



NEWS



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Firefighters extinguish railcar fire northeast of Barstow

Garrett Berghold, Daily Press

Posted: April 24, 2019, 3:03 pm



Firefighters have responded to a cluster of spot fires reported along railroad tracks 40 miles east of Barstow in Afton Canyon. [Daily Press File Photo]

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY — **Firefighters** have extinguished a cluster of fires northeast of Barstow, including one that ignited a Union Pacific railcar transporting a shipping container holding an automobile, authorities said.

As of 1:45 p.m. the fires are out, San Bernardino County Fire Department Capt. Jeremy Kern said.

Dispatch received a report of smoke at 11 a.m about 40 miles east of Barstow along railroad tracks in Afton Canyon, Kern said.

Crews arrived near 44901 Afton Canyon Road just after noon to find a road only accessible to four-wheel-drive vehicles leading to the fires, Kern said. Once on the scene, firefighters found two to three small fires burning and a railcar on fire, he said.

Two engines are on the scene and firefighters have reported the fires out, Kern said, but the battalion chief assigned to the fire has yet to access the fire in person.

Crews from the Bureau of Land Management and the Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow Fire and Emergency Services Division are assisting county fire.

No injuries have been reported.

Kern said the cause of the fire is still unknown.

This story is developing and will be updated when more information becomes available.

<https://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20190424/firefighters-extinguish-railcar-fire-northeast-of-barstow>

Fire Department responds to multi-car crash near Hesperia Walmart

Staff Writer, Victor Valley News

Posted: April 24, 2019



Crash at Main St and Escondido in Hesperia (Photo: Vanessa Hajar for Victor Valley News)

HESPERIA, Calif. (VVNG.com) — The **San Bernardino County Fire** Department responded to a crash with reports of a person trapped Wednesday afternoon.

It happened at about 4:40 p.m. at the intersection of Escondido and Main Street and involved at least three vehicles.

Fire personnel arrived at the incident and located multiple vehicles with minor to moderate damage.

Airbags deployed on two vehicles, a blue compact sedan, and a tan colored Chrysler sedan, one witness told Victor Valley News.

Extrication was not required and only minor injuries were reported.

Commuters traveling through the area should expect delays.

Please check back for updates.

<https://www.vvng.com/fire-department-responds-to-multi-car-crash-near-hesperia-walmart/>

Ongoing bomb scare shuts down Eucalyptus St in Hesperia Wednesday afternoon

Staff Writer, Victor Valley News

Posted: April 25, 2019



Deputies and fire personnel closed off a street after a bomb scare. (Nickole M. for Victor Valley News)

HESPERIA, Calif. (VVNG.com) — An alleged bomb threat forced officials to shut down a stretch of Eucalyptus Street for an ongoing investigation.

At about 4:00 p.m., **San Bernardino County Fire** and Sheriff's responded to the 16500 block of Eucalyptus Street, just west of Third Avenue, reference a strange package.

“A reporting party found an unknown cylinder with fuses coming out of it on the street close to a residence,” Sheriff's Spokesman Edgar Moran told Victor Valley News.

When officials arrived on scene they placed orange cones around the object and requested additional resources.

“Sheriff’s Bombs and Arson was contacted and will be investigating,” Moran stated.

Police are advising members of the community find an alternate route, as the street will be closed for an unknown duration.

This is a breaking news story, please check back for updates.

<https://www.vvng.com/ongoing-bomb-scare-shuts-down-eucalyptus-st-in-hesperia-wednesday-afternoon/>

Young child dies after being struck by vehicle in driveway in Hesperia

Staff Writer, Victor Valley News

Posted: April 24, 2019



(VVNG.com File Photo)

HESPERIA, Calif. (VVNG.com) — The Hesperia Police Department responded to an accident Tuesday afternoon that left a young child dead.

At about 4:50 pm, **San Bernardino County Fire** was dispatched to a home in the 16000 block of Manzanita Street where a boy was struck by a vehicle.

First responders rushed the child to Desert Valley Hospital where despite life-saving measures, he succumbed to his injuries, officials said.

According to a sheriff’s news release, “deputies learned the young child, his parents and grandparents were in the front yard of the residence preparing to leave.

The family entered a sedan driven by a 51-year-old female and drove forward attempting to exit the property. “Unbeknownst to the driver, the child was out of view and was struck,” officials said.

Investigators with the Major Accident Investigation Team (MAIT) are investigating the collision. Anyone with information pertinent to this case contact the Hesperia Police Department at (760)947-1500.

<https://www.vvng.com/young-child-dies-after-being-struck-by-vehicle-in-driveway-in-hesperia/>

One Phelan Carjacking Suspect, Second Remains at Large

Staff Writer, 24/7 Headline News

Posted: April 24, 2019

PHELAN, Calif. – One armed carjacking suspect is behind bars, while the second suspect remains at large, authorities said.

Deputies responded to the Stater Bros Parking lot, located at 4059 Phelan Road in Phelan for the report of a carjacking at around 11:55 p.m. on Monday, April 22, 2019. The 48-year-old male victim told deputies that two white adult male suspects approached him and asked for a ride and money. He refused to give them a ride and told them that he did not have any cash. One of the suspects brandished a handgun, then both of the suspect got into the victim's vehicle and drove away. They fled heading east in the victim's 2000 Mercedes SUV.

Less than an hour later, at 12:20 a.m., a car fire was reported at the intersection of Sundown Drive and Lime Road in Phelan. Deputies and **San Bernardino County Firefighters** responded to a fully engulfed in flames. The vehicle was determined to be the victim's vehicle. Shoe impressions in the dirt led deputies to a home on Sundown Drive. Deputies made contact with the residents and Justin Willis, 32, of Phelan, was arrested for the carjacking and warrants. Jesse Rogers, 21, of Lake Havasu, is also a suspect but fled out the backdoor on foot when deputies arrived.

Justin Willis was booked at High Desert Detention Center where he is being held in lieu of \$300,000.00 bail. Deputies are asking for the public's assistance in locating Jesse Bransford Rogers. Willis was arrested in January 2019, for the theft of an off-road vehicle.

Anyone with information regarding this crime is urged to contact Detective J. Collins at Victor Valley Sheriff's Station, Phelan Sub-Station, (760) 9 95-8781. Persons wishing to remain anonymous can report information to WeTip by calling 1-800-78-CRIME, or by accessing the website at www.wetip.com.

<https://247headline.com/one-phelan-carjacking-suspect-second-remains-at-large/>

Many California towns lack wildfire evacuation plans

Damon Arthur, The Washington Post

Posted: April 25, 2019

PARADISE, California — Wildfire surrounded Darrel Wilken and the three hospital patients in his car. But instead of evacuating Paradise, they were stuck in traffic along with thousands of others.

Cars burned in front of them. Trees, homes and buildings exploded into flames as the gusting firestorm destroyed nearly everything around them.

Wilken, a nurse, knew about Paradise's evacuation plan, which includes route maps and zones. But the speed and intensity of the fire forced him to improvise, he said.

Despite the tragic outcome of that day in November 2018 and the confusion faced by people like Wilken, the city's careful planning made a difference, Paradise Mayor Jody Jones insists.

“I don’t know that you could ever prepare for something like what happened here. It was just so fast,” Jones said. “But we were not caught flat-footed. We did know what to do. Our people knew what to do, and it did save lives.”

ADVERTISING

Counter-intuitive as it may sound, Paradise has some of the strongest evacuation planning in California. In fact, a USA TODAY Network-California survey of communities at high risk from wildfire found only 22% (including Paradise) have a robust, publicly available evacuation plan.

The scale of disaster in the Camp Fire was unprecedented, but the scene of people fleeing wildfire was familiar, repeated numerous times over the past three years up and down California from Redding and Paradise to Santa Rosa, Ventura and Malibu.

In many of those communities, motorists became stuck in traffic as officials tried to evacuate thousands onto a few roads leading away from the flames.

NO REQUIREMENT TO PLAN

The 85 deaths and nearly 19,000 buildings destroyed in Paradise’s Camp Fire made it the deadliest and most destructive blaze in California history. Eight of those who perished were found in their vehicles, with two others found outside near vehicles.

In some spots, burned-out and abandoned vehicles lined roads leading out of town.

But none of that has created a detectable sense of urgency for more evacuation planning.

Using Cal Fire’s designation of wildfire risks across the state, the USA TODAY Network-California requested evacuation plans from 27 communities at greatest risk of fire.

One group consisted of the 15 most populous communities where 95% or more of residents live in very high hazard areas for wildfires ; the other group included the 15 places with the highest sheer number of residents living in that riskiest zone. Three communities appeared on both lists.

Reporters contacted officials in each of those 27 communities, and filed document requests under the California Public Records Act with those that refused to release plans.

They found that fewer than one in four, just 22%, have a robust evacuation plan that is available to the public.

California does not require communities to plan for wildfire evacuations . And while experts recommend cities and counties develop evacuation plans, there is disagreement over what should be included in those plans.

Tom Cova is a University of Utah geography professor who has done extensive research on environmental hazards, emergency management, transportation, and geographic information science.

Cova said he doesn’t understand why communities wouldn’t do more evacuation planning.

“To me, it says, one, communities are complacent or ignorant of the risks, and two, it’s a failure on the part of local and state governments to not require them (certainly for the highest hazard communities),” Cova said in an email.

Jones, the Paradise mayor, said other communities around the state in high fire hazard areas should learn a lesson from what happened in her town.

“Have a plan, an evacuation plan,” she said. “You’re going to have tragedy if you don’t have a plan.”

But some emergency officials say fires are too unpredictable for that.

Evacuation areas depend on the fire itself and what areas or neighborhoods it is threatening, said Paul Lowenthal, assistant fire marshal and public information officer for Santa Rosa.

He acknowledged the difficulty of evacuating tens of thousands of residents during the Tubbs Fire in October 2017, when between 80,000 and 100,000 residents were evacuated and Highway 101 was clogged.

Lowenthal said evacuation plans may be helpful in communities with few roads in and out. But in communities like Santa Rosa, where there are more options, he believes they aren’t needed.

“Conditions dictate the extent and need for evacuations,” Lowenthal said.

FIRE EVERYWHERE

Paradise had detailed evacuation plans that had worked in the past, including in 2017, Jones said. The evacuation plan breaks the town into 14 zones. Residents living in each zone evacuate depending on where the fire is located.

The plan is mailed to every home in Paradise each year. The community even practiced evacuating, she said.

But the Camp Fire, which broke out the morning of Nov. 8, 2018, was different. It was “everywhere” by the time it got to Paradise, Jones said.

“The plan was never for the whole town to evacuate at once, so I’m not sure I would say it went according to plan because the evacuation plan we had was predicated on evacuation by zones in a very orderly manner,” Jones said.

“And the entire town, because of the wind, the embers were coming in everywhere all at once, so we had fires all over town and the entire town was evacuating at one time, which is going to overrun your transportation system.

“I don’t care what town you are, where you live or how big your streets are. They’re not sized to take the entire population at one time,” she said.

City and county officials had planned on having motorists evacuate via the five two-lane roads and one four-lane road leading out of town. But fire forced officials to close three of those routes, further clogging the remaining roads, Jones said.

Still, Jones is convinced the evacuation plan and residents' familiarity with it saved lives.

"People were aware. In Paradise, you had fire every year. You had evacuations every year, usually by zone. People knew what to do, so that was helpful," she said.

Without that, she said, the situation would have been even more chaotic.

Wilken, the nurse, said he had been through two previous evacuations in Paradise. Both went more smoothly, but the Camp Fire was different.

"It just happened too quickly. It was a blitzkrieg of fire, and no one was prepared for that," Wilken said.

SECRET PLANS

When USA TODAY Network-California reporters contacted community leaders and emergency managers around the state, some claimed they do have plans but refused to make them available.

Reporters submitted requests for copies of evacuation plans in March to Los Angeles, El Dorado and San Bernardino counties through the California Public Records Act.

Emily Montanez, a senior program manager with the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management, said the evacuation report is not available to the public because it contains sensitive information about the sheriff's office main station and substations.

Los Angeles County later released a copy of the evacuation plan after it received a public records request for the document.

In **San Bernardino County**, the sheriff's and **fire** departments have developed evacuation plans, but "the information is not public record because of the possibility of someone using that information to hamper evacuations during an emergency," said Scott Vanhorne, a spokesman for a county supervisor.

However, in response to a USA TODAY Network public records request, county officials two days later provided 851 pages of documents.

While the documents referred to the roles and responsibilities of various agencies during emergency evacuations, they did not include a separate appendix on evacuations.

The county also did not provide the evacuation plan for the communities of Lake Arrowhead, Crestline and Running Springs — three communities where at least 95% of residents live in very high hazard areas for wildfires.

El Dorado County officials also initially refused to release information about evacuation plans that would cover Pollock Pines, one of the 15 largest communities in the state where more than 95% of residents live in a very high hazard zone for wildfire.

"I confirmed with the (lieutenant) for our (emergency services) division that we do not release our emergency plan, for obvious security reasons," wrote El Dorado County Sheriff's Sgt. Anthony Prencepe, in an email response. He did not elaborate on those reasons.

Then, in response to a Public Records Act request, the county provided one page from its emergency operations plan that refers to evacuations. Three paragraphs on that page were blacked out.

El Dorado County officials also provided several pages of what it called evacuation plans for the area of Mosquito and Swansboro roads near Placerville, but those consisted mostly of general instructions to residents on how to prepare themselves.

WHAT IS AN EVACUATION PLAN?

The detail and quality of evacuation plans vary from community to community across the state.

“One of the more impressive” evacuation plans, according to researcher Cova, was developed by San Diego County and is included as a 76-page appendix to its emergency operations plan.

The evacuation plan is a “regional, 50,000-foot view of evacuation planning” not intended to replace on-the-spot decision making in specific emergencies, said Alex Bell, a spokeswoman for San Diego County.

The county’s evacuation plan was born out of the lessons learned from evacuating New Orleans residents during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, as well as hurricanes Irma and Harvey in 2017.

San Diego’s evacuation plan also contains estimates on the number of residents within communities in the county who may require evacuation assistance, sheltering, transportation and help with pet evacuation.

It provides general evacuation routes and road capacities, county-wide shelter capacities, resources available locally and through mutual aid and access considerations for people with disabilities.

There is “all sort of disagreement out there” about what makes a viable evacuation plan, said Tim Haney, professor of sociology and director of the Centre for Community Disaster Research at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta.

He looks for:

- Distinctions between what’s needed for slow- vs. fast-onset disaster.
- Plans for the vulnerable: low-income, elderly, disabled, those without a vehicle, etc. The plan should note where those populations are concentrated relative to the hazard and what kind of transportation they’ll need.
- A plan for what to do when people don’t hear the evacuation order, don’t trust it or choose not to evacuate. Will uniformed officers knock on doors, and if so how will that be staffed and organized?
- An estimate of the number of people who will need shelter while they are evacuated and where those shelters will be set up. A plan also should identify sources of food, toiletries, etc. Shelter plans should be set up in a way to minimize risk of gendered violence. Shelter plans should also accommodate pets.
- Assurance that emergency social services such as mental health services will be available and evacuees will know how to get those services.

“A successful evacuation is basically a chain of events that must happen smoothly and if any one link in the chain breaks, the plan fails,” Cova said.

A PATCHWORK APPROACH

State law doesn't require evacuation plans. City and county authorities can decide whether to have one, said Mark Pazin, chief of law enforcement for the California Office of Emergency Services.

“Nothing is mandated, but it's highly advisable, given the drama we've seen up and down the state,” Pazin said.

Nine of the 27 communities surveyed for this story are in Los Angeles County, which has an evacuation plan within its overall emergency operations plan, but those plans aren't readily available to the public.

Los Angeles County released a copy of its evacuation plan in response to a public records request from the USA Today Network.

The 73-page evacuation plan is part of the county's Operational Area Emergency Response Plan.

While the plan was not available without a public records request, it begins by addressing the “officials, employees and residents of Los Angeles County.”

Two Los Angeles County communities, Malibu and Topanga Canyon, have individual evacuation plans that are posted on the internet.

Three communities in San Bernardino County — Lake Arrowhead, Crestline and Running Springs — are covered under the agency's evacuation plan for the mountain communities in an area stretching from Crestline to Big Bear, said Glenn Barley, San Bernardino County unit chief for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

While evacuation routes are posted online, the complete evacuation plan for Crestline, Running Springs and Lake Arrowhead is not publicly available, Barley said.

Two other communities on the list — Magalia and Paradise — have posted evacuation plans online.

The city of Glendale's 2008 emergency plan identifies nine brush fire zones in neighborhoods near the mountains.

Each of the zones includes a population figure and notes about narrow roads or remote neighborhoods with restricted access. The plan cautions that such road conditions could lead to problems for emergency responders as well as people evacuating.

“I looked at that and I don't know if there is a problem. I wouldn't call that a problem, maybe a concern,” said Dan Bell, a spokesman for the city.

Bell said the city has updated the plans but declined to release those newer documents. He said the plans do not list solutions or steps the city is taking to address road obstacles in the brush fire zones.

While officials in Sonoma, Shasta and Ventura counties evacuated tens of thousands of residents from wildfires over the past three years, those counties also do not have evacuation plans.

‘CONCERN WITH THAT PRE-PLANNED STUFF’

Kevin McGowan, assistant director of emergency services for Ventura County, said fires are too unpredictable to plan for evacuations: You don’t know where they will start and you don’t know where they’ll go.

“Our concern with that pre-planned stuff is that it doesn’t lend itself to that dynamic decision-making process,” McGowan said.

He said when fires break out firefighters and law enforcement personnel are authorized to make decisions about evacuations quickly based on current conditions.

“We built a culture in Ventura County to evaluate evacuation needs right away,” he said.

Planning out evacuations ahead of time would be very hard to do, he said.

“It’s not something you can just have written and on the shelf and then just pull it out. It doesn’t work that way with wildfires,” McGowan said.

Ventura County officials do evacuation planning for tsunamis, but emergency planners know where a tsunami will come from. Those evacuation plans are available online, McGowan said.

As far as traffic congestion during evacuations, McGowan said evacuation plans aren’t likely to solve that problem.

“Every single one of these really large fires had traffic congestion,” McGowan said. However, it wasn’t gridlock, he said.

“There’s absolutely no evacuation in the history of the world that is going to go absolutely seamless,” McGowan said.

Evacuation plans are helpful for “well-defined hazards such as a tsunami or dam failure,” said Briana Khan, a spokeswoman for Sonoma County.

Wildfire evacuation plans also may help smaller communities but not larger ones, she said. Plus, there’s the cost.

“Most communities in California do not have wildfire evacuation plans due to the need to expend resources in addressing other hazards such as flooding or earthquakes,” Khan said.

However, she said, Sonoma County is interested in developing evacuation planning for its most at-risk communities.

“Although we do not have a definite timeline in place for delivering and exercising these plans, the county is very aware of — and is counting on — the significant community interest in this subject,” Khan said.

Since the 2017 fires, officials also have begun sending out emergency warnings and calling for evacuations earlier, she said.

Haney, the Mt. Royal University researcher, said the success of an evacuation plan rests on several things: effective communication, whether a community trusts its local government, resources available to residents and geography.

The trend among emergency managers is to develop evacuation plans for many different types of disasters — hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, fires, etc. — rather than a single evacuation plan for each, Haney said.

“It’s really about imagining the different scenarios — making plans flexible enough to fit many different disaster types,” Haney said.

“Things that never happened before happen all the time,” he said.

What happened during the Camp Fire in 2018 had happened before, although on a smaller scale, said Jones, the Paradise mayor.

Because of evacuation problems during a 2008 wildfire, Paradise and county officials drew up evacuation plans that include evacuation zones and routes, she said.

“We had terrible traffic jams (in 2008) and from that we developed an evacuation plan,” Jones said.

But Jones takes away a different lesson than emergency leaders in other parts of California. She doesn’t see the Camp Fire deaths as a sign that planning is futile. Quite the opposite.

“(Eighty-five) deaths is a lot and it’s terrible, but our residents knew what to do,” she said.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/fleeing-fire-common-in-california-evacuation-plans-arent/2019/04/23/4d5393ae-661c-11e9-a698-2a8f808c9cfb_story.html?utm_term=.edcc488644b2