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Town Hall meeting focuses on wildfire preparation

By Jennifer Wake

In an effort to help the community prepare for the eventuality of a wildfire, public safety officials led a virtual Town Hall meeting July 28, facilitated by Lafayette Council Member Wei-Tai Kwok. More than 150 community members logged on to learn what the city, police and fire departments as well as The American Red Cross and Lamorinda CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) have accomplished in their emergency preparations as well as what residents should be doing now to mitigate the risk of wildfire. Many questions from the community focused on fuel mitigation efforts - specifically removal of dead trees and combustible vegetation like juniper - and who residents should contact to report an issue. Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Deputy Fire Chief Aaron McAlister said the best first step is to talk to your neighbors to try to work together on a solution. You can also download the MyLafayette app on the city's website, which allows residents to report problems in the city.

Residents were urged to read the Wildfire Preparation Guide, which was recently sent to all households in Lamorinda and provides a wealth of information about actions to take during an evacuation, what to do if you're trapped and unable to evacuate, and how to harden your home against wildfire, as well as worksheets for evacuation or recovery, and important signs that can be used during an evacuation. Guides can be found at local libraries, as well as police departments and fire stations or can be downloaded at www.lovelafayette.org/Home/ShowDocument?id=5858.

Presenters also recommended homeowners create a Firewise community in their neighborhood, which involves working together on weed abatement and fuels reduction, working with a local fire official who can offer suggestions. Firewise communities can be as small as a group of eight homes. Those interested in being part of a Firewise community can fill out a form available on the CERT website: www.lamorindacert.org/resource/firewise-usa/.

American Red Cross volunteer Briana Taylor reminded community members to have a Go-Bag ready for each household resident, which should include medications, toiletries, clothing, important documents, contact information and phone chargers, as well as the Guide. She also suggested residents take a CPR and First Aid class. Emergency Preparedness Commission Chair and CERT Program Manager Duncan Seibert noted that CERT offers an intense 9-week course, which meets one night a week, to teach community members how to be ready and how to respond to disasters (www.lamorindacert.org).

New Emergency Services Coordinator John Cornell described the many ways the city and public agencies are preparing for power outages and cell phone disruption, and noted that there are generator backups on key traffic signals in downtown Lafayette which will allow these signals to operate in an outage, as well as provide lighting at these intersections. Cornell also mentioned how technology like the 50 AlertCalifornia cameras strategically placed throughout Contra Costa and Alameda counties offer a real-time solution to track wildfires in the area and how Cal OES grants for radios have improved the ability for first responders and community leaders to communicate during a natural disaster.

Lafayette Police Chief Ben Alldritt said it is absolutely critical to sign up for the Community Warning System (<https://cwsalerts.com>), which will send an alert to registered phones in the event of an evacuation warning or order. Evacuation information will include recommendations on which direction residents should take, such as "head to Highway 24 or to go east or west," but will not be specific. Alldritt suggested residents map two evacuation routes from their homes, if possible, before an alert is sent.

Residents can view the entire presentation on the city of Lafayette's YouTube page:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kz1VR772qf0. This was the first of two meetings scheduled on this topic. The second virtual Town Hall will be held at 6 p.m. Aug. 25. For more information, visit www.lovelafayette.org/wildfire.

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[back](#)

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