

The CAO Weekly Report

The week of September 21, 2015



Monterey County Administrative Office

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In this edition:

- County staff aids during Tassajara, Laureles Fires
- MVAO intern receives local scholarships



County Plays Important Role During Wildland Fires

When fires erupted along Highway 68 and in upper Carmel Valley on Saturday September 19th, more than just emergency personnel responded.

While CALFire and other fire agencies fought the flames, many county employees played lifesaving and critically supportive roles in the efforts to help those affected by the Tassajara and Laureles Fires.

Within a short time after the fires broke out, the County's Office of Emergency Services activated its Emergency Operations Center. That triggered calls to county personnel who responded in their roles as disaster service workers.

While there were two fires initially, the Laureles Fire along Highway 68 was controlled fairly quickly. The Tassajara Fire however, raged out of control for days, forcing evacuations and eventually destroying 20 homes and buildings, scorching more than a thousand acres and displacing hundreds of residents.

What can county employees do to help so far from the fires? Plenty! Here are the departments which took part on the emergency effort and some of the work accomplished by staff during long hours in the EOC or in the field:

Office of Emergency Services

Tasked with managing the county's response to an emergency or disaster, OES activated its EOC and began coordinating with CALFire. It also summoned county employees to fill important roles. The EOC is a 'war room' of sorts during a crisis.



Health Department staff at work in the EOC. The jumbo monitor shows latest fire information.

Sheriff's Office

It is the Sheriff's Office which determines when evacuation orders are given, when roads should be closed. Because of the unusual nature of the Tassajara Fire, it is the agency which will determine how the fire's lone fatality was connected to the fire's cause. Deputies in the field and at the EOC coordinated these efforts with other agencies.

RMA - Public Works

Public Works crews implement those road closure plans, setting up barricades and often staffing them. Crews also determined the

status/conditions of county roads due to the fire and cleared roads of debris so they could be reopened.

Health Department

Various Bureaus are part of the emergency team. Staff participated in public information/monitoring social media and responding to inquiries, coordinating outreach regarding air quality and Environmental Health sent an assessment team for a first look at the fire damage this week. Behavioral Health sent staff to a community meeting on September 23rd to offer services and support.

RMA - Planning

Planning staff provided critical GIS maps for fire and county teams as they worked in the burn area and its surroundings as well as leadership of EOC team during activation.

Information Technology

IT staff made sure all computers and systems running during activation and provided web support.

Contracts/Purchasing

During a disaster, emergency supplies need to be purchased or contracts/agreements made more quickly than the usual county process allows. C/P staff was on hand in the EOC to meet those needs, including assisting with an agreement to allow CALFire to use Toro Park as a base camp.



Rob Durham of Contracts and Purchasing at the EOC.

CAO

Provided leadership of EOC during activation as well as public information for media, residents, organizing web and social media posts.

Parks

Any county department can be part of an emergency activation; it all depends on the need. Parks stepped in when CALFire needed a location for fire base camp that could accommodate hundreds of fire personnel and the massive support system. Helped coordinate the use of Toro Park for that purpose and the Parks Director was among those talking directly with park users as fire crews moved in, explaining why the park was temporarily closed to the public.



Open fields at Toro Park are converted into a base camp for hundreds of fire personnel. Lunch for 1200 under tents (above), a parking and play area become a supply depot (right).



Libraries

Librarians saw a need and stepped into help fire victims. They provided reading material to Red Cross evacuation center in Carmel Valley and firefighter base camp at Toro Park.

Realizing many evacuees might have technology needs, librarians set up a Wi-Fi hot spot at the evacuation center so those in need could stay in contact with friend and relatives and get the latest information online.

Department of Social Services

Staff was on hand to answer and question from those affected by the fire at a special community meeting September 23rd.

Emergency Communications

In addition to its role in emergency communications during the disaster, operators had to handle a deluge of calls from residents wanting information about the fire.



Supervisor Dave Potter tours the burn area.

District 5

Both fires fell within District 5, so staff was in constant contact with residents in both fire areas from the beginning, relaying CALFire and emergency information via social media and responding to resident's concerns and requests. Staff worked closely with CALFire regarding community needs and access to services; for instance, getting emergency generators, equipment and personnel into wineries within the fire perimeter to reduce the impact to the harvest season.

Even though the Tassajara fire is mostly contained and firefighters are moving on to other emergencies, the EOC remains activated at a low level to monitor the fire and begin coordinating recovery for the area. County departments are already at work on that process, as they have done for fire victims in the past, most recently the Pfeiffer Fire in Big Sur.



MVAO Intern Awarded Scholarships

The Military and Veterans Affairs Office is saluting one of its own. Lamar Green, assigned to Monterey County's MVAO through the Veterans Administration Work Study, has been awarded both the Harold and Olivia Douthit Scholarship and the Platoon Sergeant James Rucker and Helen B. Rucker Scholarship at the 19th Annual Fort Ord Alumni Association Scholarship Awards Ceremony on September 18th.

Green started in the work study program in 2011 while he was enrolled at Monterey Peninsula College and continued when he transferred to CSUMB following graduation from MPC with a 3.75 GPA.

Green is an Army Veteran now in his third year at CSUMB majoring in Collaborative Health and Human Services with an emphasis in Social Work. MVAO staff wants to share Green's story, saying his drive for success, higher education and to better the lives of those less fortunate is a model they support.

In addition to his VA Work Study assignments, Lamar became a CSUMB intern in the MVAO. His current goals and work on his "Capstone" project includes outreach events for homeless veterans and coordinating multiple resources that assist this vulnerable segment of the Monterey County population.



Green holds his scholarship as he stands near a display of the military memorabilia of his scholarship's namesake.

