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First responders hold Wildfire Preparedness Town Hall in Lafayette

By Jennifer Wake

According to Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Fire Chief Lewis Broschard, who spoke during a Town Hall presentation May 31 in Lafayette, community members are the most important resource to prepare for wildfire. "We have approximately 70 staffed fire engines (one for every 15,000 residents)," he explained. "We can't get there fast enough in a fast-moving wildfire."

While Con Fire has worked on vegetation management along evacuation routes and has been working on fire trail maintenance, as well as pre-positioning fire equipment on red flag days, maintaining your personal property is critical, he said, adding that preparing for evacuation is equally important. "Last year a four-alarm fire on 121 acres with more than 30 mph wind gusts was reported at 2 a.m. but due to good defensible space, no structures were damaged."

According to Lafayette Chief of Police Ben Alldritt, Lamorinda looks a lot like the city of Paradise. "What can we do? Police your own property and talk to your neighbors . and please, please, please sign up for the Community Warning System (CWS)."

"We have an AM radio station, 1670, that reaches Moraga and Orinda, and ALERTCalifornia (a wildfire camera network (alertcalifornia.org) that the community can access to see if there are any fires in your area). If you smell smoke," he said, "if you go to the wildfire cameras, images are updated every 10 seconds. I encourage you to have situational awareness. Be proactive. Take advantage of resources available." This year's weed abatement deadline was June 4 so if you haven't started creating defensible space around your home, the time to get started is now.

A long time ago, as an 18-year-old, Broschard said he created signs about wildfire preparedness, with the slogan, "Defensible space can save your place." Assistant fire chief Chris Bachman says there are three steps for the safest fire season: Know your Zonehaven Zone (a tool to let you know where evacuations are happening), subscribe to CWS, and create defensible space around your home. For all homes on 5 acres or less, make sure all seasonal grasses and weeds are cut at or below 3 inches, remove all mulch from near structures, and cut limbs away from roof lines.

According to Jeff Peter, Con Fire's assistant chief of communication systems, Con Fire continues to grow with aviation, boats and transportation systems in the county, but regardless of growth, he said, "we really need you."

"There's only so much we can do independently of you," said Deputy Fire Chief Brian Helmick. "The reality is we can only do so much."

For more detailed information, visit cccfpd.org/wildfire-prep/ or Cal Fire's readyforwildfire.org www.mofd.org/our-district/fuels-mitigation-fire-prevention/hazardous-wildfire-fuels-reduction-program

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