

Big Sur Volunteer Fire Brigade Fire Brigade News - January 2017

Winter is officially here! And what a winter it has been so far, so much going on I hope I remember it all. As everyone knows we have gotten slammed with rain, a winter like the old days! And one we have not had for such a long time some people newer to the area might be a little surprised.....

The Big Sur river so far has mostly remained within its banks. To the best of my knowledge only one home may have gotten some water in it. It seemed like every time it was about ready to overflow and the flood warnings went out the rain stopped! Dodged a bullet! I have lost count of how many flood watch and warnings have gone out. We had one area of concern near St. Francis church where several large redwood trees were across the river and there was the possibility that a log jam might occur and then break. OES got involved and SO sent out a Deputy to the areas downstream from the trees to properties who might be affected to do a voluntary evacuation. River Inn offered up rooms to anyone who wanted to evacuate, no one did. Thank you Rick and Alan! Mother Nature eventually took care of the problem. Another huge tree has now fallen but it looks like the way it fell might not cause a problem.

Huge trees and debris have been coming down the river, I would hope no one would even consider floating/kayaking/tubing etc. We don't need to add a rescue along with all our other calls. We were busy these last few days with the wind and rain, 5 calls alone on one day starting at 01:30 for wires down in Sycamore canyon. In addition to responding we try and make arrangements to notify residents that are affected that roads are blocked etc. After our last call at Glen Oaks, a pole fire, we got word a tree was down in Sycamore canyon blocking the road and as we were still out we drove down there but some thoughtful person had already taken care of it. We actually have been quite lucky with really only the one long term outage due to the Fernwood slide. We also had the closure for several days just south of Fernwood and assisted CHP and CalTrans with traffic control and also had the Brigade and a CERT member on the north end for when they did let traffic through to check IDs so residents only could come through. We helped walk a big group out and made arrangements with the Big Sur Lodge to house the rest who were literally stuck between a rock and a hard spot. Thank you Rene!

The south end of the highway is having continual problems and Cal Trans has been doing a great job escorting people through Paul's slide so they can get out. Nacimiento has remained open thankfully. The latest large slide just south of Julia Pfeiffer Burns had the road completely blocked, after 2 days they were able to punch a lane through for emergency traffic. I had 1 FF and 1 medical responder for the entire area from the slide south. An ambulance and/or fire response would have to come from Hunter Liggett. We encouraged everyone at Esalen to leave, less people, less opportunity to need emergency care!

Almost every private road in Big Sur has taken a hit of some kind, either falling out or slides and trees blocking it. The challenge is staying on top of the information so we know where our apparatus can go. Not only getting emergency care and ambulances in but can my volunteers get out to help in the event of an emergency. County Public Works and Water Resources have been great keeping us supplied with tons and tons of sand and thousands of sand bags. I have never seen so many filled! They will keep them coming as long as they are needed.

Just past River Inn the river came very close to eroding the highway and having a key telephone pole come down that provides power to almost everyone here, that would have been a disaster. I'm happy to report that work got going pretty quickly once the word got out of the problem. So far it has held.

Normally winter is my very favorite time of year and I love hearing the rain on the roof, but even I must say that for now we need a break!

Our busy month so far has also included rescuing a person from JPB who said he dropped his cell phone and tried to recover it, ending up by getting stuck 300 feet over the side and another person who had a medical emergency on the Buzzards roost trail and needed to be carried out.

In addition, we have started our FF1 class, we have 5 people from the community taking it, I had hoped for more but the 5 are good solid people. 2 people from other town departments are taking it as well as some of our own VFF who are upgrading to FF1.

Also this month, just to add to everything else, is our weekend with Ann Simmons to work on our strategic plan and talk about the future of the Fire Brigade. Ann is a longtime supporter and has helped us several times over the years with our long range planning. She is a project manager consultant whose business is in Las Vegas, hence sending all the survey forms there, (to answer everyone's question why Las Vegas© Thank you to all who sent them in!

The backyard burning has been a little slower due to all the rain as well; I have processed almost 60 permits so far. The end of April will be here before we know it! Hopefully everyone will get their burning and clearing done before fire season.

Every two years the Fire Brigade has the election of their Board members and appointment of Officers. We just completed that process and I'm happy to announce our same wonderful Board and Officers will still be with us. They are; my fire Captains, Steve Graham, Jon Knight and Matt Harris, my medical Captain, Jeannie Alexander, and Board members, Mary Trotter, Frank Pinney, Dick Ravich, Victor Pavloff, John Handy, Lana Weeks and myself as Board member and Chief.

We ended 2016 with 300 calls, down slightly from 2015 due to the Soberanes Fire, but a respectable number. And working with Ann Simmons as mentioned above will help us to make plans and prepare for the future so we can continue to provide you and the community with emergency care response.

Martha Karstens
Chief