



MISSION CANYON ASSOCIATION

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

www.missioncanyon.org

Winter 2009



Fire Lessons

By Laurie Guitteau

Are you ready? The Tea Fire was a wake up call to Mission Canyon. Though we were spared this time thanks to our dedicated firefighters, especially those night-flying helicopters, and to Mother Nature who stopped the wind before the fire reached us, we may not be so lucky next time. Take advantage of this stroke of luck to be absolutely positive that you are prepared. Reassess your fire readiness NOW.

We talked with Captain Nikki Stevens here at Station 15 to find out if firefighters learned anything new from this recent fire that would help us be better prepared. Capt. Stevens lives right below where the Tea Fire began, so she had to be sure her family was safely evacuated before she reported for duty that night. Her experience as a firefighter reinforced the importance of the safe practices that she preaches on a daily basis. Again during the Tea Fire, defensible space became another weapon in the firefighters' battle against an uncontrollable fire.

- **Clear, clear clear!** is a lesson that cannot be emphasized enough. Not only is it important to have defensible space to protect your home, but firefighters need a safe place to fight fires. They must do triage during a wildfire such as the Tea Fire, and if you have excellent clearing, including the access to your house, the chances are better that they can make a stand. You and your neighbors need to ensure that your street and driveways are clear and inviting to a fire truck. Vehicle access should be 14 feet high and 12 feet wide.
- Get rid of the bad guys: **pine, eucalyptus, cypress, juniper**. If you can't remove these plants, at least be sure that they are limbed up as far as possible, that they are not near your house, especially the roof, and that all dead wood, leaves, needles are removed both in and around the trees. Keep your gutters clean. Remember this is a year-round job. Any plant will burn, but these are particularly explosive.
- Make sure that the underside of decks and the eaves of your house are enclosed



Overlooking Sycamore Canyon, this gate to what used to be a house on Las Alturas presents a stark reminder of the destructive power of a wind-driven firestorm. This issue of the Mission Canyon Association newsletter highlights actions you can take before a fire like this attacks our own canyon.

SOURCE: Stephen Otero

if at all possible. Most homes burn because embers get inside the home; attics are particularly vulnerable. Check your house carefully to eliminate places where an ember propelled by the wind can penetrate. Use the finest screen possible to cover all openings for vents, etc.

- Stack woodpiles at least 30 feet from buildings, fences, anything combustible.

Captain Stevens emphasized that following these guidelines is far more effective than

Fire Lessons (cont. p.2)

Defensible Space Defined

California law requires a 100-foot defensible zone around your house.

Keep the 30 feet immediately around your house clear of flammable vegetation. "Lean, clean, and green" gives you an idea of how that area should look: sparse, well-tended, and watered.

Reduce the fuel load 70 feet beyond that.

- Trim branches on trees to six feet above ground.
- Large trees—remove plants below them that could burn and catch the tree on fire; or,
- Create space vertically and horizontally between trees and bushes. How much

space needs to be between them depends on the slope of your property.

Also,

- Keep trees trimmed to 10 feet away from your chimney
- Remove dead limbs that hang over your house or garage.
- Screen your chimney stack with at least half-inch mesh.

Much more information is online at sbcfire.com. Firefighters are happy to help get your place defensible well in advance of any fire. Call the men and women of County Fire Station 15 at 681-5515, or Capt. Mark Mushinskie, one of the county's point persons on vegetation, at 686-5066.

Fire Lessons (cont. from p.1)

Getting Fire Safe Costs

A lot. The Botanic Garden estimates each eucalyptus it took out down at the wye of Tunnel and Mission Canyon roads cost about \$2,500. Enclosing the area underneath your deck can be costly. Replacing your roof with a fireproof one or installing dual- or triple-paned windows is definitely expensive. But, if you've been thinking about renovating your kitchen or adding on a bedroom, you should consider making your house and yard fire safe first, so that you can enjoy your kitchen and bedroom after the next fire has passed you by.

Exploding eucalyptus and pine-type trees can hurl embers into a 60 mile-an-hour Sundowner and send them not just as far your neighbors' but as much as half-a-mile away. Because these trees represent a danger to the entire community, MCA has used its Forest Service grant money to start removing them from major roads, and is able to match homeowners' expenses in removing such trees. Contact Tim Steele for more information: 965-3888 or bizvwpow@verizon.net. For more information on making your house fire-safe, visit sbcfire.com.

any sprinklers on your roof. Water pressure does become an issue in wildfires, especially in areas that experience lower pressure normally. Remember that the water will simply evaporate or blow away during a wind-driven wildfire. Defensible space is immune to power or water failures.

Adequate protection requires more than defensible space. Actually having to evacuate reminded Capt. Stevens of the importance of doing your homework when you live in Santa Barbara. Seeing those flames, she suddenly wondered if they had enough insurance; she had to prepare her family to evacuate while she prepared to report to work for an undetermined period of time. Since the fire, she has talked with neighbors and other homeowners and has been reminded that adequate protection takes many forms. It's too late for your most important decisions once the fire starts. Capt. Stevens shared her suggestions based on her experience and observations.

- First and foremost, review your insurance. Be sure that you have adequate insurance to rebuild here in Santa Barbara. The minimum you should calculate is probably \$300 per square foot. Are the contents of your home adequately covered?

If you have antiques or art, talk with your agent about scheduling these items. Are you covered for living expenses while your home is being rebuilt? You need to allow at least a year to rebuild, and it usually takes much longer. Few of us can afford Santa Barbara rents and a mortgage at the same time! Work with a reputable insurance agent.

- Make sure you have a family wildfire plan. Decide what you will do if the fire starts and you cannot return home. Where will you meet other family members? How will you be sure all members are safe? If you have family members with special needs, know exactly how they will be evacuated.
- As a family, make two lists of what you will take in the event of an evacuation. One list should be what to take if you have only minutes to escape; then make sure those items are organized and always ready and that everyone knows where they are. The second list would be things you would take if you had time to prepare. Most evacuees look back in wonder at the silly things they packed and the important things they left behind. Danger does not encourage deliberate thinking. Post the lists where anyone can find them at any time.
- Plan your evacuation route. If you can, have alternatives in mind, though that is difficult in parts of Mission Canyon. For example, people living on Las Canoas can exit through Sycamore Canyon.
- Discuss fire plans with your neighbors. Have each other's contact information, including cell phones in case of a power

Your Wildfire Plan

When wildfire licks at your doorstep, it's too late to figure out how to take action. Do it now. Go to any fire station or sbcfire.com and get the Fire Safe Council's **Wildfire Action Plan**.

The Wildfire Action Plan takes you through the steps to prepare yourself, your family, and your pets for evacuating, leaving your house behind, and sheltering in place. After filling out and contemplating the six pages of this pamphlet, you'll be ready for the next fire.

Santa Barbara County's emergency services teams do a heroic job during crises, but they cannot be everywhere at once. In Mission Canyon's treacherous one-way-out road system, every resident has only themselves to blame if they aren't prepared for most all scenarios when the big one hits.

Reverse 911

The county's Reverse 911 system automatically calls residents during emergencies using landline telephones serviced by Verizon, Cox, and Vonage. If your landline phone service is through one of these carriers, you are already in the Reverse 911 system, which is updated weekly.

The Sheriff's Department **will add cellular and satellite phone numbers** to the system at sbsheriff.org. That is the fastest way to be added to the system. Joe Ayala, who helps run Reverse 911 for the department, tells us residents can also call Sheriff's at 681-4100, but it takes a little longer to be registered that way. Also, do not ask to have your landline phone number added again, Ayala says. The numbers are entered by hand currently and duplication consumes time and prevents the registration of the "mountain of requests" being entered into the system after Tea Fire.

And remember, 911 is an emergency number. If you just need information or have a question, dial 211 first so that the 911 lines are not tied up unnecessarily.

outage, so that you can alert each other if the fire starts suddenly nearby. Identify anyone in your neighborhood who will need help in an emergency.

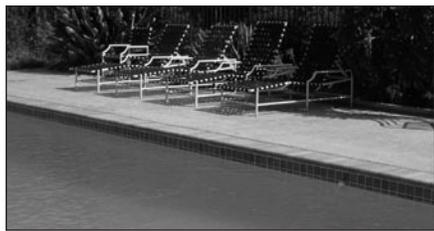
- Your landline phone is automatically registered with Reverse 911. You can now also register your cell phone at sbsheriff.org. Remember that cordless phones won't work during power outages.
- Be sure you have a portable radio with plenty of batteries so that you can keep informed during power outages.

Even if you do everything we have listed, there are no guarantees in a wind-driven wildfire. Capt. Stevens told of a concrete house that burned, and the sadness of the owner who lost all the family photos, including those of her daughter who died two years ago. She had left her house thinking it would never burn. Do all that you can to protect your home, but when the fire comes, Capt. Stevens had good advice.

- Close all doors and windows before you leave.
- If you have time, move anything flammable, including patio furniture, away from any structures. Close them in the garage or house, if possible.
- Evacuate early, especially if you have children, people with special needs, pets. Do **NOT** put your life in danger looking

Swimming Pools Save Lives

Fast-moving fires in San Diego and Yorba Linda several years ago brought the life-saving potential of swimming pools to our attention after the Tea Fire. By jumping into a pool—despite being scared to death by the deafening noise of the fire, the extreme danger from flaming trees surrounding them, difficulty breathing hot and scarce air, and the need to take care of others in the pool—two sets of fire survivors told us that if not for the pool's water, they would have literally been toast.



for a pet. There will be traffic on the escape routes so plan alternates if you can. Remain calm and follow the instructions of law enforcement and firefighters.

Captain Stevens commended the orderly behavior of residents during the Tea Fire who did evacuate early and safely.

The Mission Canyon Association formed to better protect its residents from fire, and

we work hard at doing that with an exceptional group of firefighters here in Santa Barbara whose job is to save lives and property. However, we all must accept the reality of where we live. Capt. Stevens reiterated the importance of being alert, especially during red flag days. When the Sundowners come, and you know it's a dangerous night, be watchful. Residents who live in areas difficult to evacuate may just want to spend the night somewhere else, especially if someone in the family has special needs. One spark is all it takes to destroy hundreds of homes when conditions are right. It's up to us to be vigilant.

No new lessons were learned from the Tea Fire, but the wisdom of current safe practices was underscored. Review the important information at sbcfire.com to create your personal checklist. Another source of useful information is firesafecouncil.org. Mission Canyon residents are fortunate to have the best resource of all: Station 15. Capt. Stevens encourages any resident with questions or concerns to call Station 15, 681-5515, and the crew will be happy to make house calls to help residents make their home safer.

Each fire—the Zaca Fire, the Gap Fire, and now the Tea Fire—remind us that fire is part of the landscape and that we must continue to prepare our homes and our families. Do it NOW! Fire season is year-round here in Southern California. Are you ready?

Reliable Emergency Information

Getting good intel has got to be one of the hardest things to come by during a massive emergency. Many residents found a **telephone tree** their best friend at the start of the Tea Fire. If no one called to tell you there was a fire, start asking your neighbors if they want to form a phone tree, which works as follows:

Place one neighbor who is usually home at the top of the tree. That person then calls a formal list of two to five people in your neighborhood, each of whom then calls the two to five people on their list, and so on. If someone doesn't answer their phone, you must go to the next person on their list to keep the tree going. Dozens of people can **receive information within minutes** this way.

The initial call is the tricky one. An **eyewitness** to a fire is the most reliable source, not someone who talked to someone who thought they might have seen a fire. If you feel confident there is a **genuine emergency** requiring a drastic measure such as **im-**

mediate evacuation, call the person at the top of your telephone tree and one of the board members of the MCA (and 911, of course). That gets your tree going and the board member will alert the other telephone trees in the canyon. (See MCA Officers & Directors at right for phone numbers and email addresses.)

Needless to say, if you're at the head of an existing phone tree, please **contact any MCA director** with your name, phone number and general area so this voluntary program can get underway.

And **if the power is out?** *The Santa Barbara Independent* and KCSB-91.9 offer **IndyAlert** which texts cell phones with text service with emergency information (sign up at independent.com). Tune in your **battery-operated radio** on the AM band to KTMS-990, KUHL-1410, KZSB-1290, KINF-1440, and San Marcos Pass-1040; and on the FM band to KSYV-96.7, KSBL-101.7, KIST-107.7, KSPE-94.5 (Spanish), KTYD-99.9, and KRAZ-105.9.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Foothill Road Work Begins

In what must be a fiscal miracle in the state's hard economic times, Caltrans' plans to trench 24-inch concrete storm drains along Foothill Road remain on track. In February, crews are to remove trees and relocate power poles in anticipation of the ditch digging set to begin in April.

Shoulders and gutters totaling eight- to nine-foot wide will be poured along both sides of Foothill Road, covering the ditches that are there now. Caltrans and the county are also collaborating on a storm drain lateral on Cheltenham Drive that will flow into the drainage system. The project area runs from Glen Albyn to Tornoe Road, but most of the work takes place on the 2700 and 2800 blocks of Foothill.

One lane will be closed off and on from April through October with flagmen directing traffic, but total road closure is anticipated for May, June, or July. A detour will be signed down to Los Olivos, and up Garden to Constance and State Street.

Michael Mortensen, project engineer for Caltrans, told us that the timeframes were chosen deliberately to address certain needs of residents. Tree removal had to occur during the winter to avoid the spring nesting season, and Caltrans is scheduling the work as early into the rainy season as feasible to avoid road closures during peak fire season.

The Caltrans team will update us on the project at MCA's Annual Meeting (Tues., March 31), with Q&A time.

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The MCA Newsletter was prepared with the help of Lee Anne Dollison, graphics, production and photography.



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Your MCA Newsletter Winter 2009

MCA Annual Meeting
Tuesday, March 31, 7 p.m.

County Fire's Wildfire Prep
Town Hall Mtg., Feb. 25, 6 p.m.

MCA and Fire Meetings; Dues

Mission Canyon Association holds its **2009 Annual Meeting** on Tuesday, March 31, this year. Caltrans' Foothill Road construction project is the featured topic. Fleischmann Auditorium, S.B. Natural History Museum, 2559 Puesta del Sol Rd., 6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. meeting. All are welcome.

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The County Fire Department invites residents to a meeting at the Fleischmann Auditorium to discuss **Preparing for Your Next Wildfire** and take questions. That meeting takes place Wednesday, February 25, 6-8 p.m.

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MCA continues its work to make our canyon more fire safe via Forest Service grants, brush clearing goats, tree removal, and working cooperatively with Santa Barbara County Fire, officials, and related groups. MCA's Board of Directors volunteers their time, but items like the parking and benefit district surveys, printing this newsletter, and providing Mutt Mitts on the trails are made possible by residents' dues payments. A dues request will come your way soon, so your payment helps us all.

C A L E N D A R

- Jan. 20** **UniTea Inaugural Ball.** Join Unity Shoppe fundraisers at the Granada Theatre for a rockin' party to celebrate Barack Obama's inauguration as our 44th president, with all proceeds benefiting residents affected by the Tea Fire. Go to UniTeaBall.com, or contact Elvira Avina, Unity Shoppe, 1219 State St., S.B., 93101, (805) 886-0613.
- Jan. 27** **Public hearing on S.B. Botanic Garden's Vital Mission Plan recirculated Draft Environmental Impact Report.** Copies available at sbcountyplanning.org/projects/02NEW-00138/index.cfm, Planning & Development at 123 E. Anapamu St., and Central Public Library. Hearing: 5:30 p.m., Planning Commission Hearing Room, 123 E. Anapamu St. Written comments due February 2, 5 p.m.
- Feb. 3** **MCA Board Meeting.** 7:30 p.m. MacVeagh House, S.B. Museum of Natural History, 2559 Puesta del Sol.
- Feb. 25** **Preparing for Your Next Wildfire.** Meeting organized by County Fire to inform public. Includes Q&A. Fleischmann Auditorium, Natural History Museum, 2559 Puesta del Sol. 6-8 p.m.
- Feb. or Mar.** **County Parking and Traffic Survey.** County Long Range Planning and Mission Canyon Planning Advisory Committee mail their official Parking and Traffic Survey. All residents' responses will inform long-range planning decisions on off-street and on-street parking options like no parking zones, one-way streets, and visitor and trails parking just for starters.
- Mar. 3** **MCA Board Meeting.** 7:30 p.m. MacVeagh House, Natural History Museum.
- Mar. 31** **MCA Annual Meeting.** Discussion of Caltrans Foothill Road project, election of officers. Fleischmann Auditorium, Natural History Museum, 2559 Puesta del Sol. 6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. meeting.
- Apr. 7** **MCA Board Meeting.** 7:30 p.m. MacVeagh House, Natural History Museum.