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Local Fire Services Prep for Wildland Fire Season

By Cathy Dausman



Local fire services personnel gathered as part of a multi-agency mutual response area drill. Photo Cathy Dausman

adjacent to Orinda.

Firefighters sweated in low 50-degree temperatures as they attacked the "fire" in two teams clothed in full protective gear while toting 40-pound backpacks and hauling 100-foot lengths of hose and hand tools. Non-fire related hazards included working in an area known for the presence of poison oak, ticks and rattlesnakes.

One team approached from the south; a second climbed a parallel route to attack the fire from the north. No one climbed the line empty handed.

Rein shakes his head when he hears people reassure each other with "don't worry; it's just a grass fire." He knows the cost each agency bears when it has to spread remaining crews thin and make do without equipment used on the call. He knows when an incident commander calls for air support it comes in as two helicopters, two fixed-wing aircraft and a fifth plane flying air tactical supervision.

Support like that doesn't come cheap. It's never "just a grass fire."

It might have seemed like a walk in the park for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and a host of other agencies participating in a series of recent multi-agency mutual response area drills in preparation for the 2015 wildland fire season. After all, it was daylight, temperatures were moderate, access was via paved public roads, manpower was rested and plentiful and, best of all, it was just a drill. But this was serious business, and it takes "a lot of resources to get the hose up there," Berkeley Fire Department Captain Tim MacIsaac explained.

"There" was a 3,000-foot hillside, with hoses laid out in 100-foot increments. Fire crews from Berkeley, Oakland, MOFD, Kensington, and East Bay Regional Parks were on hand the morning Lamorinda Weekly accompanied MOFD's Dennis Rein to the site.

MOFD sent a total of three different crews to each drill to battle an imaginary one-acre hillside grass fire along East Bay Regional Park's west slope

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