

SUMMER IS HERE, SO IS FIRE SEASON

With summer, unfortunately, comes fire season. Although it might be the “new normal,” we still need to prepare for the worst and hope for the best as the warm summer months turn into the even hotter and windier fall months. The pandemic aside, if you haven’t already started your wildfire preparedness this season, it is time to make sure you are ready should a fire break out in Lafayette or the adjoining hillsides.

Last October we got an inkling of how bad it could be when two fires jumped Highway 24 at Pleasant Hill Road, causing the evacuation of 2,400 of residents. (See PSPS article on page 3 for details). Due to the quick response of police and fire services, no one was hurt and there was minimal property damage. But, sadly, when it happens again – and it will happen again – the result could be more serious if we are not prepared. So, in this summer edition of Vistas, we will go over a few steps – and provide several resources – that could save you and your home should wildfire threaten our neighborhoods.



■ The Lamorinda Residents Guide to Wildfire Preparedness and Evacuation

One of the first things you can do is review a copy of the *Lamorinda Residents Guide to Wildfire Preparedness and Evacuation*. This comprehensive guidebook put together by



Lafayette Police Chief Ben Alldritt and Lamorinda CERT leader Duncan Seibert talk to a reporter about the “*Lamorinda Residents Guide to Wildfire Preparedness and Evacuation*,” which generated a great deal of media attention when it was released last year.

You might also like to see all the media attention this trend-setting guide got when it was released last year. Dozens of articles, radio and TV stories, and social media posts highlighted the Lafayette-led effort to create the guide. You can see an extensive list of the coverage here: <https://bit.ly/LamorindaWildfireGuideMedia>.

■ Wildfire Evacuation Drills and Plans: Know Your Route

Some readers might recall that in March 2019 Lafayette’s Emergency Preparedness Commission and the Lafayette PD, working closely with Con Fire and the Contra Costa County Sheriff’s Office of Emergency Services, held an evacuation drill of

the Springhill neighborhood. The drill was designed to evaluate the use of contra-flow traffic control (both lanes of roadway used for vehicle traffic flow in one direction), to test the Contra Costa Sheriff’s Community Warning System (CWS) and provide an evacuation exercise for police, fire, CERT, and Search and Rescue. Springhill Road is a two-lane road and the only evacuation route for hundreds of residents, so the use of contra-flow traffic control is vitally important.

On a rainy Saturday morning, over 100 Springhill neighborhood residents participated in the drill, which involved dozens of volunteers and over 130 emergency services personnel. The results were encouraging – use of contra-flow traffic worked! We learned many lessons about how best to communicate during evacuations and what techniques work to ensure everyone is safe. If you don’t know your neighborhood’s wildfire evacuation route, you can find a copy of the City of Lafayette’s *Wildfire Evacuation Plan* here: <https://bit.ly/WildfireEvacPlan2018>.

One big lesson learned from the drill was that the more people who sign up with the Contra Costa Sheriff’s Community Warning System (CWS), the safer all Lafayette residents will be.

■ Stay Informed and Safe: Get CWS

You cannot act if you are not informed. Wildfires move fast and you need to be prepared to react quickly, which means making sure you



get emergency alerts as soon as a wildfire breaks out. The single best way to stay informed is to make sure you are signed up for the Contra Costa Sheriff’s Community Warning System (CWS). This is a specialized alert system for time-sensitive and potentially life-saving information that is countywide, yet locally specific. CWS utilizes email, text, and voice calls (you can choose your mix) to alert you of serious emergencies, including wildfires.

(Continued on page 2)



SUMMER IS HERE, SO IS FIRE SEASON

Stay Informed and Safe: Get CWS *(Continued from page 1)*

CWS is also the primary emergency warning system used when shelter-in-place or evacuation orders are issued.

CWS tracks registration by household and in early 2019, only 2,963 of Lafayette's approximate 10,000 households had signed up for CWS. An aggressive campaign was started to increase that number and it worked! By the end of 2019, the number of households Lafayette registered with CWS went from 2,963 to 7,558 – a 155% increase in just one year. But there are still about 25% of folks who are not signed up for CWS so if you are one of them, please get CWS now at <http://bit.ly/CoCoCOWS>.

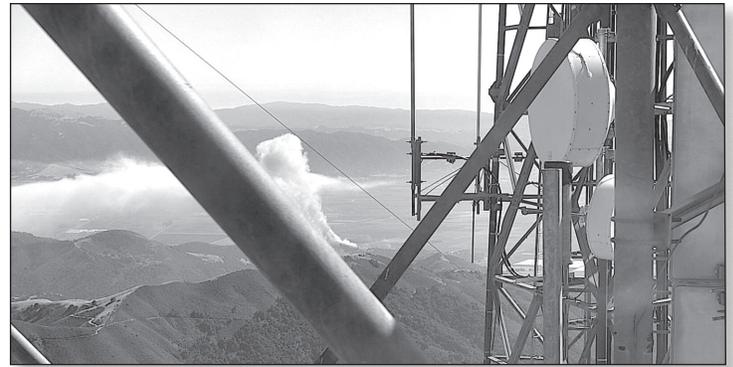
■ Emergency Alert AM Radio Station Coming to Lafayette

This spring, the Federal Communications Commission granted the City of Lafayette a license to operate an emergency alert radio station on the AM band at 1670 kHz. The station will provide a range of information for residents, travelers, and the Lamorinda community, the most important of which will be emergency information in times of disaster, wildfires, or PG&E power outages.



The idea for the City's Emergency Alert Station grew out of a discussion of how best to communicate vital information during wildfires and power outages when cell phones and the internet may not be working. Virtually every resident in Lafayette

has access to an AM radio in their cars and the City's emergency station will cover an area of three to five miles, including Highway 24. During non-emergencies, the station will carry general city information, including road conditions, meeting announcements, details on events and programs, and general visitor information about Lafayette. We are working on it now and hope that the station will begin broadcasting later this summer.



■ CWS Alerts, AM Alert Radio – And Now ALERTWildfire

In November 2019, the Lafayette Police Department began working with the ALERTWildfire program to install and maintain a network of cameras across Contra Costa and Alameda County to detect, alert, and monitor of wildfires. The ALERTWildfire program's mission is to provide access to cameras that help firefighters and first responders discover, locate, and confirm wildfires, scale fire resources to meet the challenge, monitor fire behavior, assist evacuations through enhanced situational awareness, and ensure contained fires are monitored appropriately.

The Lafayette Police Department handled the installation of multiple cameras and coordinated camera locations and training with other regional agencies and the City supported the installation of a new microwave network designed specifically for the ALERTWildfire system across Contra Costa County. As of May 2020, the Lafayette Police Department has aided in the installation and operation of 20 ALERTWildfire cameras in Contra Costa and neighboring areas of Alameda County. Lafayette's installation of ALERTWildfire cameras continues as we prepare for the 2020 fire season.

What's really interesting is that residents can watch live ALERTWildfire cameras via www.alertwildfire.org. Once on the site's main page, click on the upper left and select "South & East Bay." You can view numerous cameras within and surrounding the Lamorinda area. The camera images on the public facing side of the website are updated every ten seconds, however several cameras installed by Lafayette PD are on private property and not visible on the public website and can only be accessed by designated police and fire personnel. Enjoy the view and know you are safer through the efforts of our police department.



City Wildfire, Emergency Resources Are Just a Few Clicks Away

The City of Lafayette has some additional resources for you that are important when preparing for a wildfire, a blackout, or other potential emergency. Just as you signed up for CWS, make sure you sign up for local alerts from the Lafayette Police Department on Nixle. This hyper-local warning service provides details on police actions, road work, and other important info for residents. Get Nixle here: <https://www.nixle.com/>.

Also, the City has published a detailed webpage on emergency preparedness that contains a wealth of resources for residents. The "Are You Ready?" page has detailed evacuation maps, tips on making a family emergency plan and a list of what you need in an emergency kit, as well as key resource links. Check it out now: <https://www.lovelafayette.org/residents/public-safety/are-you-ready>.

PLANNED PG&E PSPS POWER OUTAGES

We suppose by now nearly everyone in California knows what a PG&E PSPS event is. But just in case you're new to the state or our town – or just need a refresher – a Public Safety Power Shutoff, or PSPS, can be called by PG&E when high temperatures, extreme dryness and high winds create conditions where a major wildfire might occur. If this kind of severe weather threatens a portion of PG&E's electric grid, it may be necessary for the utility to "de-energize" portions of the system to help prevent wildfires. In layman's terms – the lights go out. One irony is that even though it might not be hot and windy in Lafayette specifically, if conditions anywhere along the electrical transmission system that brings power to the city is threatened by severe weather, Lafayette could still lose power should a remote segment be de-energized.

Last year, Lafayette experienced two PG&E Public Safety Power Shutoffs in October 2019. The first PSPS event occurred October 9 – 11, for an approximate period of 34 hours and affected around 7,500 Lafayette customers, including many businesses downtown as well as City Offices. The second PSPS event occurred October 26 – 29, for an approximate period of 44 hours and affected around 8,800 Lafayette customers.

During the second PSPS event, on October 27, Lafayette experienced fires – as noted on Page 1 – that were the result of PG&E equipment failure in an area of Lafayette that had not been

de-energized during the PSPS event. Approximately 2,400 residents north and south of Highway 24 in the Pleasant Hill Rd. area had to be evacuated during the fires. To make matters worse, a key cell phone tower for multiple cell companies was also damaged causing the immediate area to have a significant decrease in cellular coverage. First



responders were unable to receive cell calls and some residents reported not receiving emergency alerts on mobile devices until several hours after the initial messages were sent. This is why it is critically important to register for CWS and, when on the air, to monitor the City's Emergency Alert Radio Station on 1670 kHz AM during times of emergency. (See previous story on page 2.)

Although PG&E says that this year it expects fewer and shorter PSPS events, it is wise to be prepared for power outages – PSPS-caused or grid overload-induced – nonetheless. The City makes it easy – or at least as easy as possible – to get ready for PSPS power outages by having all the resources and informa-

tion you need available on this webpage: <http://bit.ly/LafayettePSPS>. On the City's PSPS page, you will find updated information on forecasted or in-progress PSPS events, how to get your home ready for outages, including information on generators and power storage, what your family should know about PG&E's process, and special information for seniors and other at-risk members of our community.

Also, the City of Lafayette has been working to address the possibility of PSPS power outages this summer. City Offices have moved most of its electronic communications – telephone and email – to cloud-based servers that should continue to operate even when the City's power is out. In addition, Lafayette PD has begun the process of installing power taps at eight key intersections in Lafayette so that generators can power the traffic signals during an outage. The functionality of traffic lights during a power outage is key to improving public safety and evacuation preparedness. The following eight intersections have power taps installed:

- Mt. Diablo Blvd. and Moraga Road
- Mt. Diablo Blvd. and Oak Hill Road
- Mt. Diablo Blvd. and First Street
- Moraga Road and St. Mary's Road
- Pleasant Hill Road and Stanley Blvd.
- Pleasant Hill Road and Reliez Valley Road
- Moraga Road and Brook Street
- Pleasant Hill Road and Springhill Road

Are You Defending Your Home?

Cut those weeds! Make sure you create "defensible space" around your home to help stop wildfires from spreading. It is late in the season, as weed abatement should be completed by late spring, but if you don't stay on top of it, those weeds will continue to grow, dry out, and provide plenty of fuel for a would-be wildfire. Getting

outdoors and clearing weeds and brush from around your home is great exercise, of course. But, more importantly, it could save your life if a fire suddenly breaks out in your neighborhood. Find out everything you need to know about defensible space on Con Fire's website: <https://www.cccfpd.org/exterior-hazards>.



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Fighting Wildfires: Con Fire Resources in Lafayette

It is good to know that in 2019 the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, which we all know as Con Fire, increased staffing in the City of Lafayette, re-opening Fire Station 16 after many years of closure in the high-threat area north of Highway 24. The new Station 16, along Los Arabis Road, provides a fire engine and company of three firefighters, significantly improving response times to this wildland-urban interface area. This brings the City of Lafayette’s fire resources to three full-time engine companies including those at stations 15 and 17.



It was a full house for the “push-in” ceremony re-opening Lafayette’s Fire Station 16 in September of last year. There are now three full-time Con Fire engine companies devoted to keeping Lafayette safe.

Over the past year or so, Con Fire has been working to improve its fleet resources across the District, including two Type-6 wildland fire engines and two 2,000-gallon water tenders, which are critically important to fighting wildland fires. These tenders deliver water in firefighting quantities to areas where fire hydrants either do not exist or where they are in short supply. In addition, Con Fire’s two fire bulldozers support wildland fire operations ahead of and during fires, quickly performing tasks that might otherwise put firefighters in danger.

Also added recently are two Con Fire branded helicopters. These will deliver considerable aerial firefighting capability across the District, including fire observation, suppression using a hook-suspended fire bucket able to deliver water to distant or inaccessible fires, and complex hoist rescues. Both aircraft are also available for EMS services as well as transporting patients directly to emergency rooms.

As demonstrated during the October 27 Lafayette fire, pre-staging assets when fire conditions worsen saves lives. One “after-action” item identified as a result of the October 27 fire was the need to have standardized portable radios so that all fire fighters responding to a major fire – even those from other jurisdictions – can communicate effectively. As a result, Con Fire is procuring an additional 115 portable radios to provide standardized communication capabilities for all firefighters throughout the District in the event of another such unprecedented wildfire.

CITY DIRECTORY

To contact members of the
Lafayette City Council,
please call 925-284-1968
or email
cityhall@lovelafayette.org.

Administration

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Jennifer Wakeman, Assist. Admin. Srv. Dir.	925-299-3213
Joanne Robbins, City Clerk	925-299-3210
Mike Moran, City Engineer & Public Works Dir.	925-299-3203
Greg Wolff, Planning & Building Dir.	925-299-3206
Donna Feehan, Public Works Mgr.	925-299-3214
Jeff Heyman, Communications	925-299-3241

If you observe illegal dumping in creeks & storm drains or accidental spills on roads, call Contra Costa Hazardous Materials Division 925-646-2286.

Lamorinda School Bus Program

Whitney Simon, Program Mgr. 925-299-3216

Parks, Trails, Recreation 925-284-2232

Jonathan Katayanagi, Director

Senior Services 925-284-5050

Police Services

Ben Alldritt, Police Chief	911
Emergency: 24 Hours	
Police Dispatch: 24 Hours	925-284-5010
Police Business Office:	925-283-3680

Anonymous tipline, traffic enforcement, suggestions & LEARN (Laf. Emergency Action Response Network), 925-299-3230

Fax 925-284-3169

Address 3675 Mt. Diablo Blvd. #210
Lafayette, CA 94549

Website www.lovelafayette.org

Make sure to subscribe to the City’s publications – the *Almost Daily Briefing* and the *Weekly Roundup* – and follow us on social media. Learn how to connect with the City at www.lovelafayette.org/connect.

There, you’ll find the latest news and events, a way to sign up for meeting notifications by email, as well as great photos and videos of things happening around town.

