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Cut it Back so the Trucks Can Get Through

By Andrea A. Firth





Pictured are MOFD Firefighter Julie Mulliken and Engineer Mike Murphy with their engine in a tight spot Photo M. Mentink

Vegetation growth such as trees, shrubbery, and weeds that block or curtail the passage of emergency vehicles on the narrow streets and roadways throughout Canyon, Moraga, and Orinda is a common problem, according to Fire Marshal Mike Mentink. "[The vegetation overgrowth] can damage the emergency vehicles and really slows us down," states Mentink.

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) recently responded to a fire in a two-story residential structure up a narrow road in Canyon. Ladders stored on the outside of two of the MOFD trucks had brackets broken by overhanging vegetation, and the ladders fell to the roadside before the trucks reached the home. In this case, the MOFD firefighters were able to contain the fire with the equipment on hand and no one was hurt, but there is a real potential for the emergency effort to be impaired, explains Mentink.

He also notes overhanging limbs and shrubs can break off the emergency lights on the MOFD vehicles which requires the vehicle to be out of service until the lights can be repaired.

The MOFD guideline for the maintenance of vegetation on or near roads is the provision of a three-foot clearance from the shoulder extending upward to a 15-foot clearance off the ground. Property owners are responsible for maintaining vegetation, trees, and shrubbery on their property and in the public right-of-way abutting their property.

"With the narrow roads we have, keeping the vegetation trimmed back extends the usable roadway," he explains. This extra road space can be critical in a number of emergency scenarios, for example, if two vehicles need to pass or in the event an evacuation is necessary. "Trimming back vegetation is an effective way to ensure access to your property in case of an emergency," states Mentink.

Reach the reporter at: andrea@lamorindaweekly.com

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