

**MARINWOOD FIRE COMMISSION: MEETING AGENDA**

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2019, 7:00PM**

MARINWOOD COMMUNITY CENTER, 775 MILLER CREEK ROAD, SAN RAFAEL, CA 94903

<b>#</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Commission Action</b>
1	<b>Agenda</b>	Adopt
2	<b>Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items</b> <i>Speakers are asked to limit comments to three minutes. Speakers may comment only on non-agenda items within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Commission. The Commission may not take action on, consider or debate items not on the agenda except under narrow circumstances meeting statutory tests. Response to comments on non-agenda items will be limited to factual information or clarifying questions from staff or Commission. The Chair may refer the matter to staff or to a future meeting agenda.</i>	
3	<b>Commissioner Items of Interest</b>	
4	<b>Draft Minutes of November 5, 2019 Fire Commission Meeting</b>	Approve
5	<b>Discussion regarding Emergency Preparedness and Alert Systems</b>	Discuss
6	<b>Chief Officer Report and Activity Summary</b>	Review
7	<b>Commissioner Requests for Future Agenda Items</b>	
8	<b>Adjourn</b>	

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NEXT FIRE COMMISSION MEETING TO BE HELD ON JANUARY 7, 2019 AT 7:00 PM  
AT MARINWOOD COMMUNITY CENTER

**MARINWOOD COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT**  
**DRAFT MINUTES OF FIRE COMMISSION MEETING**  
**November 5, 2019**

**Time and Place:** 7:00PM Marinwood Community Center

**Present:**

Commissioners: Chair Russ Albano, Tom Elsbree, Steve Farac, Pascal Karsenti, Ron Marinoff, Greg Stilson

Board Director: Sivan Oyserman

Staff: District Manager Eric Dreikosen, San Rafael Fire Chief Chris Gray, Fire Captain Ryan Brackett

Chair Albano called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

**1. Agenda**

M/s Marinoff/Elsbree to approve agenda as presented. All in favor. Motion carried unanimously

**2. Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items**

The Commission received public comment regarding:

- a. Congratulating Chief Gray on his upcoming retirement and recognizing his contributions to Marinwood during the past year

**3. Commissioner Items of Interest**

-Albano praised the fire department personnel for their efforts during the PSPS event.

-Stilson announced Santa Claus is expected to visit Marinwood-Lucas Valley the weekend of December 14-15 (unless his sleigh is grounded due to inclement weather, then the following weekend of December 21-22) accompanied by volunteer firefighters.

-Marinoff confirmed firefighters on out of county assignments returned safely.

**4. Draft Minutes of October 1, 2019 Fire Commission Meeting**

M/s Marinoff/Elsbree to approve Draft Minutes of October 1, 2019 Fire Commission Meeting as presented. All in favor.

Motion carried unanimously

**5. Discussion on Recent PG&E Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) Event**

The Commission discussed the recent PSPS event including efforts of Marinwood personnel; citizen notification and communication challenges; facility usages during the event including back-up power generation capabilities; and, potential of catastrophic fire event in Marinwood-Lucas Valley. Discussion resulted in the following motion:

M/s Albano/Farac to research possible siren or similar community alert system installed on roof of fire station. All in favor.

Motion carried unanimously

**6. Chief Officer Report and Activity Summary**

Commission received Chief Officer Report and Activity Summary

**7. Requests for Future Agenda Items**

-Albano requested continued discussions regarding a siren/alert system installed at fire station and potential to increase backup power capabilities throughout fire station and community center.

-Karsenti requested discussion regarding adding battery backup system to existing PV (solar) installation.

-Marinoff requested information regarding backup power capabilities at juvenile hall site.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:21PM.

The date of the next Fire Commission meeting is December 3, 2019.

Submitted,  
Eric Dreikosen

ENVIRONMENT

CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

CLIMATE CHANGE

## Sirens, texts, even church bells. California wildfire alerts and evacuations still ad hoc

BY JULIE CART



PUBLISHED: NOVEMBER 15, 2019



📷 Residents evacuating from the Holy Fire near Lake Elsinore in 2018. Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG

### IN SUMMARY

California has no statewide standard for emergency wildfire alerts and evacuations, leaving families, businesses and local authorities to learn through hard experience how to protect themselves during fires.

When a fast-moving wildfire marched toward the town of Paradise more than a year ago, few who lived there were aware of it. Even though the community used the [CodeRED](#) automated emergency warning system, less than 40% of residents subscribed to the alerts.

Only 7,000 of the 52,000 residents who eventually evacuated received the emergency alert to leave.

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The fire incinerated cell towers and communications equipment, revealing a vulnerability of the telephone-based disaster alert system. "The only notification systems left were emergency vehicle sirens and bull horns... word-of-mouth with families and neighbors... and immediate action," the [Butte County Grand Jury](#) reported to the Superior Court earlier this year.

The unimaginable deaths and the wholesale destruction of a town exposed California's ad hoc approach to alerting residents to approaching wildfires and providing prompt and accurate information about escape routes.

By the time Paradise residents began to understand the menace that was about to engulf them, they found themselves in rush-hour-volume gridlock: Only one of the four roads planners had expected to use for evacuations remained open; the others were burning, the grand jury reported.

Panicked motorists abandoned their cars and fled on foot, attempting to outrun the advancing flames. Of 85 deaths attributed to the fire, 10 perished in or near their vehicles. Unable to reach the safety of another town, some residents took shelter in any available structure, the report said – a church, a gas station, a supermarket parking lot, a lake.

### **Disaster warnings still piecemeal**

Up and down the state, families, businesses and local authorities are learning through hard experience how to protect themselves during fires. They are pre-planning their evacuation routes and establishing their personal get-out threshold for evacuating.

Companies have set up their own emergency response centers, cities have contracted with web-based developers to better understand fire threat and one small fire department is developing a smartphone app to help residents know when and how to evacuate



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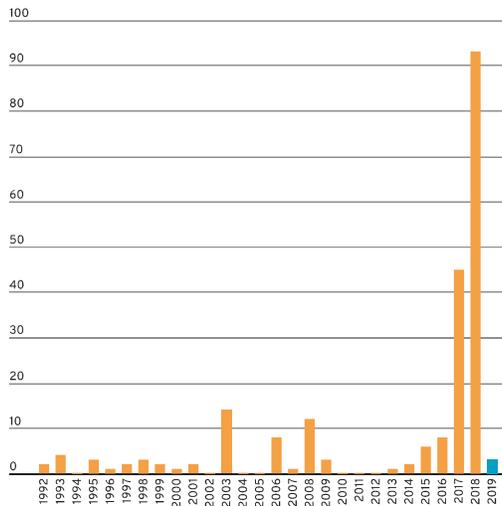
emergencies, not just for fire but also for floods and earthquakes. Public notification of impending disaster is piecemeal, and much of it depends on working telephone lines and available power, equipment that is often the first casualty of fire.

State officials have shown an interest in adopting [technology for fire response](#), particularly for detecting, monitoring and mapping blazes. California even hosted an international fire [innovation summit](#) last March to fish for new ideas. But the state has yet to roll out many of its initiatives.

And the policy of utility companies curtailing power in times of high fire danger to prevent sparking blazes presents a new, still unresolved wrinkle in broadcasting emergency alerts.

California officials – in the Legislature and at the Office of Emergency Services – say they are working on it, while noting that the state's role is to provide guidance: It is local authorities who are responsible for immediate emergency response. Following the deadly 2017 fire season, a new [state law](#) required local governments to have a mechanism to warn residents during emergencies. The state Office of Emergency Services released general [guidelines](#) earlier this year.

## California wildfire deaths



Source: Cal Fire, as of Nov. 15, 2019

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The guidelines advocate a scattershot approach to alerts, suggesting a mix of old-school and cutting-edge: sirens, loudspeakers, social media, texting, even ringing church bells. The new rules require alerts when there is an “imminent threat to life, health or property” and emphasize that time is critical. Worries about triggering mass panic are not an excuse to avoid or delay issuing a warning, the guidelines say.

The state consulted with a wide range of experts before publishing the guidelines, and they reflect policies many local authorities already had in place, according to Sam Wallis, a Sonoma County emergency coordinator. He said the county did not adopt any of the state’s new fire-alert strategies in response to recent wildfires.

“The document reflects what we are already doing,” Wallis said.

### **'An awful lot of work to be done'**

California does not require communities to plan for wildfire evacuations, leaving it as a local decision.

Among the state’s communities that are at the highest risk of fire, fewer than one in four have an evacuation plan that residents can review, according to an [investigation](#) published earlier this year by a media collaboration including The AP, USA TODAY Network-California, McClatchy and Media News.

“If you have a plan and are unable to communicate to the population at risk in real time, you don’t really have a plan, you have an interesting piece of paper on the shelf,” said Dave Winnacker, chief of the [Moraga-Orinda Fire District](#) in Contra Costa County. “That’s where historically we have missed the mark.”

Winnacker has been experimenting with harnessing technology, and anything else, to warn residents of impending fire. His department has carefully studied the puzzle of evacuation and is developing an app to help residents safely leave a fire zone. It’s the kind of innovative idea that experts say is needed to respond to the challenge presented by California’s new [ferocious fire threat](#).

“The state does not have an amazing track record for fielding technology,” Winnacker said. “The state is going to need some help. There’s an awful lot of work to be done.”

The private sector is brimming with ideas. There are [companies](#) that are instantly able to supply detailed weather information and forecasting, real-time traffic and road reports, images from satellites and remote cameras with eyes on an active fire and census data providing first responders with information about the location of disabled residents and the languages spoken in a particular household.

The trick is to synthesize layers and layers of information and get it where it's needed, quickly and accurately.

"With state policy, we are just at the front end of this conversation," said Pete Peterson, dean of the Pepperdine School of Public Policy, which operates a [web-based emergency mapping tool](#) that has been adopted by the city of Los Angeles.

The platform aggregates more than 200 layers of publicly available information – the functioning of the electricity grid and transportation, for example – and collates that onto maps that help authorities and residents make decisions about evacuation. The maps and other data are available online.

Peterson said that during the recent Tick Fire in L.A. County his research group got a call from officials who were considering evacuating an area where they believed about 50,000 people lived. The computer program ran the census data and discovered the area had about 250,000 residents. That kind of accurate information is vital during urgent evacuations.

"The communications part of evacuations is not real good," he said. "Policymakers and government agencies are going to be increasingly accountable for why we don't have this."

### **Avoiding cautionary tales and lives lost**

No community wants to join Paradise, or the Sonoma County city of Santa Rosa, as a cautionary tale of lives lost because of chaotic and inadequate communication.

But missteps can bring about better policy. Misti Wood, the Community Engagement Liaison for the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office, pointed to the difference between community response to the 2017 Tubbs Fire that killed at least 22 people and the recent Kincade Fire that burned for two weeks but caused no fatalities.

"Two years ago, people tended to wait for instructions. That's changed," Wood said. "Most of us remember what it was like; none of us want to be in that position again. This fire, we had extraordinary compliance. There are always people who stay behind and we will always bang on your door. But most people left."

Last month's Kincade Fire afforded authorities more time to warn residents and evacuate 187,000 people over several days, the biggest evacuation in Sonoma County history. Deputies drove through neighborhoods with bullhorns and knocked on doors. Officials also triggered the Nixle system – a subscription service that texts fire alerts. Wood said signups for the service jumped since 2017 and now 66% of the county's residents use the system.

The medical group Kaiser Permanente didn't wait for the evacuation orders to begin moving hospital patients when the Kincade Fire started, according to Stephen Parodi, an Associate Executive Director of the Permanente Medical Group at Kaiser Permanente and an infectious-disease physician who plans for patient evacuations at several hospitals in Northern California.

Parodi said there was scarcely time to evacuate during the 2017 Santa Rosa fires, which came in with such speed that staff wheeled patients in the streets on gurneys and loaded patients into buses or private cars to move them out of harm's way. In the chaos of the emergency, dozens of patients were sent to hospitals with no documents or medical records.

The most recent fires were different, Parodi said. Working from the company's own emergency operations center, Kaiser officials monitored weather and fire maps and were in constant communication with local authorities, enabling hospitals to make independent decisions about how best to respond.

Because of the time-consuming triage required to evacuate hundreds of patients, some critically ill, Parodi said, he decided to start evacuating at 10:30 p.m., before the facility was under orders to clear out.

Six hours later, when mandatory evacuation orders were given, the hospital was still only halfway through its process. The standard practice of relocating patients to the nearest sister hospital had been stymied because the two closest facilities had no power and were operating on generators.

In the end, all patients were safely relocated, Parodi said.

The new reality for Californians is going to be one of more warnings and, very likely, more evacuations. The public will have to adjust to the new safety paradigm, Cal Fire officials say, and beware evacuation fatigue.

Cal Fire Deputy Director Mike Mohler pointed to the December 2017 Thomas Fire that stalked the coastal city of Montecito. Residents yo-yo'd between orders to evacuate and approval to return home, as the unpredictable fire front shifted with the wind. It became the largest fire in California history.

A month later a deluge of rain placed the community in jeopardy for [mudslides](#). Weary of false alarms, some homeowners chose to stay put. Nearly two dozen people were killed.



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