

Big Sur Volunteer Fire Brigade Fire Brigade News – August 2016

Where to start.... I leave to go on my first real vacation since the Pfeiffer fire and see the Soberanes fire as I head to town. I'm thinking this is no good, but never imagining it would be knocking on our door in a weeks' time. A few days into our trip I'm doing regular texting, calling and emailing to determine whether to cut the trip short or not. Frank stepped in/up and started attending the ever present meetings that happen during fire incidents. I kept in touch with some of my friends with Cal Fire and USFS assigned to the fire getting their thoughts daily. Long story short, I didn't need to cut the trip short and was back for a few days before the fire started encroaching into the Fire Brigade's area.

The loss of homes up in Palo Colorado is just heartbreaking and the community and organizations like CPOA got started quickly gathering donations and have already disbursed some funds to some of the homeowners.

Unfortunately we are getting proficient and well versed in dealing with fire disasters. We have evacuations, both mandatory and warning only depending on what side of the road you are on.

We have had two night time road closures and I just got the alert that starting 2:00 tomorrow the 14th there will be an up to 24 hour road closure for firing operations. We had an almost 24 hour closure due to a redwood tree on fire and threatening to fall between the State Park and Fernwood. Thank you to the Clear ridge road association and Jeff Mallory for giving access to some people through on their roads. Unfortunately it was also abused by some and the gates were closed again.

We have a Liaison Officer assigned to the FB which is wonderful. We are now on Liaison #4 due to the others heading off to other fires. Frank and I work out a schedule with our Liaison to make sure we have a presence at the cooperators meeting every day at Toro Park. I start attending all the daily 07:00 briefings down here. Sometimes they add in funny and advisory information like don't keep food in your pants after 2 skunks were seen dragging off a pair of pants in the middle of the night.

The Fire Brigade does not have any apparatus attached to the fire, we made the decision with over 500 engines and 5,000 personnel already on the incident that our role would be best to continue covering our normal calls as no one else was going to do that. We let the IC know if the incident needed our help we would be available. This fire was different in that it did not start in our area and was extremely well staffed prior to getting here. Our CERT members were requested to help out several times and did assist.

We brought in our local knowledge with our retired USFS BC Frank Zabrowski coming down to ride with the fire OPs and fill him in on past fire behavior in our area. That was greatly appreciated. One benefit of a fire is that we get up to date mapping information. Tori worked with the mapping guys who would come by the fire house and working together both they and we benefited.

How quickly we get used to the gray skies, either the fog, smoke and/or a combination of both. Our air in Big Sur is most days labeled "unhealthy." I can't seem to tell the difference any more. The sun and moon are red when you can see them. The helicopters are a daily occurrence, several days their flight path was over my house and I could just look up through the sky lights to watch them.

The evening of the community meeting on the 8th the fire jumps the fire line on top by Mt. Manuel. After watching for a few hours we decide to be prudent and load up some of our papers and the pictures I have gathered since the Pfeiffer fire into my car and take it to a safe place just in case. We get paged out around midnight, I go out to take a drive to the camp looking for OPs and then up the Old Coast road. In the dark it is hard to tell the exact location of the fire. I talk to OPs and he is over on Clear ridge keeping an eye on it. There are engines up at Apple Pie and strike teams staged along the highway. It doesn't seem that long ago we did the same thing for the Basin fire. We watch the firing operation on the East side from the ridge and it goes well, a nice westerly breeze is just what we want. By that evening I feel more comfortable, and the fog is in too putting a nice damp blanket on everything.

The fire is now mostly in the back country and should be safely past Partington, they now say most likely no containment until 9/30. The numbers of apparatus and personnel are now greatly reduced due to other fires starting around the state. They are moving everything, sleeping and showers, out of Pfeiffer down to Molera, most of the Cal Fire folks are leaving and USFS is coming in. The fire camp will probably be there quite a while. We agree no community meeting is needed for the first time. The Chimney fire is working its way into Monterey County on the south end and we hope it doesn't come any closer.

We need to stay alert for other fires, remember the Basin and the Chalk almost back to back and in the 90s we had 3 fires. There is still several months of fire season left and there are people out there doing stupid things like building their fires in redwood trees. The signs along the roads thanking the fire fighters are nice to see, they are all the way out to the Toro camp and out Carmel Valley. We get an envelope with cards written by the All Saints school kids, my favorite is thanking the FF for saving us because if not we'd be "toast", literally☺

Martha Karstens
Chief