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## MOFD to conduct evacuation drills in Orinda and Moraga Dec. 15

By Sora O'Doherty



Evacuation map provided

All traffic in both lanes of Moraga Way from the Orinda city limit at Ivy Drive to Glorietta Boulevard will travel only in the northbound direction from 7 to 8 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 15 as the Moraga-Orinda Fire District tests evacuation procedures. The Orinda City Council adopted a resolution Nov. 27 authorizing the temporary closure of the road to southbound traffic, which will be diverted to Rheem Boulevard. The resolution recognizes that the need for practicing and simulating evacuation efforts has only been heightened with the loss of life in the recent Camp Fire. Moraga Way is considered a major evacuation route for most of south Orinda and portions of the town of Moraga.

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Fire Chief Dave Winnacker, Orinda Police Chief Mark Nagel and Public Works Director Larry Theis presented the plan to the city council. Vice Mayor Inga Miller noted that the test "is a comfort to our residents." The officials have been working with Moraga, which will also be affected by the drill.

Nagel explained that 50 or so CERT volunteers will stand along the road and at intersections to assure the smooth flow of traffic. Moraga Country Club residents will be invited to participate in the drill, and those who are not participating will be asked to take an alternate route. "We want it to be very controlled, very slow," Nagel said. The plan included advertising on social media for a week before, as well as the day before and the day of the drill. Changeable message signs will alert drivers to the drill this week. The number of vehicles that will participate in the drill is unknown.

The first responders are hoping to learn how volunteers can help coordinate traffic from the exercise, which, admittedly, is not quite the full-blown situation of an evacuation in the event of a real emergency, such as a wildfire. Armed with the lessons learned on Saturday, the group anticipates a second drill early next year on Miner Road, the primary feeder route for north Orinda. Council Member Eve Phillips pointed out that Orinda Country Club has a robust block captain system and Theis noted that Orinda has worked well with PG&E to clear vegetation along Miner Road.

Laura Lyons spoke during the council meeting's public comment period. "I'm a little concerned about this very limited evacuation," she said, adding, "There is general panic; we are being compared with Paradise: one road out, one road in." She made a number of suggestions, including widening the road, getting CERT involved, and developing a plan not dependent on cell phones and cell towers. Lyons commended the very active parents groups that helped get water tanks installed at Sleepy Hollow and Wagner Ranch elementary schools, but noted that there is nothing similar at the three other schools in Orinda or the high schools. She added that in a firestorm, a fire moves an acre a second.

Winnacker noted that the primary mode of notification is landlines, underscoring how the old-school system of direct wired phones is the best because no electricity is required. If your telephone system uses wireless handsets, he recommends the purchase of an uninterrupted power supply for both the phone and the modem. The secondary route of notification is for people who have registered their addresses and mobile telephone numbers; they will receive an alert via cell phone. Also, the broad-based federal notification system would be similar to amber alerts, broadcast to every cell phone in range of the tower. However, there is no way to opt out of this type of notification.

Winnacker also recommended the use of weather alert radios with battery backups, which, he said, even when turned off will sound a 120-decibel alarm with a flashing light. He said that these items are stocked on Amazon, starting at around \$20. After the alert, the radio gives more information, such as which evacuation route to take.

Mayor Amy Worth asked Winnacker about school fire safety, and the chief discussed meeting with the site safety council at the schools. For Wagner Ranch and Sleepy Hollow the plan is to shelter students and staff in place in inherently Type 3 fire resistant multipurpose rooms; 10,000-gallon tanks have been provided and filled, and a fire engine would be allocated to each site in the event of a fire. "Of the five engines we have available to us," he said, "two are allocated to those schools. I know that it is an extreme ask," he continued, "but it is better not to go get your child."

Worth also asked about efforts to control vegetation and fire load. Winnacker responded that the 14,000

parcels in the district get a notice each year asking them to focus on three big things that are required: grass cut to less than 3 inches, bushes broken up so that they don't form a fire ladder, and trees limbed up to 6-8 feet. MOFD is also working with East Bay Parks and the East Bay Municipal Utility District to ensure mitigation of wild land surrounding the district.

Winnacker said that EBMUD has been a great partner, and that the agency has facilitated a lot of grazing which, to the untrained eye, looks untreated but really leaves just stubble. Prescribed burns were carried out this year on 30 acres, with burns on 200 acres planned next year, and 30 miles of fire trails were mowed or disked, and the plan is to expand that number next year.

"The year after that," Winnacker said, "we hope to burn a perimeter black line around the entire district to create a fire-safe island."

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