 hours to the community. The value of their time is $51,000+.

♦ Cut, split and stacked 85 cords of firewood for the less fortunate

♦ Created defensible space for 8 senior and disabled homeowners who cannot do the work themselves.

In July, the volunteers got together for a farewell luncheon for Dennis Pahuda as he moves. Pictured clockwise from the left front: Janice Fast, Sara Stiles, Norm Walker, Edwina Scott, Elliott Taylor, Dan Felix, Dennis Pahuda, Mark Taylor, Pat Smith, Kim Fryer and Stacey Grant. Not pictures: Ron Perry, Doris Lombard and Chris Kramer.

The Woodies wish to express their appreciation to Annie Weaver at The Red Kettle for the great lunch!

NEW RECRUITS WANTED
If can push a wheel barrow and would like to join the Woodies as they help provide wood for the needy, put on some old clothes, a good pair of work boots and gloves and come to the Help Center Friday mornings. 8 am –11:30 am.

Volunteers don’t get paid, not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.
~Sherry Anderson

Cranston Fire
In late July, our peaceful village was turned upside down when an arsonist started a fire just above Hemet.

More than 7,002 people were evacuated, and 13,139 acres burned. Sadly, 7 homes were destroyed and 6 other outbuildings damaged or destroyed. Thankfully, no one lost their lives and no civilians were injured, however three firefighters were injured.

We owe our deepest gratitude to the U.S. Forest Service, CAL FIRE/Riverside County Fire, Idyllwild Fire and many other fire agencies from several states for their heroic efforts to save our community. The fuel breaks created by the Forest Service and CAL FIRE played a key role in mitigating the fire.

The next few months will be difficult for those who lost their homes or had property damage but the folks on the Hill are strong. They have been knocked down but they will rise up again.

Photo by: Pete Coy, MCFSC Field Supervisor

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HOW TO HELP FIREFIGHTERS

By Robert Fish, BS, EMT-P, CEMSO
Bautista Division

As a Cal Fire firefighter, I am frequently asked what can home owners due to help firefighters during wildfire emergencies? My answer is simple, preparation and abatement. Though not exciting nor immediate, both these activities provide me and all other firefighters on the hill, or responding to it, a fighting chance to defend and prevent the destruction of your home and property.

To illustrate this idea, we can borrow from a concept paramedics use in cardiac emergencies. The concept is known as the chain-of-survival. Boiled down to its most basic, the concept is to have the best outcome in a cardiac medical emergency, medical care requires a system based approach for the best outcome. While each component of the chain-of-survival is important, the collective of all the components from 911, paramedic and EMS response, early defibrillation, prehospital advanced life support, hospital care, advance diagnostic and treatment, work together to enhance the other’s contribution to the care of the cardiac patient. Ultimately this approach leads to better outcomes and survival for cardiac patients. In the wildfire setting, preparation and abatement are components to a chain-of-preparation. You as a homeowner contribute to a system based approach for the best outcome for you and your community and adds to the synergy of the system to prevent and combat wildfires.

Here are a few of the things homeowners can do to help us:
First, ensure you have marked your property with a visible and reflective address sign. This action allows firefighters at nighttime or in poor visibility a way of identifying your home’s location more easily. Both the Idyllwild and Pine Cove communities have programs providing free address signs to its citizens. Contact the local fire station to participate. I strongly encourage it.

Secondly, prepare your property. Remove all dead or drying grass, plants, shrubs, trees, branches, leaves, weeds and needles away from your home for 30 feet. Don’t forget to remove debris, such as pine needles, from your roof and rain gutters. These areas, if not properly maintained, can be an easy source for fire brands to ignite and start spot fires on your home’s roof. Outbuildings and Liquid Propane Gas (LPG) storage tanks must have ten feet (10 ft.) of clearance to bare mineral soil. In areas where you have brush and trees intermingled, reduce the fuels to prevent a “fire ladder” from occurring. This expression refers to the process of fire transitioning from the ground to the upper level or canopy of a tree. This is a far more difficult fire to fight and one that can broadcast fire brands (sources of spot fires) very long distances. To reduce this vertical “fire ladder,” remove branches beneath large trees for 6-foot minimum clearance and create proper vertical spacing between shrubs and the lowest branches of trees by using the formula three times the height of the shrub or brush. Failure to achieve this separation is one of the most common failure criteria during our Defensible Space Inspection programs. Optimal spacing of trees, crown to crown, is a minimum of 25 feet from tip to tip. This spacing also reduces the likely hood of fire spread from crown to crown in the trees on your property.

Another very common failure point is the horizontal spacing of shrubs and brush. The horizontal spacing allows for the continuous spread of fire and creates a situation that resists fire control efforts. Horizontal spacing requirements depend on the slope of the land and the height of the shrubs or trees. The distance in spacing can range from two times the height of the brush to six times the height of the brush depending on the influence of slope. The Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council has educational information and experts whom can aid you in making the right choices for your property (see diagrams on page 4).

Third, prepare your family with a plan for emergencies. At the website “Readyforwildfire.org” you can find great information on preparation. The “Ready, Set, Go!” program is the best for family preparation. Fire Agencies are constantly preparing for wildfire by training, conducting fuels reduction programs, performing Defensible Space inspection programs, educating the public, and by being aggressive and vigilant when fires do occur, but most families don’t think about the need to evacuate in a moment’s notice until that moment arrives. By following the guidelines established in “Ready, Set, Go!”, your family will have an established plan for when a wildfire does occur.

By being proactive as a resident and homeowner on the hilltop and being prepared for fire, you empower your firefighters to concentrate on the defense of your community.* All of us either live, work, or play on the mountain. We must all do our part to make things safer and more prepared for wildfire.

* Unfortunately there are cases where the homeowner has done everything right and hot embers find a place to get established and the home is lost. There are no guarantees when dealing with a wildland fire and there will never be enough fire engines to have one at every house. However, the idea is to tilt the odds in your favor. Ideally your home could survive (when properly abated) whether there is a fire engine there or not.

Farewell and Best Wishes to Larry Kueneman and Roberta Corbin

Larry and his wife Roberta are moving. The MCFSC honored them at a luncheon in June. In 2001, Larry was one of the original organizers of the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council and continued serving as a member of the board of directors. He currently is 2nd Vice President.
Larry’s wife, Roberta, also actively supported the council. She designed and managed MCFSC’s website, and conducted a school fire safe educational program. MCFSC appreciates all that they have done to further efforts to make our communities safer from wildland fire. We wish them the very best for all the new ventures that life has in store for them.
Pictured on the right is Brian Tisdale, Supervisor Washington’s Legislative Assistant presenting Larry with a Certificate of Appreciation from the Board of Supervisors.

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MCFSC Recognizes Pat Boss

After Pat’s retirement, the Mountain Area Safety Task Force (MAST) presented him with a plaque “In Recognition of His Commitment to Wildfire Mitigation Efforts in the San Jacinto Mountains”.
Pictured, from the left, are Incident Commanders Jerry Hagen, Emergency Management Department; Patrick Reitz, Idyllwild Fire; Bill Weiser, CAL FIRE/Riverside County Fire shaking hands with Pat Boss; Chris Fogel, U.S. Forest Service; and Gregg Bratcher, CAL FIRE/Riverside County Fire.

Things Homeowners Can Do, Continued from Page 3

Horizonal Spacing (diagram on the left)
Horizontal spacing depends on the slope of the land and the height of the shrubs or trees. Check the chart on the left to determine spacing distance.

Vertical Spacing (diagram below)
Remove all tree branches at least 6 feet from the ground. Allow extra vertical space between shrubs and trees. Lack of vertical space can allow a fire to move from the ground to the brush to the tree tops like a ladder.
To determine the proper vertical spacing between shrubs and the lowest branches of trees, use the formula below.

Example: A five foot shrub is growing near a tree. \(3 \times 5 = 15\) feet of clearance needed between the top of the shrub and the lowest tree branch.

Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council appreciates the support of everyone who has sent in membership dues and donations. Memberships are valid for one year. We do not send membership reminders, but include a registration form in all newsletters. You are welcome to make a donation or pay membership dues by using PayPal. Just log on to our website (www.mcfsc.org), click the How to Join link, then the Donate link at the bottom of the page.

MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES FIRE SAFE COUNCIL, 25380 Franklin Drive/PO Box 507, Idyllwild CA 92549-0507
Phone: 951-659-6208; Email: info@mcfsc.org; Website: www.mcfsc.org; Facebook: MCFSC.org