

Published October 14th, 2020

ConFire officials warn against complacency as fire season winds down

By Nick Marnell



Wildfires have scorched more than 4 million acres in California this fire season, shattering records for the amount of burnt earth in a single year. It's been a rough fire season locally as well, as vegetation fires rose 63% over last year within the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District.

But thanks to a combination of efforts, including a high level of preparedness, aggressive mitigation activities and the awareness and contributions of residents, not one of the 412 vegetation fires in the district through September charred more than 10 acres nor resulted in a fatality.

"People should realize it's not for lack of fires that we've had good fortune here. Every one of those fires could have gotten away from us," ConFire spokesman Steve Hill said. "Just because we haven't had a devastating wildfire here, we should not feel immune."

ConFire crew puts out vegetation fire in June Photo courtesy ConFire

Especially fortunate this year has been Lafayette, which experienced only one vegetation fire. Apparently the

October 2019 Pleasant Fire, which destroyed the Lafayette Tennis Club and prompted the evacuation of thousands near Highway 24, got the attention of city residents.

"As we near the traditional height of the fire season here in Contra Costa County, it is obvious this has already been an exceptionally challenging one across the region and the western U.S.," Fire Chief Lewis Broschard said. "Here at home we have had, thus far, good fortune in spite of a significant uptick in vegetation fires. We make our own luck, however, and the combined efforts of our fire agencies and our residents have helped protect us all."

This is not the time to take anything for granted, Hill said, as the county is one red flag warning away from a major catastrophe.

"There is more unburnt fuel on the ground in the county than in any recent year," Deputy Fire Chief Aaron McAlister said. "The moisture levels of that fuel are historically low. With a combination of high temperatures, low humidity and strong winds, we are at tremendous risk for a devastating wildfire."

Broschard doubled down on the need for citizen awareness. "We can't do it alone and so we are counting on every resident's continued vigilance to help see us through what can still be a very dangerous remaining few weeks of fire season 2020," he said.

On that note, the district Fire Prevention Bureau is helping neighborhoods organize the first Lafayette Firewise Community.

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