

Spring 2009

Foothill Improvement Project Causes Road Closure

By Jean Yamamura

The Foothill Road improvement project broke ground April 13, but for several months beforehand, the project was the subject of intense scrutiny by the county's emergency services planners and MCA. The reason? Both lanes of the road must be closed for approximately 11 weeks—from about April 20 to July 3—the tail end of that at the beginning of traditional fire season.

MCA's Board of Directors objected to the double-lane closure when they first learned of the proposal, though they had worked on getting the drainage improvements and safer shoulders for nearly 10 years.

The work involves new drainage pipes beneath both sides of the 2700 and 2800 blocks of Foothill, which are to be connected to a culvert on the south side of the road. By covering what are now open ditches, bicyclists and pedestrians have a shoulder to ride and walk on, and it also gives drivers a space to pull over when a fire truck or ambulance comes through.

While Caltrans' resident engineer, Michael Mortensen, tweaked the construction schedule several times to shorten the closure, the county's Office of Emergency Services and Supervisor Salud Carbajal convened meetings with numerous city and county agencies and MCA representatives to find solutions.

Among the strategies to be implemented are increasing road work to 10 hours a day to meet the deadline, notifying emergency services and residents of the closure and detours, and improving emergency vehicle access through Mission Canyon Heights.

Construction: While the work centers around the two blocks between Cheltenham and Tye, associated construction takes place near Glen Albyn and Tornoe roads. During these phases—roughly early April and July—the route will be one lane and flaggers will direct traffic. The detour loops around the Mission via Alamar or Los Olivos streets.

Check the press releases at Caltrans' Web site (dot.ca.gov/dist05/projects/mission_cyn/) for weekly updates on work progress, road

closures, and delays due to weather or unforeseen problems.

An interesting aside to the project was Caltrans' change of heart due to the public outcry over tree removal. Noting the lengthy exchange on Edhat as well as comments by MCA board members, Mortensen opted to keep tree cutting to a minimum: Only 14 of the 30 trees slated to come down were felled. However, about seven stand on hold until the actual trenching reveals if their roots will be damaged.

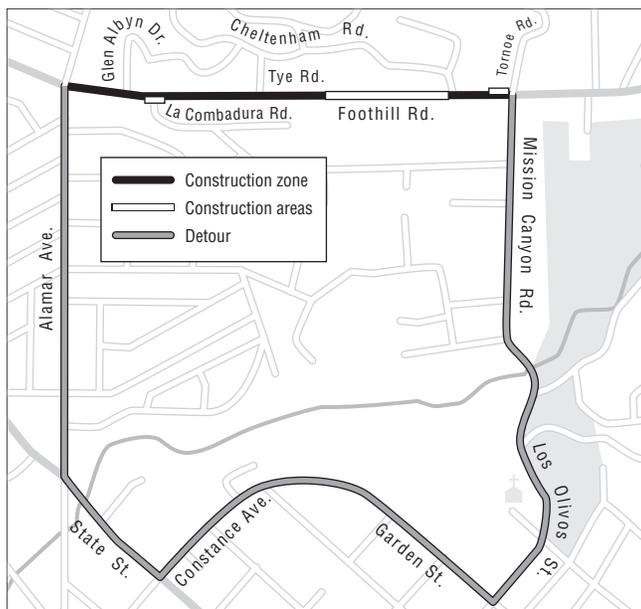
Emergency Evacuation:

Should there be an emergency evacuation of the canyon, please remember that Foothill will be barricaded and closed from the end of April through early July. Residents headed down Tye Road must turn right, toward Goleta. Those coming down Cheltenham must go left, toward Mission Canyon Road. For people living further up Tunnel or Mission Canyon roads, remember that Foothill Road directly toward Goleta will be closed; take another route.

As a matter of fact, now would be a good time to analyze how many ways you can leave your home between April and July without crossing the stretch of Foothill between Cheltenham and Tye. Please keep those routes and these dates in mind and in your emergency preparedness kit.

All law enforcement and fire departments are aware of the road closure, so be sure to follow directions given by sheriff's deputies or police officers in the event of an emergency during this time frame.

Parking Strictures: During Emergency Services' investigation of whether fire trucks could pass through Cheltenham, Tye and Glen Albyn roads, they discovered several extremely narrow spots in the road—"If you



Roadwork to cover the ditches along Foothill Road by installing storm drains will create one-lane traffic on Foothill Road during April and July. Foothill will be closed completely from late April through July 3. The detour route goes around the Mission.

SOURCES: Caltrans & Google Maps

fell down you'd touch the other side," as Jay McAmis described it—and places where parked cars narrowed the road significantly.

Temporary "no parking" signs will pop up where the road is simply too narrow for cars to park and fire trucks to pass; these will be in place, and enforced, for the duration of the Foothill work. Public Works will also be painting permanent white stripes on portions of the roads to clearly mark lanes of travel as opposed to shoulder areas. Cars must park to the right of these white lines, otherwise they may be ticketed or towed.

Enforcement will increase in the Heights, with the California Highway Patrol driving by frequently with an eye to parking violations.

Residents are encouraged to begin thinking now how to work out better parking setups on their properties and off the road. Already at Kenmore and Arriba, MCA's Parking & Traffic Committee members have helped create three to four new off-street parking spaces. For help, you can call on Ralph Daniel, 682-2889, rdaniel@fambus.com.

Play Defense with Your House

by Laurie Guitteau

The Boy Scouts knew a thing or two when they adopted their motto: Be prepared. That's exactly how to survive a wildfire. Only what you need to examine for preparedness now is not just your 100-foot perimeter but your house and yourself as well. Want to know how to keep your house from burning down? How to save your family? Read on.

Santa Barbara County Fire fights about 150 to 200 brushfires a year with little problem. Most are less than 10 acres. But firestorms like the Tea Fire have increased dramatically in both number and ferocity since 2000. Twenty-six people died in San Diego fires in 2003, including the Witch Fire; five firefighters died last year; two of our own residents were seriously burned in November; more than 200 died in Australia recently. These fast-moving and widespread conflagrations overcome not only entire communities but the resources immediately on hand to combat them, too.

If you wondered where law enforcement was during the first hours of the Tea Fire, the two deputies patrolling all of Montecito and Summerland were busy working with Search & Rescue teams to evacuate residents in the fire's immediate path. Off-duty officers from every substation arrived as quickly as they could. Montecito Fire District dispatched every engine company at its disposal within the first 45 minutes of the fire, then had to wait an hour or two for reinforcements to arrive from out of town.

Every resident in this canyon needs to know what to do to survive.

Shelter in Place: Evacuating early is vital, but you may find yourself in the rare situation when you cannot safely leave. The most important thing to remember if you are trapped is that you are safer in your house than outside. You cannot outrun a wildfire.

Stay in your home until the worst of the fire has passed. Then soak towels in all the basins and tubs of water you prepared in advance, and put out the hot spots ignited by burning embers. Hook up your hoses—which you remembered to bring inside with you so they wouldn't melt—and put out anything burning in, on, or near your house. Be ready to rush back inside if the fire comes back, and drag those hoses in with you.

One thing firefighters observed during Tea was the flamboyant way plastic garbage and recycle bins blew against buildings and torched, being petroleum products. The safest place for your outdoor flammables is inside your house. The garage is less safe be-



The materials used on your house make a crucial difference in survivability. Double-paned thermal windows take more heat before they shatter and let a fire inside. Fire-resistant roofs, fascia, and vents can better withstand the fiery embers hurled by Sundowner winds. And, as we all know now, a cleared area around your home makes all the difference in firefighters having the space to defend it.

cause the large gap between a garage door and its jamb makes the garage more likely to catch embers.

If the fire overtakes you in your car, remember that you are definitely safer in your car than you are outside. No matter how hellish it may get in your car, it is much worse outside. But you are only safe in your car for as long as it takes the worst of the fire to rush by. Cars burn, so once the firestorm is past, get the heck out of there to somewhere safe.

The above information is nano-bits of data compared to all the Fire Department's tips and advice at sbcfire.com. Go there or request a visit by the folks at Station 15 for specific details on sheltering in place. Please remember, however, that no matter how ready you might be to shelter in place, the Fire Department strongly advises that early evacuation be your first action. As we know from the hundreds who died in Australia this year, sheltering in place can be fatal.

Protect Your Home: Everyone in Santa Barbara during the Tea Fire remembers how rapidly it devoured hundreds of homes. Every Mission Canyon resident knows that if the wind had not stopped that night, we would be among its victims.

At a County Fire presentation on February 25, Captain Eli Iskow showed photo after photo of homes razed to the ground but surrounded by untouched vegetation. Embers blown up to a mile ahead of the fire, arriving minutes, even hours ahead of the fire,

had found flammable spaces and crannies on homes and begun a fire. Once one home burned, it ignited another and another until entire neighborhoods were engulfed.

Old building codes were developed to protect us from fires inside the home. New fire codes, written specifically as a result of studying massive disasters, are designed to slow ignition from the outside. All homes built as a result of Tea Fire will adhere to these new fire codes, but what about older homes? What can you do that you can afford? The answer is, a lot.

Most vulnerable to fire is your **roof**. If you don't have a fire resistant roof, get one. An asphalt, class A roof is the most inexpensive and is the absolute minimum. Even tile roofs catch fire when leaves and birds nest under the tile spaces as embers blow right in to ignite the debris. Easy and inexpensive to fix with bird stops.

Now examine the **edges of your roof**. Can an ember flying along on 70-mile-an-hour winds fit anywhere between the roof material and the decking to which it is attached? Look at the **fascia** or the border. Is it vulnerable? Made of wood? The availability of fire-resistant coatings and materials is growing, and some can be viewed at sbcfire.com.

Gutters littered with duff plus an ember guarantee a fire that will quickly spread to the roof and walls. Make sure that all roof surfaces, including **valleys** and gutters, stay clear of debris. Gutter covers of 1/8-inch

mesh can deter embers, but require diligent cleaning.

Vents are another invitation to a wind-driven ember. Inspect every attic, roof, wall, basement, crawl space, and dryer vent. Use 1/8-inch metal screen to cover them for maximum ember deterrence. If you can't change the screen, have pre-cut plywood on hand to nail over each vent when a fire advances. Also, clear any heavy vegetation growing near, above, below, or alongside your vents.

Windows present windows of opportunities for flying embers or brands, which are hurled so hard by the wind that firefighters say it hurts when they get thwopped by them, even wearing their thick fire suits. Single-pane windows break in the intense heat of a fire, and flying embers break in to ignite carpet, furnishings, curtains, all the flammable things in our houses. Make sure you trim

back any vegetation right up next to a window. Dual- or triple-paned, tempered glass windows with metal screens, surrounded by metal frames and sashes are the ideal to protect your house, but are costly. Plywood can be cut to fit your windows, ready to nail in place quickly during a fire. Meanwhile, as you do replace windows, choose fire-resistant materials.

Next to roofs, **decks** are the most inviting spot for invading embers. Not only are they usually built of wood with lots of nooks and crannies, but a fire can attack them from all sides, especially below. Make sure nothing flammable is stored or growing next to or under your deck. If a fire threatens, move furniture, plastics, and ignitables inside the house. As you replace old decks, use the many new fire-resistant materials.

Fences are as problematic as decks. One solution is to use fire-resistant materials on the part of the fence closest to your home, since fences act as a fuse or wick for fire to travel to your home. Same goes for hedges, except they may burn even more quickly and intensely than a fence.

The February 25 Fire Safety Meeting is available online, and the pictures do indeed tell a thousand words. Available at sbcfire.com or http://sbcounty.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=5&clip_id=755.

Though County Fire cannot give product or professional recommendations, its Web site will soon have links to architects, contractors, and manufacturers regarding fire-resistant construction and materials as seen in the video. This is a growing field, one of great importance to all of us in Mission Canyon.

N E W S I N B R I E F

S.B. Botanic Garden Debate

The merits of the Botanic Garden's controversial Vital Mission Plan (VMP) were debated at MCA's Annual Meeting in March. The VMP adds about 26,000 sq.ft. of horticulture cultivation and equipment space, staff housing and a children's lab, library, an herbarium, and restores the Gane House for use by administrative staff. Some residents have raised questions about the increased fencing, lighting, and paved pathways, among other issues.

Proud of the Garden's accomplishments in preserving and restoring native California plants, Bill Koonce, a member of the Garden's Board of Directors, spoke of its need for more space. He explained that its staff has acted as consultants to government agencies and the Nature Conservancy and has published about one book and nine journal articles annually. The facility's needs have grown, he said, and the VMP would expand the building footprint to 1.4 percent of the Garden's 78 acres.

Seeing that figure as doubling the Garden's current footprint, Marc Chytilo of the neighborhood group Friends of Mission Canyon worried about the increased fire danger presented by more people coming and going from the Garden. While he applauded the county's suggestion that the Garden prepare and submit a National Register Nomination for the Historic Garden, he also suggested it would be wise to place its seed and rare book collection offsite, in a less fire-prone area, as well as its classes and fundraisers, to which

the Garden's Nancy Johnson replied that they already did. Chytilo's strongest words were reserved for the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) that governs the Garden's activities. It would be updated with the VMP, and Chytilo stated the canyon's interests would be best protected by strict and specific language in the CUP.

The VMP's Environmental Impact Report is being finalized by the county currently, and the plan may go before the Planning Commission June 10. (Check with County Planning for up-to-date information.)—JY

Visibility First

Improved visibility at intersections, new "no parking" zones, and increased enforcement of existing parking restrictions were the top vote-getters in the county's survey of parking and circulation in Mission Canyon. Twenty-eight percent of survey recipients responded (374 responses), with half living in the Heights (Cheltenham area) and a quarter in the upper canyon.

Most survey questions met with agreement, with the strong exception of one-way streets. Only 19 percent agreed, while 39 percent opposed them (most people didn't know or were neutral, 42 percent). People were evenly split on an up to \$100 property tax increase to fund circulation and parking improvements (38 percent for, 42 percent against).

Tunnel Trailhead and the Heights were seen as having the worst parking problems, with Cheltenham third. Improvement ideas

for the trailhead included creating a parking lot (56 percent) and improving enforcement (32 percent).

This community input gives county staff a starting point in researching problems and solutions. Striping and signs would be the first changes to arrive on our streets, while higher cost improvements might go into the county's Fire-Year Capital Improvement Program. Full survey responses are at longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/planareas/mission_canyon/mcrps.php.—JY

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Your MCA Newsletter Spring 2009

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Fire-Resistant House Tips

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Volunteer Gardeners Project

MCA welcomes Cass Ensberg to its Board of Directors, having introduced her to the 70 or so people attending our Annual Meeting in March. The Foothill Road construction spurred Ensberg to organize the Mission Canyon Community Volunteer Gardeners, and she and her volunteers have already rescued a number of aloe and agave plants due to be uprooted. These plants store well and will be replanted with the design assistance of the project's professional landscapers.

The Community Gardeners are looking for volunteers interested in beautification projects, including helping their neighbors restore their properties along the portion of Foothill now undergoing "surgery" to improve pedestrian and vehicle safety. Project volunteers will likely lend assistance on Mission Canyon's annual Brush Day, June 13 this year.

If this sounds like your cup of tea, please contact Tim Steele at 895-3888.

And if you appreciate the work MCA does, payment of your annual dues will keep it going. \$25 to P.O. Box 401, S.B., 93102.

C A L E N D A R

- April 20** **Road Construction.** Approximate date for full closure of Foothill Road between Cheltenham and Tye roads. Expected to last through July 3. See dot.ca.gov/dist05/projects/mission_cyn/ for up-to-date information.
- May 5** **MCA Board Meeting.** Open to the public. 7:30 p.m. MacVeagh House, S.B. Museum of Natural History.
- May 12** **Herb Parker Installation.** Volunteers needed through June 4 to help with various phases of art project. Contact S.B. Botanic Garden, volunteer@sbbg.org or 682-4726 x119.
- May 22** **Butterflies Alive!** lets you walk through a whirl of color at the Natural History Museum. Through September 21. Free-\$10.
- May 23-25** **I Madonnari.** Italian-style chalk painting festival on the Old Mission Grounds.
- June 2** **MCA Board Meeting.** 7:30 p.m. MacVeagh House.
- June 6** **Flora and Ecology of the Oak Woodland.** Docent-guided exploration of the Botanic Garden's oak woodland. 2 p.m. Free-\$8.
- June 10** **Planning Commission review of S.B. Botanic Garden Vital Mission Plan.** Meeting date may change. See <http://www.sbcountyplanning.org/projects/02NEW-00138/index.cfm> for up-to-date information.
- June 13** **Brush Day.** Plan to haul your brush down to Rockwood Woman's Club this Saturday. Free to MCA members. Only \$25 to join!
- June 27** **22nd Annual S.B. Wine Festival.** More than 60 wineries on the grounds of the Museum of Natural History. Benefits museum exhibits and programs. \$50 members/\$75 nonmembers. 21+ only. Call 682-4711 x443, or visit sbnature.org.
- July 7** **MCA Board Meeting.** 7:30 p.m. MacVeagh House.