



Fire Safety News

*Serving the communities of Castle Creek, Champagne Village, Deer Springs, Hidden Meadows,
Jesmond Dene, Rimrock, The Welk Resort, and West Lilac*

February 10, 2018

Defensible Space Is It Enough?



The Lilac Fire two hours after it started on December 7, 2017, viewed from Rimrock.

Deer Springs Fire Safe Council photo.

Not With The Lilac Fire!

By Greg Lorton

The Lilac Fire that swept through North San Diego County in early December proved to be tragic in terms of losses of homes and buildings, as well as the loss of dozens of horses. However, the fire provided some lessons that may help in planning for future fires with the goal of minimizing similar lessons. Even with quick response, the fire was difficult to contain, especially given the hazardous weather conditions in the region at the time. From the time the fire was first reported, it grew to two acres within the few minutes before the first fire engines arrived on scene. The fire expanded so quickly that residents of the nearby Rancho Monserate community had only minutes to evacuate. Almost miraculously, no residents were injured in Rancho Monserate. Later however, three people were injured at the San Luis Rey Downs stables.

One month after the fire, Nick Brown, Chief of the Deer Spring Fire Protection District, shared his observations and experiences with Craig Cook, President of the Deer Springs Fire Safe Council. During the Lilac Fire, Chief Brown acted in the role of operations chief, working to dispatch and coordinate firefighting resources coming in from around the state as well as several other states.

The Lilac Fire began on December 7 during a Red Flag warning period with gusty Santa Ana winds and warm temperatures. The recently developed Santa Ana Wildfire Threat Index was at its highest level (purple) at the time. At this level, if a wildfire breaks out, it may be potentially unstoppable, even with an ideal firefighting response.

The concept of defensible space around residences has been well developed and implemented by proactive residents seeking to ensure that their homes can survive a wildfire. However, Chief Brown noted that some homes with appropriate defensible space burned in the Lilac Fire. Some of those homes had combustible materials close to or in contact with the homes. Embers traveling ahead of the main fire ignited these materials resulting in the loss of homes and structures. In other cases, long narrow driveways with no defensible space created severe challenges for the firefighters in gaining access to burning buildings. Property owners need to do their part in creating and maintained defensible space not only around structures but also along the roadways and driveways leading to them.



Even with defensible space, some homes were destroyed by the intense fast-moving fire.

CAL FIRE photo by Jeff Hall.

Chief Brown noted that the fire was so hot that succulents and cactus burned. The fire also burned trees in avocado and orange groves, despite moist soil from regular irrigation. He also mentioned that bearded palm trees (trees with the remnants of dead fronds still attached) burned aggressively, often raining down embers to combustible brush below. Also, when caught by the gusty winds, embers travelled up to two miles to create new spot fires. Skinned palm trees, with the dead frond remnants removed, provide much less combustible material and the resulting potential for airborne embers and spot fires.



Many untrimmed palm trees burned in the path of the fire, most started by flying embers lodging in the untrimmed "beard" or fronds. CAL FIRE photo by Jeff Hall.

The tragic loss of thoroughbred horses occurred at stables in the path of the fire. Chief Brown noted that older stable structures burned, while newer stables survived. The older structures were open construction built with wooden frames and metal roofs. With the open construction,

the fire easily entered the buildings. Loose hay and straw in the stables was the perfect fuel bed for ignition by flying embers. In addition, the open structures contained stacked bales of hay that sustained the fire. On the other hand, the newer stables were enclosed structures, and the walls prevented the fire from entering the structures. These experiences corroborate strategies and construction practices to prevent fires from entering structures, including homes. If the fire can be kept outside, the likelihood of a structure surviving the fire is significantly increased.

In spite of the quick response and aggressive actions by firefighters, the Lilac Fire burned 4,100 acres (6.4 square miles), destroyed 157 homes and structures and damaged 64 others. The effort to combat the fire was coordinated by CAL FIRE, and relied heavily on local resources as well as resources from around California and several other western states, including Oregon, Utah, and Idaho.



Dry ornamental bushes next to a home caught on fire by ember showers.

CAL FIRE photo by Jeff Hall.

Creating defensible space not only around your home but also access to the street is a safeguard that should be implemented before hazardous fire conditions occur. But Chief Brown strongly emphasized that when fire conditions are critical, such as red flag warnings from the National Weather Service, residents should take the time to walk around their home and ensure that any combustible materials are either moved inside the home or well away from the home. If you see smoke coming your way, it is probably too late. Combustible materials to look for may include trash cans, patio furniture, cardboard boxes, dead bushes, bark, wood

piles, piles of leaves, and debris. Recognize that most plastics will burn when subjected to high temperatures. Defensible space may not be enough!



Under the intense heat of the Lilac Fire, the rubber tires and plastic exterior of a golf cart burned fiercely next to a home in Rancho Monserate. – CAL FIRE photo by Jeff Hall.

Wildfire behavior has been more severe than ever, so residents need to be equally diligent. Please do your part to increase the chances that your home will survive a wind-driven wildfire. Help the firefighters help you!

Hear more about the Lilac Fire and the lessons learned

*presented by
Deer Springs District Fire Chief,
CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Nick Brown*

At the Annual Fire Safe Council Meeting
this Saturday, February 10th, 10:00AM
at the MHA Pavilion

28208 Meadow Glen Way West

You're Invited!

To the Annual Fire Safe Council Meeting
this Saturday, February 10th
from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

MHA Pavilion
28208 Meadow Glen Way West

Refreshments will be served

What do the red flags mean?

By Greg Lorton



Red flags on December 4, 2017 at the entrance of Champagne Village. Photo by Greg Lorton

Occasionally as you drive through Southern California, you will see a pair of red flags flying at the side of the road. What do these flags signify?

The red flags indicate that we are having, or soon will have, weather conditions that create a “critical risk” of a wildfire. The National Weather Service issues these warnings. These warnings result when weather forecasts indicate a combination of the following factors:

- Strong winds
- Low relative humidity
- Warm to hot temperatures

For Southern Californians, these critical fire weather conditions often occur when we are having “Santa Ana” winds (also known as “Santana” winds outside of southern California). Santa Ana winds occur when there is a high-pressure area over the deserts of California, Arizona, Nevada, and/or Utah. The winds result as dry air from the high-pressure area flow towards lower pressure areas. The temperatures become even higher as these hot dry winds descend into the lower elevations. And the fire danger increases as humidity decreases.

The intent of these red flag warnings is to alert everyone to the potential of a wildfire, to exercise caution, and to plan accordingly. The Deer Springs Fire Safe Council maintains these flags within the boundaries of the Deer Springs Fire Protection District, and flies them when the National Weather Service posts a warning. There are 14 flag locations throughout the District. These flags are mounted on permanent signs that state “Extreme Fire Danger Area”.

Helpful phone numbers

Immediate Emergency Assistance:
911

Emergency & Non-Emergency
County Information Hotline (road
closures, shelter locations,
evacuation sites, fire related
information, recovery assistance and
more): 211

San Diego County Sheriff, San
Marcos Station: 760-510-5200

Deer Springs Fire Stations

Station 1
8709 Circle R Drive
Escondido, CA 92026

760-749-8001

Station 2
1321 Deer Springs Road
San Marcos, CA 92069
760-741-5512

Station 3
10308 Meadow Glen Way East

San Diego Animal Services
Emergency Dispatch: 619-236-2341
Deer Springs Fire Safe Council
Informational Hot Line:
949-472-1401

Escondido, CA 92026

760-751-0820

We gratefully acknowledge ...

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<http://www.DeerSpringsFireSafeCouncil.com>

Or you can mail your donation to:

DEER SPRINGS FIRE SAFE COUNCIL
P.O. BOX 460097
ESCONDIDO, CA 92046-0097

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Deer Springs Fire Safe Council

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