



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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San Bernardino County Agencies Come Together to Prepare Residents

On Tuesday, September 29, the San Bernardino County Fire Department hosted a multi-agency press conference to stress the importance of wildfire preparedness. While the National Weather Service has been warning us of a strong El Nino system this winter, before that occurs our region will experience our usual hot, dry Santa Ana winds through October and November.

"This time of year is when the region historically gets our most intense wildfires, and now is the time to get prepared," stated San Bernardino County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig. "Don't be fooled by the beautiful weather we have been experiencing lately, the Santa Ana winds will blow and we all know how quickly our mountains and deserts dry out. Fuel moisture levels are at an all-time low. One Santa Ana wind event can ignite and spread a fire quickly."

County Fire was joined by the U.S. Forest Service, CalFire, San Bernardino City Fire, the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department, the California Highway Patrol, and Caltrans to discuss not only how each agency is prepared for wildfire season, but how the public can be ready as well. Topics included the Ready, Set, Go program, the newly implemented Red Flag Community Notification program, the fire season outlook, the Telephone Emergency Notification System and the importance of adhering to evacuation notifications.

Last year County Fire implemented a local Red Flag Community Notification Program to warn citizens within the county when conditions for extreme fire danger arise. The Red Flag program is designed to enhance public safety by providing a visual reminder that extreme fire conditions are predicted or present. When the National Weather Service posts a Fire Weather Watch or a Red Flag Warning for our area, a Red Flag will be flown below the American flag at all County Fire stations to serve as a visual reminder that extreme fire weather conditions have been predicted and/or are present.

"I cannot stress the importance of being prepared and vigilant. Now is the time to start clearing the debris from around your home and creating a defensible space," stated Chief Hartwig. "There is ample evidence that the home that doesn't clear the brush can and will cause the destruction of homes that have done the clearing."

CalFire San Bernardino Unit Chief Darren Feldman continued that sentiment and reminded everyone of the dangerous consequences of becoming complacent. He also commented that while officials in San Bernardino County are prepared for an emergency, there are steps the public can also take to avoid a potentially devastating situation.

"As we enter fall, Santa Ana wind conditions can drive fires and can cause destruction to lives and property, especially in Southern California where a majority of our most devastating fires have been wind driven," he stated. "Also, once we enter winter, the potential for more storms and precipitation can bring devastating flooding to areas where a wildfire has burned."

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Already this year there have been five confirmed deaths in the Northern California due to the roaring wildfires. Deputy Chief Bill Lenew from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department was on hand to talk about evacuation orders, his main point being to leave early. The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department works hand in hand with fire agencies to determine when and where residents need to evacuate.

"Don't wait to be told to evacuate. Authorities may not have time to order an evacuation. If you feel threatened, leave on your own," stated Lenew. "In 2003 during the Old Fire, 3 people died because they didn't have enough time to escape the flames."

Chief Lenew added you can find checklists and other helpful tools in the Ready Set Go booklet. Booklets can be found at County Fire's website, www.sbcfire.org. Residents can also sign up for text alerts through the Telephone Emergency Notification System (TENS). In an effort to quickly communicate information on impending dangers, the San Bernardino County Sheriff and Fire Departments send high-speed mass notifications via telephone and text messages. TENS alerts do not generally go out to the entire County but instead are targeted to affected areas.

All of the agencies present and their representatives wanted to make one point very clear; they're ready for a wildfire, are you?

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