

Fire Brigade News
August 2012

Over the last month the Brigade didn't have anything out of the ordinary happen to report on. With the northern half of our state going up in flames it seemed an appropriate time to remind everyone to think about what actions you will take if we have a fire in Big Sur.

As I write there are thousands of acres on fire not only in California but in our neighboring states. People are fleeing from these massive fires, many to return to find nothing left of what was once their home. Just watch the news to see the devastation. Our fire season is just getting started with the most dangerous times coming in the next two months. I would like everyone to take a moment and think about what your plan will be if you need to get out of your home in 10 minutes. What will you take, important papers, pictures, medications, do you have animals, what will be your evacuation route etc.?

The following is my report on the evacuation meeting the Brigade held and our plans to provide for your safety during a disaster.

The Fire Brigade recently met to discuss evacuations in Big Sur in the event of another Basin type fire or any other disaster that may occur. We have just had the 4th anniversary of the Basin fire, one of the most devastating wildfires to occur in our backyard. Agencies present were the Sheriff's office, CHP, State Parks, Cal Fire, USFS, OES, CERT and the Fire Brigade. Any and/or all of these agencies will be instrumental in an evacuation notification or process.

An evacuation message may be disseminated in a variety of ways. The one most frequently used would be the Sheriff's deputies driving door to door for notification. Additional methods can or will be utilized, the Alert or TENS/reverse 911 phone call where specific areas can be targeted by computer, web sites, phone trees, radio PSA, alert machines or simply listening to scanner radio traffic.

As many of you may remember the evacuation process during the Basin fire could have been better. This is was one of the things we focused on at our meeting. The Sheriff's Office receives the orders to evacuate from the Incident Commander. It is the process that happens after those orders are received which we worked on.

Since the Basin Fire a CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) has been formed in the Big Sur community. This group is comprised of many people you all know and trust. These CERT members will be key players in the event of an evacuation. We all agreed that most important was the safety of the people that may be driving into dangerous areas to warn residents of an impending evacuation. We also agreed that everyone going out to perform an evacuation must have the same message for all residents, (depending on your location). In other words, you should all be hearing from an Officer, evacuate now, or be ready to leave in 4 hours or 2 days, etc.

The Big Sur Fire Brigade activates the CERT team. Our goal is to have CERT members ride along with a law enforcement officer for these notifications. These CERT members, usually your neighbors, will lend credibility to the message the Officer is bringing. They also are familiar with their enclaves and can make sure that all residents receive notification.

You may make the choice to remain at your home to protect it. This is your decision. The Sheriff's office needs you to understand that doing so is at your own risk. **We cannot emphasize this enough!** If you choose to remain to protect your home, you should not expect a fire engine to come and help you. You are more than likely on your own. You will be asked to sign something that says you understand the danger and accept the risk.

This process will happen if there is enough time. In the event of a fast moving fire or flood you may only get a quick hail on a PA that says get out now! Your CERT members will also be able to assist law enforcement with road blocks, traffic control and resupply among other things.

We are planning on doing drills in different enclaves with the CERT team and other available agencies in the coming months. We will notify your area ahead of time. This preplanning is key to an effective evacuation procedure.

Last, but definitely not least, is the part you as a Big Sur resident play during our next fire. If you expect an engine crew to risk their lives to respond to protect you and your home **you must do your part to make their access and the surrounding area around your home safe for them to work.** I cannot say this anymore bluntly, your home is not worth anyone's life!

Finally, I am very concerned about the possible complacency of some of the Big Sur residents. Other than the first several days, the Basin fire was a slow moving fire. Many of you did successfully defend your homes and think you could do it again. But if we have a fire with any kind of wind, or just by the sheer magnitude of it and the terrain in Big Sur, it can be extremely fast moving and devastating. You have all seen them on the news recently; they burn faster than you can run. If we are so unfortunate to have a fire like that, lives may be lost.

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Chief