

## MINUTES

City of Pacifica  
 Emergency Preparedness & Safety Commission  
 2075 Coast Highway  
 Pacifica, CA 94044

DATE: September 16, 2020

TIME: 6:30 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m.

### ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: Chair Hitz, Taverna, Salisbury, Johnson, Blackburn,  
 Lotridge, Hladkyd, Gasanyan

Commissioners Absent: Erbacher

Ex Officio Members Present: Councilmember Bier

Ex Officio Members Absent: Peppers, Machado, Fleming

STAFF PRESENT: Captain Clements, Sergeant Cumming

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: The agenda for the July 15, 2020 was approved.  
 The agenda for the August 19, 2020 was approved.

### COMMISSION COMMENTS:

Commissioner Blackburn spoke to the committee regarding the threat of floods, wild fires, erosion, and the impact of a possible 2020 La Nina winter weather.

Commissioner Hitz talked about adding CERT antennas to four locations in the City

Commissioner Hitz is presenting an Emergency Preparation class for a group September 22, 2020.

**EX-OFFICIO COMMENTS:**

Council Member Bier commented about upcoming District 1 and District 4 elections. She said only residents in those districts will vote for those City Council candidates in this upcoming November election.

Council Member Bier said the oversize vehicle ordinance in the City of Pacifica is being enforced and citations could now be issued.

Council Member Bier said the Beach Blvd Infrastructure Resiliency Project will meet September 24, 2020. This is a virtual meeting and registration can be done on the City website.

Council Member Bier shared the Pacifica Resource Center receiving the Jerry Hill Non-Profit of the year award.

**STAFF COMMENTS:**

Captain Clements reported on these activities:

-In July he met with CAL OES and National Weather Service regarding the tsunami sign program and location placement.

-In July ongoing work was done on the Zonehaven emergency evacuation program that works with the County of San Mateo.

-San Mateo County Emergency Managers Association meeting via Zoom.

-PG&E training for PSPS events.

- National Night Out in August had been postponed until October due to the pandemic.

-City continues to review plans to re-open facilities to staff and the public with COVID19 measures

-CERT Class scheduled for August 2020 was postponed due to the pandemic

-Annual CERT exercise schedule for August was postponed due to the pandemic

-San Mateo County Emergency Preparedness Day – postponed due to pandemic.

- August 15- Friends of San Pedro Valley Park hosted a presentation on living with mountain lions.

**Captain Clements reported the following information was promoted in the community through the police department social media sites;**

- August 17 Information regarding PG&E PSPS events
- August 17 CZU fire information from San Mateo County Office of Emergency Services. This event did not affect the city of Pacifica
- August 19 Pacifica Police Officers assisted with CZU fire evacuations
- August 19 spare the air day was declared and information was provided to the public
- August 19 North County Fire Authority public information regarding wild fire safety
- Ongoing updates from San Mateo County OES regarding the CZU fire, road closures, and additional evacuations
- August 21 City of Pacifica emergency proclamation due to poor air quality and Covid-19 pandemic. Beach closures resulted from this proclamation
- National Weather Service fire weather updates were provided
- North County Fire “Ready Set Go” wild fire safety plan was promoted
- August 28 City added an alert banner to website for Covid-19 information
- September 1 local emergency proclaimed due to the spread of Covid-19. Beach closures resulted on Labor Day weekend
- September is National Preparedness Month
- Ongoing information regarding PG&E PSPS preparedness
- Ongoing information regarding air quality

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Ken Miles spoke during public comments and provided a written statement as well regarding wildfire preparedness.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

None

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

Commissioner Blackburn stated that he would be speaking about Flood Program during the October 2020 meeting.

Chair Hitz talked about the goals and role of the EPSC.

Commissioner Taverna expressed her concern over cancelled EPSC meetings during the Covid-19 outbreak.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Commissioner Hladky proposed a working group to discuss wild fire preparedness. Commission approved creation of a working group comprised of Commissioner Hladky, Commissioner Salisbury, Commissioner Gasanyan, and Commissioner Taverna, and report back to the EPSC.

Captain Clements asked the commission about their interest in staffing a Covid-19 testing location in the City of Pacifica. The commission stated possible interest in volunteering.

Next Meeting: October 21, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. hours via Zoom

**ADJOURNMENT:** 7:48 p.m.

**Submitted by Ken Miles for EPSC Meeting on 9/16/20**

**Dear Members of the City of Pacifica Emergency Preparedness and Safety Commission,**

**Attached is a five page article titled “Wildfires Past and Present, And What We Can Do” that I recently wrote for the Pacifica Historical Society’s August Newsletter, which should be of special interest to you. Of greatest concern and a matter of public safety, in my opinion, is the possible impact of a wildfire threatening Pacifica. We are fortunate to live in a community surrounded by beautiful hills and nearly 70% open space, most of the time is relatively cool coastal environment. Most of California including coastal regions and Pacifica are experiencing the effects of an eight-year drought and extreme heat. Each year the wildfire season seem to start earlier than the year before. So far we are fortunate to be spared from the wildfires that have ravaged the nearby regions to the north, northeast and south of us. The month of October, with its warm dry weather and strong easterly winds, is the traditional peak of California’s fire season.**

**Most of us cherish our trees, but some species such as eucalyptus trees are highly flammable as evident by the Oakland Hills Fire of October 1991**

**([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oakland firestorm of 1991.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oakland_firestorm_of_1991)) We are also surrounded by thick dry coastal scrub vegetation including Scotch Broom which haven’t burned in over 50 years. Most at risk are the neighborhoods of Vallemar and East Rockaway which have numerous trees, surrounded by hills of coastal scrub and only one road in and out. Can fire trucks get to the fires if those narrow roads are blocked by people fleeing for their lives? Pedro Point, East Sharp Park and wooded areas of Linda Mar Valley are also at risk. What are our local plans for preparing for wildfires in Pacifica? For evacuating people and pets and where do they shelter after they leave their homes?**

**Maintaining the safety and value of our homes is also highly important. Insurance companies are concerned about California’s wildfires and are sending inspectors out to conduct on-site assessments of all properties they believe to be vulnerable to wildfires, to determine the level of risks, and adjust homeowner and fire insurance policy rates accordingly, or cancel the policies altogether. The home and/or property owners with canceled policies have no choice but to purchase a higher cost insurance policy or the extraordinarily expensive California Fair Plan. Banks and other mortgage lenders require property owners to carry homeowner-fire protection insurance policies. Those who own uninsurable homes and properties outright will find it difficult to sell their properties. Not purchasing a fire-protection policy is not an option.**

**I have a pretty good understanding of emergency preparedness plans and readiness having worked for nearly 30 years with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as their Pacific Region medical device and radiological health advisor. My job included working as a technical advisor and evaluator for the regional Federal Emergency Management Agency’s biannual evaluations of commercial nuclear power plants’ emergency preparedness plans and procedures during tabletop exercises. Avoiding disasters and being well-prepared “in case it happens” are essential. Having well-prepared plans, procedures and tools is important. Conducting periodic tabletop exercises is also important to assure**

the plans are effective, that public is well informed and able to safely evacuate to designated shelters, and response agencies are able to effectively work together. Communication, coordination and cooperation are highly important.

Are we well-prepared for wildfires here in Pacifica? Pages 4 and 5 of my "Wildfire" article includes suggestions and resources for your consideration, such as the following :

***Page 4: Short Range, Multiple Public Agencies: Public agencies that own and manage large undeveloped parcels of land in and around Pacifica (National Parks, State of California, Cal Trans, San Mateo County Parks, County's Fire Safe Group, San Francisco Recreation and Parks and Water Departments, City of Pacifica, Pacifica School District, and the North Coast County Water District) and private owners of large undeveloped properties should work together to assure firebreaks are placed where needed and combustible vegetation near dwellings and other structures is sufficiently cleared to not pose a threat to life and property.***

***Page 4: The City: Develop a list of nearby evacuation centers for various neighborhoods. Arrange for notifications by Fire and Police via phone, TV or Internet. Inform various neighborhoods where the safest exit routes are and what areas and roads to avoid. Secondly, consider joining San Mateo County's "Fire Safe" group of fire departments and non-governmental public safety organizations.***

**Notes:**

- Cal Fire and US Forestry, as well as other public agencies, have important information and programs for creating firebreaks and conducting prescribed burns/controlled burns to clear thick vegetation such as coast scrub, Scotch Broom and pampas grass.
- Recently, US Parks' Golden Gate National Recreational Area crews cleared firebreaks along their border with the town of El Granada.
- There are experts who can assist us at UC Berkeley Dept. of Fire Ecology, and similar resources at SF State and San Jose State... Native American Ohlone Ecosystem Restoration Program – Peninsular Open Space Trust: <https://openspacetrust.org/blog/fire-in-california-2019/>
- Many communities have ordinances to clear weeds and shrubbery from vacant parcels to reduce the likelihood of fire. If the lots are not cleared of weeds, the jurisdiction may hire contractors to clear the parcels, and bill and/or fine the registered owner(s).

Perhaps the City's Emergency Preparedness and Safety Commission can form a Fire Protection Task Group of public officials and others as soon as possible to address these suggested actions before it is too late.

Respectfully Yours,

Ken Miles,

[kenmilesaqa@earthlink.net](mailto:kenmilesaqa@earthlink.net)

## "Wildfires Past and Present, And What We Can Do"

**Most of us wore very early Sunday morning August 16<sup>th</sup> to see and hear the spectacular lightning and thunder that crossed over the Bay Area. Open this hyperlink to observe and hear: <https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-avg-securebrowser&hsimp=yhs-securebrowser&hspart=avg&p=bay+area+lightening+show#id=1&vid=144e027222b0140688d4309ed794fa70&action=click>. Beautiful as it was, the lightning show set off hundreds of small fires across the Bay Area region, some growing to become wildfires that still raging and destroying property and lives. Wildfires are spreading in other parts of California and other western states. Firefighting agencies are overwhelmed. So far Pacifica has been spared. We must protect ourselves from wildfire and prepare for evacuation.**

**For many of us, real wildfires seemed only occurred in the Sierra Nevada mountains or vacation spots like Russian River or Clear Lake during the long hot summers. Today it's a different story. This article explores wildfires past and present, and how we can prepare and protect ourselves damage and destruction.**



**I remember, as I'm sure many you have as well, Walt Disney's touching animated movie, "Bambi", when Bambi's survives a great wildlife caused by the Hunter's campfire. I've vividly remember the scene of the great frightening forest fire. This is short summary that scene " *Bambi is awakened afterward by the smell of smoke; he follows it and discovers it leads to a hunter camp. Bambi is warned by his father that Man (the man that shot and killed Bambi's mother) has returned with more hunters. The two flee to safety, although Bambi is separated from Faline in the turmoil and searches for her along the way. He soon finds her cornered by Man's vicious hunting dogs* ". Open: [https://](https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-avg-securebrowser&hsimp=yhs-securebrowser&hspart=avg&p=bambi%2C+wildfire#id=1&vid=98f2ffc9ec6ced12ed70cd621ede2dda&action=click;)**

[video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-avg-securebrowser&hsimp=yhs-securebrowser&hspart=avg&p=bambi%2C+wildfire#id=1&vid=98f2ffc9ec6ced12ed70cd621ede2dda&action=click;](https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-avg-securebrowser&hsimp=yhs-securebrowser&hspart=avg&p=bambi%2C+wildfire#id=1&vid=98f2ffc9ec6ced12ed70cd621ede2dda&action=click;)

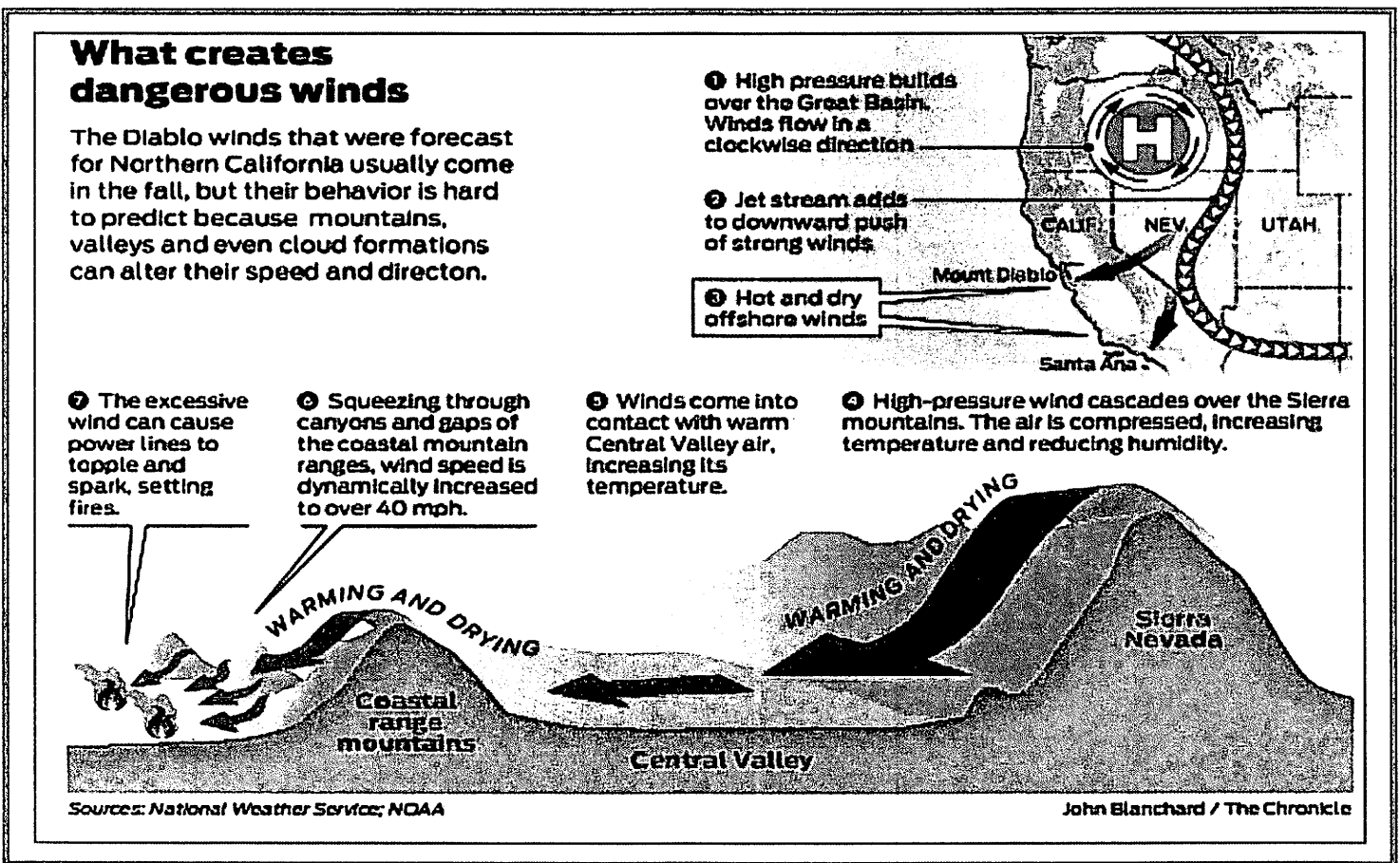
**Evidence of ancient wildfires: Archaeologists have unearthed fossil charcoal that indicates wildfires began soon after the appearance of terrestrial plants 420 million years ago. Ecologists believe wildfires must have had pronounced evolutionary effects on most ecosystems' flora and fauna. As humans evolved they used of fire for agricultural and hunting purposes during the Paleolithic and Mesolithic ages altering the preexisting landscapes and fire regimes. Woodlands were gradually replaced by smaller vegetation that facilitated travel, hunting, seed-gathering, and planting. Minor allusions to wildfires were mentioned in the Bible and by classical writers such as Homer. However, while ancient Hebrew, Greek, and Roman writers were aware of fires, they were not interested in the uncultivated lands where wildfires occurred. Wildfires were used in battles throughout human history as early thermal weapons. In the 14th century Sardinia, firebreaks were used for wildfire protection.**

**Fire was one of the first tools used by early man: Charcoal found in sedimentary deposits off the Pacific coast of Central America suggests that more burning occurred in the 50 years before the Spanish colonization of the Americas than after the colonization. As early as the 17th century, Native Americans were observed using fire for many purposes including cultivation, signaling, hunting game, and warfare. Scottish botanist David Douglas noted the native use of fire for tobacco cultivation, to encourage deer into smaller areas for hunting purposes, and to improve foraging for honey and grasshoppers. Charcoal evidence from**

Several members of the Portola Expedition of 1769 CE to the Bay Area wrote about crossing fields of grass that the indigenous people had burnt. The Ohlone tribe as many other Native American tribes burnt grassland and wooded areas to manage and improve their hunting habitat, natural vegetation, creeks, and streams, and to reduce the probability of wildfires.

**Great Fires and Wildfires During Modern Times:**

Many towns and cities were destroyed by fire caused by man or natural forces. The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 burned in the American city of Chicago during October 8–10, 1871. The fire killed approximately 300 people, destroyed over 3 square miles of the city, and left more than 100,000 residents homeless. In 1906, San Francisco was destroyed by earthquake and by fire. The 1910 Big Blowup wildfire burnt three million acres (4,700 sq mi; 12,100 km<sup>2</sup>) in north Idaho and western Montana, with extensions into eastern Washington and southeast British Columbia, in the summer of 1910, and killed 87 people, mostly firefighters, and destroyed entire towns. The 1991 Oakland Hills “Tunnel Fire” was started by a grass fire in southeast Berkeley, and was driven by 65 mph northeast winds towards Oakland’s eucalyptus-covered hillsides during the weekend of October 19–23, killed 25 people and injured 150 others. It destroyed 1,520 acres that included 2,843 single-family dwellings and 437 apartment and condominium units, at an economic loss of \$1.5 billion.



**Fire Season and the Bay Area’s “Diablo Winds” and Southern California’s “Santa Anna Winds” of September and October**



The occurrence of wildfires seem to be increasing here and elsewhere around the world. During the past several years, wildfires have swept across parts of Europe, Brazilian Amazon forests, Siberia, Canada, Australia and the Western United States. There were major fires in Northern California that have killed many people and destroyed whole communities (e.g., Lake County's Lower Lake and Middletown, Paradise and Santa Rose). This year and close to home, fireworks started the Apple Fire on July 4th in the Gilroy which burned for 10 days before being brought under control.

Perhaps our "fire season," should be defined as 5 months, starting July 4th and ending sometime during November. Southern and Northern Californian hills, mountains and towns have been destroyed by raging fire accompanied by hot dry weather, and usually driven by the high easterly "Diablo" or "Santa Ana" winds that arrive during Fall (October and early November) and are a major force that generate wildfires.

Root causes of uncontrolled wildfires: Earth is an intrinsically flammable planet owing to its cover of carbon-rich vegetation (fuel), seasonally dry climates (low humidity), air (atmospheric oxygen), and ignition sources (lightning, volcanic eruptions, man the tool-maker). Wildfires typically occur during periods of increased temperature, drought and wind. 1750 to 1870 appears to have been a period of increased fire usage, attributed to human population growth and land clearing practices, as suggested by charcoal data around North America and Asia. During the 20th century, evidence shows a great decrease in usage of fire, likely linked to the expansion of agriculture, increased livestock grazing, and fire prevention efforts. A meta-analysis found that 17 times more land burned annually in California before 1800 compared to recent decades (1,800,000 hectares/year compared to 102,000 hectares/year). Perhaps this could be interpreted as the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a period of fewer wildfires and a buildup of unburnt fuels?

Sources of fuel: Most Western countries build their towns and suburbs near highly flammable vegetated areas (fuel), using combustible wood and petroleum products (fuel). The vegetated areas may include old growth and new growth forests, dense scrub lands and brushes, and grasses growing along hillside or flat land. Some of the troublesome species of plants for Pacifica and the Coastside areas are introduced species: eucalyptus and pine trees, pampas grass, Scotch broom, and various grass species.

Sources of Ignition: Lightning strikes, downed utility company power lines, natural gas lines, spillage of petroleum products, sparks caused by car exhaust systems, camp fires, burning cigarettes, fireworks. It is estimated that 95% of all wildfires are caused by humans.

Other factors: Limited water, limited access, overhead power lines (vs. underground power and utility lines).

Power Outages: Some power outages during wildfires are caused by destruction of the electric power lines and utility company equipment; other outages are those that the utility companies conduct to manage the power grid distribution that occurs when high electrical usage in an area may over-load the utility company's entire grid. Problem: Utility power outages can disable medical devices, communication systems and water pumps needed for fire fighting.

**Fireworks:** Pacifica is one of the few cities in the Bay Area to allow legal "safe & sane" fireworks for the July 4th holiday. However, the City of Pacifica has zero tolerance for illegal fireworks. Persons caught with illegal fireworks will be cited and may be fined and/or sentenced to one year in jail. To report individuals using, possessing or selling illegal fireworks, call the non-emergency Pacifica Police dispatch line at 650-738-7314.

### **Immediate Preparation for Fires:**

**Property Owners:** Visit this Cal Fire website for advice on protecting structures and landscaping from wild-fire (defensible- space) : <https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/get-ready/defensible-space/>

**The Public:** Prepare for possible evacuation. Collect all irreplaceable and valuable items and documents, jewelry, medicines and containers for small pets for easy pickup when notified to evacuate. Plan where to relocate in case you and your family must evacuate and find each other. If you have not been assigned an evacuation center by the city or county authorities, select a place such as a school or large parking lot close to the beach.

**The City:** Develop a list of nearby evacuation centers for various neighborhoods. Arrange for notifications by Fire and Police via phone, TV or internet. Inform various neighborhoods where the safest exit routes are and what areas and roads to avoid. Secondly, consider joining San Mateo County's "Fire Safe" group of agencies.

### **Short to Long Term Plans to Safeguard Our Communities:**

**Short Range Multiple Public Agencies:** Public agencies that own and manage large undeveloped parcels of land in and around Pacifica (National Parks, State of California, Cal Trans, San Mateo County Parks, San Francisco Recreation and Parks and Water Departments, City of Pacifica, Pacifica School District, and the North Coast County Water District) and private owners of large undeveloped properties should work together to assure firebreaks are placed where needed and combustible vegetation near dwellings and other structures is sufficiently cleared to not pose a threat to life and property.

**Medium Range, State, County and City:** Require that homes and other live and work structures be built with external noncombustible materials and have internal fire extinguisher systems.

**Medium Range, State and City:** Require all power lines and other overhead lines be undergrounded with easy access for maintenance (as in Europe).

**Medium Range, State and City:** Require new and existing buildings with ample access to sunlight have solar panels and backup batteries installed and electrical current shared with a limited grid.

**Medium Range, State, County and City:** Assure all firefighting organizations have interchangeable communication and firefighting equipment.

**Long Range, State:** 1) Develop electrical transportation vehicles and systems; and 2) Find alternatives to using natural gas, which is primarily methane, a greenhouse gas [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural\\_gas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_gas) .

## **Resources to Prepare for Wildfires & Protect Ourselves:**

**California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire): Updated reports of current significant wildfires throughout the State (note: may be many more smaller fires)** <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/>

**Cal Fire's Site for Protection of Property from Wildfire:** <https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/get-ready/defensible-space/>

**Cal Fire's site for checking active fires:** <https://ucanr.edu/sites/fire/Safety/Current/>

**Pacific Gas & Electric Utility Company about power outages:** <https://www.pgecurrents.com>

**County of San Mateo County Manager's Office, Flex Alerts:** <http://www.flexalert.org/>

**County of San Mateo Hazards | California State Fire Severity Zones:** <https://planning.smcgov.org/sites/planning.smcgov.org/files/documents/files/Fire%20Hazard%20Severity%20Zones.pdf>

**San Mateo County Fire:** <https://www.cfsfire.org/news-release/>

**County of San Mateo Region "Fire Safe" Authorities (Pacifica City-Daly City Fire is not a member, but should consider joining):** <https://firesafesanmarateo.org/resources/fire-history>

**Red Cross link with preparedness, precautions and updated map:** <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/wildfire.html>, <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/wildfire.html>

**San Mateo Co. Homeowners advisory website:** <https://firesafesanmarateo.org/resources/homeowner-resources/hardening-your-home>

**City of Pacifica Ordinances for fireworks:** [https://www.cityofpacifica.org/depts/police/safety\\_n\\_disaster/fireworks.asp](https://www.cityofpacifica.org/depts/police/safety_n_disaster/fireworks.asp)

**John Muir Earth Island Institute:** <https://johnmuirproject.org/> OR <https://johnmuirproject.org/scientific-research/>

### **University courses in Fire Ecology and Fire Sciences**

Cal Fire and regional firefighting agencies have established a network of manned watch towers located on mountain tops around the state. Pacifica Historical Society's board member Steve Johnson volunteers with the Marin County Fire Department as a fire lookout in the tower on Mt. Tamalpais and provided this beautiful video on a day in the life of a fire lookout: <https://vimeo.com/48169212> "There are also fire lookouts on Mt. Hamilton (Copernicus Tower, aptly named because it's not far from Lick Observatory) and Pole Mtn. (Sonoma County)."

Steve recommends the following link for advice on making your property more firesafe by providing defensible space: <https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/get-ready/defensible-space/> He adds that "...this is particularly important in the back of the valley where response time will be longer. (As you know, we only have two engine companies in Pacifica)."

Cal Fire recently installed over 100 cameras around the state to monitor the surrounding countryside for signs of smoke and fire.

By Ken Miles,  
Aug. 18, 2020