



NEWS



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A year after major fires, lessons and takeaways by those involved

Shea Johnson, Daily Press

Posted: August 18, 2017, 4:37 PM



Smoke blankets the sky during the Bluecut Fire last August. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

A year ago, back-to-back roaring fires born in or near the Cajon Pass tested the resolve of the region, requiring a hurried and decisive response to alarming blazes that ultimately would char nearly 45,000 acres.

A diverse deputation of responders were called upon in the interest of public safety, with some fighting the fires at ground zero and others providing the ancillary services that often get overlooked.

Reflecting on their roles during the Pilot and Bluecut fires, individuals from an assortment of agencies and groups recently told the Daily Press about their biggest takeaways and lessons learned over the course of the two weeks last August that put a region on edge.

“The big thing is, and we try real hard to do this, to make sure that we’re in unified command and we have a captain who’s free enough so he can stay in unified command. I think every one of these big events just reinforces that that’s a good thing.” — San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Lt. Patrick O’Brien

Unified command essentially engages representatives from multiple involved agencies, including forestry, fire and law enforcement, who work in lock-step to ensure efficient communication and consensus in critical decision making.

O’Brien, who’s been with the department for 29 years, was part of the Department Operations Center during both fires.

“One of our takeaways is because we didn’t have equal numbers of trained people in different positions in both (desert and valley) areas, one of our takeaways is (to) have people trained in both areas who can do everything.” — San Bernardino County Red Cross spokeswoman Georgia Duncan

The Red Cross played a critical part in operating shelters, particularly the much-needed location at Sultana High School during the Bluecut Fire, but their desert and valley divisions were cut off by the Cajon Pass shutdown and the snarled traffic on other corridors through the mountains.

There were more than 200 “resilient” volunteers between both divisions during the fires, with more bodies and logistical-savvy volunteers in the desert, Duncan said. The Red Cross has since made cross-training volunteers in both divisions a priority so logistics and mass care skills are equally divided between the two, she added.

“We have to quickly switch from ‘fun and event mode’ into an ‘evacuation or emergency mode’ and make sure everything’s ready. I think we can always do better and we learn from every circumstance we’re in. I think one of the key takeaways is the constant state of preparation and readiness.” — San Bernardino County Fair CEO Geoff Hinds

The fairgrounds’ large, open space and ready infrastructure make it a key facility during large-scale emergencies. It acted as a command center and emergency animal shelter during the fires.

Hinds said while the Bluecut Fire “overwhelmed our initial abilities,” including running out of equipment for animals, Fair personnel and the community stepped up to ensure the facility could adequately meet the needs required by the emergency.

“We bent but we never broke,” he added. “We emerged from it stronger. Now we continue to prepare, we learn, we evaluate, we’re a better organization and better to support the community because what we learned.”

He also said the Fair has since established a more cohesive plan moving forward, which will continue to evolve.

“We learned the best ways to care for animals that are in shock, scared, who’ve been lifted from their barns and brought to somewhere that is very unfamiliar.” — Dave Gross, volunteer coordinator at fairground’s emergency animal shelter

More than 400 animals at the fairgrounds were handled, fed, calmed and safely returned to owners. Gross said volunteers acquired new techniques to feed the animals and to keep themselves going through long, uncertain days. He added that volunteers now have a 40-foot container full of supplies, ready for the next major emergency.

“The biggest challenge the city faced was communicating with federal fire authorities in determining appropriate boundaries for the evacuation zones.”— Hesperia city spokeswoman Rachel Molina

The Pilot Fire quickly resulted in over 5,300 evacuation orders for homes in southeast Hesperia and mountain communities. More than 82,000 residents were ordered to evacuate during the Bluecut Fire, including in parts of southwest Hesperia.

Molina said the city believed it would have been beneficial for federal authorities to consult officials in Hesperia before evacuation zones were identified.

During both incidents, the city activated its Emergency Operations Center and city employees responded after hours and on weekends to set up and hold road closures to help care for evacuated animals. Working with **County Fire**, the Sheriff’s Department and Red Cross, Molina said the city learned it was “well prepared” to address disasters in Hesperia and neighboring jurisdictions.

"(One) takeaway is seeing that the advanced preparation homeowners took with the Ready, Set, Go program really worked." — County Fire spokesman Eric Sherwin

The program teaches residents to harden their homes to the dangers of wildfires and Sherwin said those preventative measures were in play during the fires, although another of his biggest takeaways was also one of the most frustrating.

"Despite our best effort," he said, "some people are going to ignore all of the warnings and refuse to evacuate and subsequently place themselves and public safety officials in a dangerous position that could have been avoided."

Overall, he most recalled the courageous acts of firefighters who took a stand on multiple instances to save residents' homes throughout the West Cajon Valley. The Bluecut Fire, which destroyed an estimated 105 homes, drew at its peak more than 2,680 personnel to fight it.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20170818/year-after-major-fires-lessons-and-takeaways-by-those-involved>

Bad fire season predicted, authorities call for safety preparation

Rene Ray De La Cruz, Daily Press

Posted: August 18, 2017, 5:48 PM

HESPERIA — Fire officials believe the phrase "creating defensible space" is not a suggestion, but an action essential to improving a home's chance of surviving a wildfire.

Tracey Martinez, spokeswoman for the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**, told the Daily Press the upcoming fire season looks like a bad one and property owners should take safety measures in case of a wildfire.

"Rain is always a double-edged sword for us — we get beautiful growth in the spring, which turns into dry vegetation and fuel for fire," Martinez said. "The warm Santa Ana winds and dry vegetation make for a dangerous combination, especially in September in October. We need to be prepared."

With over thousands of acres burned already, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein said California could be in for a severe wildfire season and Max Mortiz, a fire ecology expert at the University of California, Berkeley, told Time he anticipates fire conditions this year will be "not unlike what we saw last year."

No homes were lost in last year's Pilot Fire near Hesperia, but more than 100 homes and more than 200 other structures were destroyed by the Bluecut Fire, which burned more than 36,000 acres.

"Creating that 100-foot buffer between a building and vegetation is one of many ways property owners can protect their homes," Martinez said. "Along the foothill areas, we're seeing more and more properties with defensible space. We're also seeing a lot of properties that have not been cleared."

Martinez said creating a defensible space also involves trimming trees/bushes, cleaning out debris, removing dead vegetation, removing pine needles, keeping the height of weeds and grass to 4 inches or less, and keeping foliage and limbs 6 feet above ground for trees over 12 feet in height.

According to Martinez, some plants present more of a fire hazard than others, such juniper, manzanita, spanish broom, chamise and greasewood. Plants that pose less of a fire risk include vinca, lilac, and ornamental trees.

“Property owners should keep plant spacing in mind — a rule of thumb is keeping plants apart by one-half to two-times the height of the plant,” Martinez said. “And even though the shade is nice, planting trees close to one another or to a house is not a good idea.”

Martinez said firewood should be stacked tightly and be located 30 feet from structures, and property owners should consider using non-combustible fence material.

“Keep in mind, embers can travel 1 to 2 miles and many times end up in small vents or on the roofline of homes,” Martinez said. “Some residents are using flame and ember resistant vents, and using fire resistant roofing materials.”

Property owners have the option of installing a roof-mounted sprinkler system that emits a water-based flame retardant or applying protective gels and foams, said Martinez, who added the options are “smart,” but most gels only last a few hours.

“Many people hose down their properties before a fire, but we don’t recommend they stay when the fire is approaching,” Martinez said. “If it’s unsafe or we call for an evacuation, then it’s time to leave your property and head to safety.”

Martinez told the Daily Press arson activity has recently increased and authorities are asking for the public’s help in reporting suspicious activity by calling 800-472-7766.

A former fire explorer from Yucaipa was arrested earlier this month for allegedly starting eight wildfires in the San Bernardino Mountains over the last two months, including the Bryant Fire II on Aug. 3, which burned over 325 acres.

For fire safety resources and information, or to download the “Ready, Set, Go! Personal Wildfire Action Plan,” visit www.sbcfire.org.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20170818/bad-fire-season-predicted-authorities-call-for-safety-preparation>

Pomona Valley Hospital personnel get training on new helipad

Monica Rodriguez, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Posted: August 18, 2017, 8:09 PM



Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center staff take part in onsite training atop the new helipad at the hospital Friday August 11, 2017. The new helipad, which is atop a new parking structure at the hospital, is expected to be fully functional in approximately one month and is located next to the emergency and trauma center. WILL LESTER — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

POMONA >> Periodically, the sound of a helicopter fills the air around Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center.

Helicopters from various fire, air ambulance and law enforcement agencies have been landing on the helipad on top of the hospital's five-story parking structure.

The landings are part of Federal Aviation Administration-required training for hospital personnel, said Stephanie Raby, director of Pomona Valley's trauma and acute care surgery services.

About 200 hospital employees are undergoing training that prepares them to carry out their duties in and around the helicopters, she said.

The construction of the helipad is one of the improvements Pomona Valley has made as part of becoming a trauma center. The hospital received the trauma center designation March 1 when it began accepting ambulances transporting trauma patients to its emergency department.

Among those going through the training are doctors, emergency department nurses and technicians, along with doctors, nurses and technicians who are part of the hospital's maternal and neonatal intensive care unit transport teams. Members of the hospital's security and maintenance departments also must participate in the training.

The training provides an opportunity for the various agencies to get a feel for landing at the hospital and its flight paths, said Richard Tadeo, assistant director of the Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services Agency.

"It's a good exercise," he said.

So far, helicopters from the Los Angeles County Fire Department, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Mercy Air, REACH Air Medical Services, which has a base in Upland, **San Bernardino County Fire Department**, Pomona Police Department and Los Angeles City Fire Department have had helicopters land at the hospital's helipad, which was completed in the spring.

Los Angeles City Fire pilots have flown to the hospital to familiarize themselves with the area should there ever be a large-scale multiple-casualty incident, Raby said.

Pomona Valley has obtained the permits and authorization required before patients are to be flown to the hospital, Tadeo said.

The last permit the hospital is awaiting is the city's occupancy permit for the parking structure, said Frank Garcia, hospital spokesman. That is expected to be issued once some minor details are completed.

Once that permit is issued, the hospital will be ready to accept patients via helicopter, he said.

Training is expected to continue into next month.

Currently, the hospital is conducting training with a temporary occupancy permit, Raby said.

Los Angeles County Fire Department personnel are glad to have the hospital designated as a trauma center and to have the new helipad.

"We're excited about it," said Los Angeles County Fire Capt. Erich Goetz, with the department's Emergency Medical Services Bureau.

The eastern end of Los Angeles County needed a trauma center for a very long time, he said.

Having the trauma center at Pomona Valley and the helipad will mean it will receive patients who were involved in accidents or who find themselves in urgent need of medical care while in the nearby mountains, Goetz said.

Pomona Valley availability will cut the distance fire personnel must travel to get a patient to a trauma center, he said.

Currently, patients can go to Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center in Los Angeles.

"The ultimate goal is to get a patient to the appropriate medical center in the shortest amount of time. This helps us achieve that goal," Goetz said.

Since it began receiving trauma patients in March, the area that the hospital receives patients from has grown.

As of April 1, the catchment area, the area the hospital serves, increased significantly. Pomona Valley is receiving patients from the 605 Freeway east to the county line, Raby said.

There is one area in which the catchment area of Pomona Valley and Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center overlap. That area is bound by the 605 Freeway on the west, Azusa Avenue on the east, the 210 Freeway on the north and the 60 Freeway on the south, Tadeo said.

Paramedics will determine which trauma center to take patients to based on traffic conditions, he said.

It is faster to take a patient to Pomona Valley in the morning and to Los Angeles County-USC in the afternoon, Tadeo said.

Trauma patients from some nearby San Bernardino County cities are also making their way to Pomona Valley.

First responders are transporting trauma patients from Montclair, Upland, Chino and Chino Hills to Pomona Valley, Raby said.

The closest San Bernardino County trauma center for those cities is Arrowhead Regional Medical Center in Colton. Taking patients to Pomona Valley can save time.

The decision where to take a patient is based on “what’s in the best interest of patient care,” Raby said. Dr. Michael Jimenez, Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center’s trauma medical director, said that in the slightly more than five months that the hospital has been accepting ambulances transporting trauma patients it has been able to save many lives.

One case that stands out is one in which a young man was the victim of a gunshot that did significant internal damage in his chest.

Paramedics rushed him to the hospital, but a minute after arriving he essentially died, Jimenez said. Because Pomona Valley is now a trauma center and has expert surgeons and other medical professionals on-site, the patient was immediately taken to surgery where the damage was repaired.

Two weeks later, the patient was able to walk out of the hospital and return home, Jimenez said.

Had Pomona Valley’s trauma center not existed, the patient would have been flown to Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center.

But, “There’s no way he makes it to USC,” Jimenez said.

Pomona Valley is now in a better position to do more for trauma patients.

“It’s the fact you are ready and available to handle the worst,” Jimenez said.

Once the helipad goes into service, the work does not end, Raby said.

In about a year, the hospital’s trauma center will be the subject of a visit from representatives of the American College of Surgeons, the body that approves and grants the trauma center designation.

The representatives will return and evaluate the hospital’s trauma center, its patient care, outcomes and other areas, Tadeo said.

Pomona Valley has the trauma center designation, “but typically you bring the college back as part of ongoing monitoring” since it recently joined the Los Angeles County network of trauma centers, he said.

Eventually, the trauma center will be the subject of visits by college representatives every three years, Tadeo said.

<http://www.dailybulletin.com/health/20170818/pomona-valley-hospital-personnel-get-training-on-new-helipad>

Former Ontario fire chief suing city, alleging discriminatory hiring practices

Rob McMillan, ABC 7 News

Posted: August 18, 2017, 8:19 PM

ONTARIO, Calif. (KABC) --

Floyd Clark worked for more than 30 years in the Ontario City Fire Department before he said he was forced to retire.

Now he's suing, alleging discrimination and harassment, saying the department is infected with a culture of dishonesty and racial degradation.

According to Clark, not one African-American firefighter has been hired since 1986.

"There is a systemic problem with respect to hiring practice, promotion practice and all those things within the city of Ontario," said Clark.

Bradley Mancuso is the attorney representing Clark. "It's pretty rare to see a work environment go 30 years without hiring an individual of color, I mean that's amazing to me, I've never heard of that," said Mancuso.

Clark said when he was promoted to fire chief in 2011, he tried to make the fire department more racially diverse.

It was a priority he claims wasn't shared by management. Clark recalled a conversation he had with the city manager.

"When I retire there will be no African-Americans on the Ontario Fire Department. Doesn't that mean something?" And I can't recall the exact verbiage, but it was like, "That's just not important right now, let's just move on," Clark said.

ABC7 filed a public records request with the city of Ontario. In its response, the city said they only retain equal opportunity employment records for three years.

But of the 196 people currently in the fire department, not one identified themselves as African-American.

By comparison, the city of Riverside's fire department has 234 personnel. Of those, 10 are African-Americans.

As for the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**, there are 31 African-Americans on its force of more than 1,000.

"That's been one of our biggest struggles, when you look at the community overall, versus the applicant pool, it doesn't match."

Deputy Chief Don Trapp said they reach out to high schools and colleges, but he said they still struggle with the number of African-Americans who even apply.

"Why don't more minorities apply? That's the million-dollar question, and I wish I had an answer for that," said Trapp.

As for the lawsuit in Ontario, the city gave ABC7 this statement: "The City cannot comment on ongoing

litigation and/or personnel matters. With that said, the City of Ontario is committed to promoting and encouraging diversity, inclusiveness and equal opportunity. We are not going to try Mr. Clark's patently false claims in the media, and look forward to disproving them in court."

"I'm hoping justice will be served, and when I say that I mean the city of Ontario and its fire department will take a serious look at its hiring and promotion practices," said Clark.

The City of Ontario and Al Boling deny all the allegations and are asking the judge to throw the case out on legal grounds. They claim Clark's allegations from 1986 to May of 2015 are barred by the statute of limitations.

Boling is invoking immunity from liability for his discretionary acts performed within the scope of his authority as city manager.

<http://abc7.com/former-ontario-fire-chief-suing-city-alleging-discriminatory-hiring/2324016/>

When Cajon Pass shuts down, officials don't take it lightly

Shea Johnson, Daily Press

Posted: August 19, 2017, 1:18 PM



A view of the Bluecut fire from Interstate 15 in the Cajon Pass last August. A wildfire with a ferocity never seen before by veteran California firefighters raced up and down canyon hillsides, instantly engulfing homes and forcing thousands of people to flee, some running for their lives just ahead of the flames. [Alex Gallardo, Associated Press]

In the Cajon Pass, the paramount thoroughfare of the region connecting the desert and the valley, even seemingly the slightest of interruptions can cause considerable strife for motorists.

So when lanes must be reduced, whether for construction, accidents or large-scale emergencies, officials do not take it lightly. On a typical day, up to 160,000 vehicles travel Interstate 15 through the Pass, and more than one-eighth of them are big rigs.

On rare occasions, as occurred last August during the Bluecut Fire, the entire roadway must be shut down and the High Desert suddenly feels isolated. On Aug. 16, 2016, the more than 36,000-acre blaze started innocuously enough in the Pass, but quickly spread out of control into the fifth-largest wildfire that California would see that year.

I-15 was shut down in both directions.

“That was the biggest fire incident with the longest freeway closure I’ve ever experienced,” said California Highway Patrol spokesman Michael Mumford, who’s been with the agency for nine years.

Mumford, himself, spent more than 12 hours diverting traffic at Main Street ramps. As a Victorville CHP officer, he and his fellow officers have jurisdiction up to Oak Hills. Everything in the Pass and on the valley side is handled by the San Bernardino office.

CHP has the authority to make the call when to close lanes on the freeway and, in this instance, the guardrail post near the Bluecut’s source had burned and the guardrail was on the road, according to Mumford.

It was an irrefutable decision at that point, particularly considering the blaze’s fast rate of spread and the smoke drifting across the freeway limiting visibility. Sacramento and Caltrans were notified and unified command, a joint effort among multiple agencies including law enforcement and fire, was commenced.

“We were tasked to keep the roadway shut down and give alternate routes for motorists,” Mumford said. “The No. 1 problem was commuters trying to go up and down the freeway ... Obviously, not everyone’s going to be happy.”

Hotels and shelters in the region booked up quickly as local and non-local motorists were stranded.

CHP also assisted San Bernardino County Sheriff's officials escorting motorists in Phelan into and out of their properties to obtain medication or to feed animals.

"I would say, by the second day at least 50 percent of the traffic had been alleviated" on I-15 by using alternative routes, he said, crediting Caltrans alerts and the media coverage of work-arounds as contributing factors.

The northbound freeway restrictions were lifted that night and southbound closures were revoked the next morning, the third day of the fire.

For both CHP and Caltrans, the authorities over the freeway, moving traffic is a top priority only behind safety.

"We get pressure from Sacramento to get the highway re-opened to the traveling public," Caltrans spokeswoman Terri Kasinga said, "and to get it open as soon as possible."

Caltrans crews work on removing debris from the road, whether it be brush or guardrail, and alerting the public on available detours.

Kasinga said that one of the biggest lessons learned as major emergencies have reared in past years is not to detour traffic through the mountains; it's a lengthy route where traffic builds quickly and it becomes difficult to evacuate in the event of secondary incidents.

During the Bluecut, CHP advised motorists to avoid Highway 138 as several big rigs blocked lanes on the highway in Crestline, unable to navigate the sharp turns.

The threat of fire burning in the vicinity and parking lot-like traffic conditions make alternative arterial connections a dicey proposition even as logjams are present elsewhere.

There have been preliminary talks in the past of connecting Cajon Boulevard to Highway 138, but the projected massive undertaking never got off the ground, Kasinga said. Railroad and environmental issues are serious concerns.

"We take away lessons from every incident whether it's large or small," she said. "The biggest thing is communication."

For the CHP's Victorville station, they were initially faced with not having enough manpower to oversee the closures that were required at the fire's onset, but they received assistance from other stations.

The problem in the days following were a bit different: As overseers in unincorporated Phelan, CHP officers were regularly receiving calls for horses, without collars, on the loose.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20170819/when-cajon-pass-shuts-down-officials-dont-take-it-lightly>

Fire insurance: A ‘hit-and-miss situation’

Rene Ray De La Cruz, Daily Press

Posted: August 19, 2017, 1:20 PM



HESPERIA — Residents who live in fire-prone areas say paying for and obtaining fire insurance has been a hit-and-miss situation over the years.

Roberta Lawrence, who lives in Oak Hills, would not reveal how much she pays for fire insurance, but said her premiums have “danced around” over the last few years and the recent Bluecut Fire did not affect her rate.

“We’ve had several close calls with fire, but our home was never touched,” said Lawrence, who has a home north of Highway 138 near Summit Terrace and another in Barstow. “Our rates have fluctuated over the years. I think the most they’ve gone up was about \$75 in one year.”

After shopping around for insurance, Lawrence found that rates are affected by several factors, including recent fires and the strength of the insurance company.

Alyssa Evans, an agent with Armstrong Fairway Insurance in Victorville, said depending on the carrier, some homes located near where fires occurred have not see any change in their insurance premium.

“However, other homeowners have been receiving non-renewal notices for their homeowners insurance due to an increase in the fire hazard,” Evans said. “A preferred insurance company will have funds set aside in the event of a catastrophe and ideally, there would not be a change in their insurance.”

Evans said several factors determine whether a home is eligible to be insured with a preferred carrier, including accessibility of the home, wind, slope property, fuel sources for a fire and brush near the home.

“Premiums for homes that are not eligible to be with a preferred carrier tend to be greater than \$1,500 per year,” said Evans, who added that several insurance carriers offer a discount for having a sprinkler system in the home.

Evans said some insurance companies go “above and beyond” by offering protective services to their clients, such as Safeco Insurance that offers a Wildfire Defense Program, which includes the company sending out a response team to protect a home they insure by using fire retardant or a specialized sprinkler system during an active wildfire.

Barbara Little, who currently owns homes in Big Bear and Oak Hills, said she and her husband, Russ, are currently paying about \$400 more in fire insurance per home than when they lived in Hesperia.

“We bought our house in Big Bear in 2004 right after a big fire swept through the area,” said Little, who resides mostly in Oak Hills. “We tried to get insurance then, but most insurance companies wouldn’t touch us. We finally went with Allstate, but it took a while.”

Little said trying to get insurance for their Oak Hills home in 2007 was a “repeat performance” of Big Bear, sharing that one insurance company picked them up only to deny them a few days later because they were located in a fire-prone area.

“Now, we’re saddled with an annual fire supplement fee of \$115 for each property, which we totally oppose,” Little said. “We pay high premiums, we pay an added fee and we have two fire hydrants right near our home — if our house ever burns down somebody is going to hear about it.”

Homeowners insurance companies pay out an average of \$6 billion each year for fire-related claims, according to a report by the Insurance Information Institute. The report also revealed many insurers offer discounts and preferred rates to homes and communities that take steps to reduce the risk of fire.

Janet Ruiz, a state representative for the insurance institute, reported that insurance rates in fire-prone areas have been steady in recent years, adding that some regions have seen increases while others have seen decreases.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20170819/fire-insurance-hit-and-miss-situation>

Lands in Bluecut Fire footprint prove resilient

Charity Lindsey, Daily Press

Posted: August 19, 2017, 1:24 PM



Officials with the California Department of Fish & Wildlife said that the impact a fire has on wildlife probably isn't nearly as serious as many might expect, which is why the agency doesn't ever facilitate animal evacuations or replant or repopulate after a fire. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

One year later, thousands of acres turned black by the Bluecut Fire have regenerated, many remarkably appearing more green than before they burned.

Experts like Char Miller, a professor of environmental analysis at Pomona College who has been studying and teaching on fire for the past 30 years, say it's proof that fire has a lot of value "in producing a more resilient landscape."

While the combination of the Bluecut's "explosive growth" with the drought and steep slopes "spelled disaster" for people whose homes were nearby and for firefighters, it actually caused the landscape to "become more vigorous than it would otherwise," Miller said.

Miller said the chaparral habitat is one that needs to burn on "a 30-year cycle or so." So, while fires have consistently burned in such areas, the difference now is that more people live there, changing our "social response."

Upwards of 82,000 people were evacuated during the Bluecut — people who are "living in a very arid area," essentially "a fire zone," Miller said.

"As fires move up elevation and away from human population, it's OK to let it burn," Miller said, keeping in mind, however, that air quality also suffers.

Soon after the Bluecut last year, officials with the California Department of Fish & Wildlife (DFW) told the Daily Press that the impact a fire has on wildlife probably isn't nearly as serious as many might expect, which is why the agency doesn't ever facilitate animal evacuations or replant or repopulate after a fire.

DFW officials said that there is no way to accurately gauge the total effect a wildfire has on animal and plant life, but that the priority is always on containing the fire and keeping people safe, while letting "nature take its course."

Jane Hendron, a spokesperson for the DFW office in Carlsbad, said the agency did not have any threatened or endangered species within the Bluecut Fire's footprint, noting that it was mostly chaparral that burned. The question that remains in terms of "post-fire condition," she said on Friday, is "whether or not the burn area becomes susceptible to invasion by non-native grasses."

"On the other hand, some wildfires can be beneficial by opening up areas, encouraging new growth," Hendron said. "There are wildflowers that specifically germinate by fire."

Similarly, Miller spoke of the black-backed woodpecker, which flies into areas post-fire to feed on beetles in recently burned habitats.

"It needs fire to feed," Miller said. "What we see as damage, they see as a smorgasbord."

"One of the things we tend to forget is that fire isn't always about us. It's also about what plants and animals require certain habitats ... Everyone talks about chaparral earth and the total devastation and total ruin, but that's such short-term thinking. We need to be careful about how we manage fires so that the fires can do what they need to do ecologically."

Stephen Razo, a spokesman for the Bureau of Land Management's California Desert District, said that of the roughly 37,000 acres of the Bluecut fire footprint, only about 400 were on BLM land.

"According to fire staff, long-term effects on that small footprint and ecosystem were not significant," Razo said, adding that the remaining 36,600-acre footprint "would have those issues to deal with."

But since the Bluecut "burned in a patchy sort of way," it allowed plenty of regrowth, Miller said.

"The roots have not been burned ... We see black ground and think that won't recover, but it does," Miller said. "It's those patches of green that are sort of the seedlings for the regeneration to come."

<http://www.vvdaily.com/news/20170819/lands-in-bluecut-fire-footprint-prove-resilient>

Firefighters tackle blaze at George Air Force Base Saturday

Charity Lindsey, Daily Press

Posted: August 19, 2017, 4:51 PM



An abandoned apartment complex at the George Air Force Base burned for over three hours Saturday morning. [Matt England, for the Daily Press]

VICTORVILLE — An abandoned apartment complex at the George Air Force Base burned for over three hours Saturday morning before firefighters got it under control, authorities said.

The fire was first reported around 3:25 a.m., with callers seeing it from five miles away, according to **San Bernardino County Fire Department** officials.

An old, two-story military housing apartment off Phantom Way was fully engulfed when units arrived on scene approximately eight minutes after the fire was reported.

Due to the amount of fire in the building, firefighters went into defensive mode and attacked the flames from the exterior, authorities said.

The fire was under control around 6:50 a.m.. Authorities said it took a significant amount of time due to the large size of the building and firefighters needing to take precautions because of a partial collapse in the building.

No injuries were reported as a result of the fire. The cause remains under investigation by the fire department.

<http://www.hesperianstar.com/news/20170819/firefighters-tackle-blaze-at-george-air-force-base-saturday>

Family Heirloom Survives Fire in Twentynine Palms

Z107.7 News

Posted August 19, 2017

A family heirloom survived a fire in a storage shed Thursday in Twentynine Palms. According to **County Fire** Battalion Chief Scott Tuttle, firefighters were called to the 5300 block of Bailey Avenue about 2:00 where they found a metal storage shed in the yard on fire. No other structures were threatened by the flames. Tuttle said that a 120-year-old dresser inside the shed survived the blaze. The cause is under investigation, and the loss is estimated at about \$1000.

<http://z1077fm.com/family-heirloom-survives-fire-in-twentynine-palms/>

Accused serial arsonist admits setting fires

Douglas W. Motley, Alpenhorn News

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San Bernardino County District Attorney Michael Ramos announced at an August 7 press conference that a 23-year old Yucaipa man, Jarrod Anthony Samra, had been charged with nine felony counts of arson related to a series of eight wildfires, some causing great bodily harm, and burning 900 acres of National Forest land and several structures. At least four of the fires posed an immediate threat to the Running Springs communities.

According to court documents obtained by *The Alpenhorn News*, “On or about August 3, 2017, in the above named judicial district, the crime of Arson Causing great Bodily Injury, in violation of Penal Code Section 451(a), a felony, was committed by Jarrod Anthony Samra, who did willfully, unlawfully, and maliciously set fire to forest land and property thereby causing great bodily injury to a Cal Fire Firefighter.”

The document also charges Samra with violation of Penal Code section 451(c), also a felony, for “maliciously setting fire to and burning and causing to be burned a structure and forest land.” Additionally, Samra was charged with violation of Penal Code section 451.1, stating, “Arson was caused by use of a device designed to accelerate the fire.”

“This arsonist will be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law,” Ramos said adding that Samra faces 19 years in state prison if convicted. Officials also confirmed that the fires took place during similar times of the day and that evidence found at each of the fires was similar in nature, leading investigators to believe the fires were related.

The fires Samra is accused of starting are the Bryant Fire 1 and 2 (Yucaipa) on July 7 and August 3, which burned over 400 acres; The Hidden Fire on July 12 (on Hwy 330); The Bridge 2 Fire on July 14, which burned 460 acres; the Piedmont Fire on July 16; the Seine Fire on July 22, both in San Bernardino near the bottom of Hwy 330 and the Trout (Hwy 330) and Helen fires in Devore, both on July 28, which were stopped as spot fires. During these fires, three firefighters were injured, one seriously.

Samra was arrested on August 3, when a white GMC pickup truck he was driving was found in the vicinity of Hwy 38 in Yucaipa, where the Bryant 1 and 2 fires began. A multi-agency task force had been gathering evidence from the sites of the numerous fires, which led to the identification of Samra as the person responsible for starting at least eight of the current rash of fires. “This is a perfect example of public safety agencies working together to keep our communities safe,” said Sheriff John McMahon.

One of the modern tools used by investigators was a license plate scanner. Officials said social media postings by Samra enabled investigators to trace the license plates on his vehicle once he became a person of interest in the case.

According to a Crime Summary Information Probable Cause document dated August 3, 2017 obtained by *The Alpenhorn News*, Samra, who was “Mirandized” by investigators at the Highland Sheriff’s Station, admitted to setting six of the eight fires, using fireworks components. Samra – likely under the advise of an attorney – subsequently pleaded not guilty at an arraignment hearing held on August 7. He remains incarcerated at the Glen Helen rehabilitation Center, with bail set at \$2 million.

Authorities said Samra is a former member of a Fire Explorer Scout program operated by the San Manuel Fire Department. The program introduces youth to the firefighting profession by giving them experience and training in firefighting procedures.

San Bernardino County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig said, “San Bernardino County Fire takes arson personally due to the extreme threat to the citizens we serve and the firefighters who put themselves between the fire and communities they protect. Catching and convicting these criminals is a high priority.”

<http://alpenhornnews.com/accused-serial-arsonist-admits-setting-fires-p8297-155.htm>

Homestead Valley Community Council Meets Today

Z107.7 News

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The Homestead Valley Community Council will hold its monthly meeting Monday, August 21. On the agenda are updates on the hauled water ban, the Ord Mountain solar project and Siena solar project, as well as clean-up at Giant Rock, set for September 9. The council represents the communities of Yucca Mesa, Landers, Flamingo Heights, and Johnson Valley. Representatives from the Sheriff’s Department, as well as **County Fire** and CalFire will also be in attendance. The meeting starts at 3 p.m. at the Yucca Mesa Community Center on Balsa Avenue.

<http://z1077fm.com/homestead-valley-community-council-meets-today-2/>