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Oakland Fire steps up to help MOFD cover Canyon

By Nick Marnell



Locked up and ready to respond into Canyon.
Courtesy MOFD

On the evening of April 18, the town of Moraga closed the Canyon Road bridge over Moraga Creek between Constance Place and the Valle Vista staging area, compromising the ability of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to quickly respond into the Canyon community.

"Our first thought was to use the Lafayette-Moraga Trail," Fire Chief Stephen Healy said. "We could use a bulldozer and scrape out a road." But the landslide along the trail was too big and it was pushing toward the bridge, nixing that approach. The muddy fire trails nearby need regraded and that option remained out until the summer. The district requested assistance from the Oakland Fire Department and from Paramedics Plus, the Alameda County ambulance provider, and the agencies immediately entered into a mutual aid agreement. "It was a lot to ask of Oakland Fire," Healy said.

Under mutual aid, either agency may decline to respond if it is unable to perform, so MOFD will respond to Canyon incidents out of Moraga Station 41 using a unique procedure. The district parked a reserve engine and a reserve ambulance on the Canyon side of the Canyon bridge, and locked them behind a fence topped with barbed wire. If Fire Station 41 is dispatched, the firefighters will shuttle to the bridge and walk across to the staged vehicles. "It's part of our job to take risks in order to save lives," said the chief, who noted that, should the bridge become impassable for even MOFD crews, they will use the trail at the end of Augusta Drive.

Healy said that under normal conditions, Station 41 responses take eight minutes of travel time to Canyon. Adding five minutes for the crew to cross the bridge and start the engine would result in a 13 minute total travel time.

Should the Station 41 crew be unavailable, an engine from Orinda Station 45 and an ambulance from Orinda Station 44 will respond to Canyon through Oakland and Pinehurst Road.

Travel time to Canyon via Highway 24 from Station 44 is 25 minutes; from Station 45, 22 minutes. Crews from Oakland Fire Station 6, on Colton Boulevard near Skyline, would arrive in Canyon in 11 minutes.

"Only when we receive word from Oakland Fire that they are on the scene will we send our guys back to their stations," Healy said.

The Oakland firefighters came to Canyon the day after the bridge closure and endeared themselves to the community. Crews toured the town, mapped the area, checked the water supply, pretty much socialized themselves to an area they knew very little about. "They were great and we are grateful," said Canyon Steinzig, Canyon Community Association president.

In the 365 days preceding the bridge closure, MOFD responded to 22 calls into Canyon, including eight emergency medical calls, five vehicle accidents and no structure fires.

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