



## Fire Districts

### Public Meetings

**Moraga-Orinda Fire District** Board of Directors  
Wednesday, Dec. 14, 5:30 p.m.  
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit [www.mofd.org](http://www.mofd.org)

**ConFire** Board of Directors  
Tuesday, Jan. 17, 1:30 p.m.  
Board Chamber room 107,  
Administration Building,  
651 Pine St., Martinez  
For meeting times and agendas,  
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

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# MOFD Officials Jump Right into Water Flow Project

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District wasted no time tackling one of the critical goals of its recently approved Strategic Plan when Fire Chief Stephen Healy and director Brad Barber met with East Bay Municipal Utility District officials requesting the upgrade of the water supply to district fire hydrants.

Barber noted that the water district had given MOFD a \$50 million estimate in 1997 to bring all of the pipes in the fire district up to the highest standard of water flow. Since then, while some of the pipes have been upgraded, inflation has

eaten up the money saved and the cost today would very likely approach the same number. "It would be a number beyond EBMUD's capacity to repair," Barber said at the Dec. 7 district meeting.

Instead, the district will look at a tiered approach to piping infrastructure replacement. Step one may include the upgrade of the inadequate water flow from "red top" hydrants - those barely pumping 500 gallons of water per minute - to a marginally adequate rate of up to 1,000 gallons per minute - "orange top" hydrants. Green caps indicate good flow, be-

tween 1,000 and 1,500 GPM, with blue yielding superior flow at more than 1,500 GPM. Approximately 40 red top and 250 orange top hydrants exist in the district, out of a total of more than 1,400.

Other variables include concentrations of inadequate hydrants, possibly obviating the need to fix all of the problem hydrants in one location as long as at least one hydrant pumps an adequate water supply. "Like in the Charles Hill area," said Division 5 director Craig Jorgens, on the board at his first MOFD district meeting. "Maybe in some areas

it's more critical for an orange hydrant to be brought up to the green level rather than a red to an orange."

In addition, timing for the water flow improvements is paramount: The district would like to coordinate the piping upgrades with Orinda as the city continues its road paving project.

Barber said that EBMUD plans to report to MOFD early next year on the costs of the various upgrade tiers, possibly at a fire district meeting. "If they are willing to come," Barber said.

# MOFD Firefighter Reflects on the Ghost Ship Fire

By Nick Marnell

Lucas Lambert got the call at 10:30 a.m. Sunday. Of course he knew why. The Oakland Fire Department needed help, and as a member of the East Bay Incident Management Team, an inter-agency all-risk firefighting unit, Lambert took off to International Boulevard and 31st Ave. — the Ghost Ship fire.

"We are an all-risk team that responds to incidents that go beyond a 24-hour period," said the Moraga-Orinda Fire District firefighter-paramedic, who reported to the incident command post at the Wendy's Restaurant across the street from the live-work space fire that killed 36 people.

The three-alarm blaze began late on the night of Dec. 2, and the fire had been extinguished long before Sunday morning. What OFD needed was a safety officer, an officer to provide for the care of the firefighters, and that became Lambert's assignment. "Someone to stare back and take in the big picture," he said. "As firefighters we often get so focused and so task oriented, we need to keep everything in balance."

So he had to go into what was left of the building and learn the details of the operation, which at that point had phased into recovery mode. Lambert had to confirm that all firefighters' personal protective equipment was functioning properly and not compromised by the high amount of particulate matter still in the air. He



Firefighter Lucas Lambert surveys the remnants of the Ghost Ship.

Photo courtesy Lt. Mark Tait, East Bay Regional Park District

checked the structural integrity of the building with the structural engineers who removed drooping material from the walls that was in danger of collapsing onto the firefighters. "The walls looked like a wet cracker," said one of the engineers.

Lambert also participated in firefighter stress debriefings.

Right about the time Lambert arrived at the building, firefighters were removing the dead from the rubble. One of the firefighters told Lambert that he knows that he pulled bodies from the building, but he remembered nothing of the specifics.

"Anyone who entered that building would be lying if they say it didn't affect them," Lambert said. "Every time that you respond to something like this, it takes a little bit out of you." Out of respect for those affected, Lambert would not go into detail of what he witnessed.

"Personally, it wasn't something that I wanted to see, but I feel comfortable with the work that we did for the victims and their families," he said.

And also for the responders. The industry has progressed far from the tough-guy culture and recognizes the needs of the fire-

fighters who often have difficulty after, and sometimes during, the fact. Assistance programs are available at the county level for long-term stress and psychological issues, but Lambert said that the firefighters still feel most comfortable talking with each other.

"No human being should have to witness this," commented one of the first responders. But human beings do exist who are not only able to witness a tragedy like this but able to mitigate the disaster.

Those human beings are called to the firefighting profession.

# During Fire, Officials Say Know Your Exit Strategy

By Nick Marnell

Often it takes an incident like the Oakland Ghost Ship fire to jolt people into action to prevent a similar tragedy. As such, officials of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District emphasized the importance of adhering to fire codes and heeding fire prevention

advice in order to stay safe in an emergency situation.

"The fire prevention bureau is often overlooked as a valuable part of the fire district," said ConFire Chief Jeff Carman. Indeed, most revere the fire suppression teams and the firefighters as heroes who put themselves at risk to save lives and property, with the fire prevention division looked on as a nuisance and a symbol of government bureaucracy.

But fire inspectors and code enforcers indirectly save many lives, probably more lives than do the firefighters, Carman said. Fire prevention work is often contentious, dealing with developers, contractors and private parties in an attempt to apply the fire and building codes. Lives potentially saved include not only civilians but firefighters as well.

"The number one source of our code violations is exiting," said Robert Marshall, ConFire fire

marshal. "Lights burnt out, the exit sign turned the wrong way, blocked exits." He stressed the need for education at home, especially for children: Teach the kids exit drills. Know two ways out of the house at all times. Before enjoying a feature at the Rheem Theatre, scope out the exits. Tell visitors staying at the Lafayette Park Hotel to be sure to locate the exit stairway. Stay alert at the Bruns Amphitheater.

"Focus on that exit sign. Walk toward it. It will lead you to the way out," Marshall said. "If you can't see a way out, your life is in danger." He noted that the 36 people killed in the Ghost Ship fire could not escape in under five minutes, yet at no time were they more than 50 feet from an exit.

As there are no crowded live-work warehouse-type structures in the district, MOFD fire marshal Kathy Leonard said that the larger concern in the Lamorinda area is a devastating wildfire, and

that providing defensible space around your property is critical for your protection. "We do code inspections for a reason," she said. ConFire does about 12,000 code inspections per year, MOFD about 1,100.

"Had the fire code been adhered to it would not have resulted in the high number of fatalities we saw there," Carman said of the Ghost Ship tragedy. "Unfortunately, the Oakland fire is a stark reminder that the codes are there for a reason and if followed they will ultimately reduce the loss of life and property."

Fire officials recommend this action plan: If you intend to put on an event, call the district. The fire prevention bureau will inspect the venue and walk you through the necessary safety requirements.

Marshall sounded more hopeful than convinced that the public will heed the districts' exhortations. "We'd love to say that it's never going to happen here," he said.

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