



San Carlos Wildfire Meetings April 13 and 16, 2019

Questions from Participants and Answers

Awareness/Future Meetings

Q: Can you give a presentation at the Brittan Heights condo association?

- **A:** We have no plans for future meetings on this topic. However, if we were to hold more, they will most likely be with larger groups for logistical reasons. Fortunately, the meeting videos and materials are on the City's website at www.cityofsancarlos.org/wildfire.

Q: Are you planning to expand the meetings to Emerald Hills?

- **A:** Redwood City Fire is planning to have similar meetings in Redwood City.

Q: Can Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) be more present in the community?

- **A:** CERT will be expanding in the near future through a partnership with the County Office of Emergency Services (OES).

Q: Will results or further information regarding exploration of fire cameras be shared in the future?

- **A:** The City Council will discuss option at a future date. Community input is encouraged and will be sought before any cameras are installed.

Clearing Vegetation/Fuels Management/Urban Interface

Q: How do we clean up open space property?

- **A:** Property can only be cleared by the property owner or legal occupant. However, the City of San Carlos will be cleaning up areas of open space it is responsible for. In addition, code violations that are reported can be enforced by the Fire Department. You can reach the Fire Department at (650) 780-7400.

Q: Please share the phone number up on the screen for an urban interface inspection—is that CalFire? City Hall?

- **A:** It is the Redwood City Fire Department at (650) 780-7400.

Q: How do you request a wildland urban interface inspection?

- **A:** The Fire Department conducts these inspections every year; no request is needed. If a violation is found the property owner will be contacted for a correction. If the owner is not contacted, no code violations were noted.

Q: We respect the fact that City/Fire Dept. focus is on public land. What help/direction is available to support prevention efforts on private open space (e.g., Devonshire Canyon)?

- **A:** Many resources are available on the Fire Department website. There are also private companies that can inspect and provide direction for a fee.

Q: Would the Fire Department commence regular fire safety/vulnerability assessment of all canyon-facing properties with recommendations for fuel management and follow-up actions/assessment? How can private owners of Devonshire Canyon be prevailed upon to manage vegetation? We know of one individual who owns 14 acres but does zero maintenance.

- **A:** We conduct Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) inspections and enforce the fire code as needed. Private property owners whose property lines extend down into Devonshire Canyon are only required to clear 100 feet from their structures.

Q: Threat of vegetation on neighbor's property—multiple eucalyptus trees. What can we do about neighbor's house with a lot of brush? Neighbor has a lot of empty boxes-- more than 2 years' worth.

- **A:** Call the Fire Department and report it at (650) 780-7400. We will have a Fire Prevention Officer inspect and enforce as appropriate.

Q: How do we locate/access funds for fuel management?

- **A:** We are not aware of any funding source for private property maintenance.

Q: My neighbor has a tree close to my home. I am concerned about this from a fire standpoint. What can I do?

- **A:** We can inspect it from a fire code point of view. Contact the Fire Department at (650) 780-7400.

Q: Is there someone in the Fire Department who could come to our home to assess the preparedness of the home and surrounding area to protect against fire and to recommend actions to take?

- **A:** The short answer is no, we do not have the capacity to conduct such assessments. However, we will respond to reports of fire code violations.

Q: Our backyard is the open space area. The City of San Carlos owns a sliver of land and there are huge man-planted trees (pine, oak, eucalyptus). Should these trees be removed because of a fire hazard?

- **A:** We would have to conduct a site inspection. Please provide more details about the location.

Q: Is there an entity that can reduce fuel loads in the canyons? I've lived in this area all my life and I haven't seen the brush or trees trimmed in the common areas (not owned by homeowners) and canyons in San Carlos or Belmont. I'm talking about bushes and trees, not grasses.

- **A:** It is the property owner's responsibility. Ownership will need to be determined so that the property owner(s) can be notified.

Q: Is there a City/County ordinance that makes property owners take care of unsafe vegetation?

- **A:** The fire code requires the establishment of defensible space. We can respond to complaints.

Q: What agencies are responsible for fire prevention/suppression in Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve?

- **A:** That area is San Mateo County Fire's (CalFire) area of responsibility. Contact CalFire at (650) 345-1612.

Q: What tree trimmers are certified by PG&E?

- **A:** PG&E doesn't have a list of certified trimmers. You can ask tree trimmers if they are certified to work around high voltage lines.

Evacuation

Q: We live at the Belmont end of Crestview. If we were blocked from going south on Crestview or getting down Club Drive, would we be able to get out via Hallmark, which is normally blocked?

- **A:** This item is currently being discussed with the City of Belmont.

Q: What about the westernmost fence at the watershed which has barbed wire?

- **A:** If Club is blocked, Crestview and Melendy, this is the last resort. We can't prohibit private property owners or other agencies from fencing in their property. If your life is in danger you should do whatever you need to do to survive.

Q: We have neighbors--a board and care home--and their roof is made of shakes, very old and dry. Danger to their residents and caregivers? Danger to our house? We have tar and gravel shingles for our roof and houses are very close together.

- **A:** Older construction, known as legacy construction, is more prone to catching fire. However, if your neighbor's roof was constructed prior to 2008, they are compliant with the fire code and our enforcement options are limited.

Q: How do we deal with cars parked on the road and stops for effective evacuation?

- **A:** Narrow roads do present a problem here in San Carlos. Unfortunately, in many neighborhoods, red zones would have a very negative impact. Early evacuation is key to getting out in areas such as these.

Q: I live on Winding Way, which is a narrow road and with only one exit. What are your recommendations in the event of a fire?

- **A:** With limited options for evacuation, early evacuation is key.

Q: Is there a central place to go to when evacuated?

- **A:** The safer area of town will be along the El Camino corridor. As you prepare your family plan you should select a meeting place that works for you. It will be unknown if evacuation shelters will be set up until a fire event happens. We recommend you sign up for SMC Alert to be advised of options in an emergency.

Q: How would the Fire Department handle big engines and narrow streets like Eaton Avenue with big SUVs parked on both sides of the street?

- **A:** It's situational. Trucks are normally able to get through. If truly blocked, we have smaller vehicles and aircraft available for firefighting.

Q: Is there any technology in use that would be able to help direct through Google or Apple Maps the quickest exit routes in case of a fire? It would overlay so people can see where the fire or hazard is and step by step directions to get the person to safety from where they are.

- **A:** Not yet, but there is some new technology being developed. We will inform the community if this becomes an option.

Q: What about pets?

- **A:** Your pets should be part of your family emergency plan. If shelters are established for an emergency evacuation, each may have its own rules.

Q: Should we leave cars at home and walk to evacuate?

- **A:** Our recommendation would be to use one car to evacuate if possible. If cars cannot make it through, the situation may call for you to evacuate on foot.

Q: How do I find more information about possible evacuation routes? (I live on a cul de sac).

- **A:** With limited options for evacuation, early evacuation is even more important.

Q: Should parking be restricted on narrow portions of Winding Way, Windsor, Manor, etc.?

- **A:** The current placement of red zones allows the Fire Department to enter all of our City streets. During a major incident when an evacuation is occurring, we will have difficulty, but we can also use some of our smaller engines or aircraft to fight the fire.

Q: If it was an emergency and we had to throw a blanket over the SF Watershed barbed wire to head west would we be fined?

- **A:** That would be a question for law enforcement at the time. I would imagine an emergency would be taken into consideration.

Q: Seems like evacuation in the hills will be a huge problem. What are the plans?

- **A:** The plan is to educate community members so that they can form their own individual plans in advance. If a wildfire begins, we will notify the community as quickly as possible through SMC Alert and share the most current information on location and direction of travel of the fire. This will allow residents to use their family plan and leave the area.

General Preparedness

Q: Are there foam pretreatment kits for home use?

- **A:** We are not aware of any.

Q: Where to buy a safe escape ladder from balcony?

- **A:** The Fire Department does not recommend commercially available ladders to escape second floor windows. Make sure you have enough smoke detectors to enable you to evacuate early.

Q: When it is said to “have a plan and practice”, are there instructions on how to practice?

- **A:** Develop your plan and then practice the process you have developed to see if it will work in a real world emergency. Then practice periodically and adjust if needed.

Q: How many minutes should people be tracking to in their practice to ensure it is a realistic plan?

- **A:** The faster the better, but 10 minutes would be a good benchmark.

Q: We have a fire hydrant in front of our house on a cul de sac and there is no hose. How can we get all neighbors to fund the hose?

- **A:** We would not recommend residents use the hydrant for firefighting. We recommend that you evacuate the neighborhood.

Q: Any cost incentives towards upgrades to home improvement projects to incorporate less fire combustible materials?

- **A:** We are not aware of any.

Notification

Q: If I don't have a smart phone, would my cell phone still get a warning?

- **A:** SMC Alert has the ability to provide a recorded message notice.

Q: Can you work with cell phone companies to have them ring in case of an emergency even when on Do Not Disturb?

- **A:** This is already in place as long as emergency notifications are not disabled on your phone.

Q: How do we get text updates for red flag warnings?

- **A:** We send out SMC Alerts on red flag days.

Q: If I am not in charge of managing landscaping since I live in a condo, how can I get the Homeowners Association (HOA) to work together with the Fire Department to manage the defensible space? Do you inspect these properties?

- **A:** The HOA would be responsible for being compliant with the fire code.

Q: Would it be beneficial to clear a fire break—or even build a fire road—on the Cranfield right of way?

- **A:** We believe that normal defensive space in this area is sufficient.

General Information

Q: What are fuel breaks?

- **A:** The removal of combustible vegetation to stop the advancement of fire.

Q: What fuels a fire more--homes or vegetation/trees?

- **A:** It's hard to compare since both are fuel for fires.

Q: Will cities adopt stricter codes regarding building materials that are fireproof?

- **A:** We adopted the current fire code in 2008, which requires fire resistive material in the high fire danger area.