



City of Malibu News

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City of Malibu Prepares for the 2020 Wildfire Season Amidst the Pandemic

(Malibu CA) – As Southern California heads into peak fire season, the City of Malibu is working to prepare and help community members be prepared to prevent wildfires and be prepared to respond to the next big wildfire that may come.

“We have already seen at least five brush fires break out this year and fortunately they were all quickly extinguished, but they were a serious reminder that the next big wildfire is always around the corner, and will not wait for the pandemic to be over,” said Mayor Mikke Pierson. “The City and our agency partners are doing everything possible to be ready, and that includes helping all residents do everything they can to be ready.”

What the City is Doing to Prepare

The City and the Los Angeles County Fire Department are closely monitoring fire conditions, and the Fire Department is deploying additional resources in the Malibu area. The City will send out emergency and weather alerts and will post announcements on social media and the website when fire conditions are forecast or if a fire occurs that could threaten Malibu or could be a major draw on resources available to fight a fire in Malibu.

The City Manager and Public Safety Manager meet weekly with the Fire Department and Sheriff’s Department to discuss current and forecasted fire conditions, community concerns, deployment levels in response to wildfire threat factors such as hot, dry, windy weather, fuel moisture levels and Santa Ana winds. They also discuss the levels of firefighters, companies, vehicles, water dropping aircraft and other firefighting resources that are currently available or may be deployed at other ongoing fires.

The Fire Safety Liaison is monitoring current fire conditions, including weather and fuel moisture levels, and reports them weekly to the City Manager and Public Safety Manager. The fuel moisture levels are based on the volume of water that certain local indicator plant species are holding and are checked continuously by the L.A. County Fire Department. Together with heat, wind and humidity, fuel moisture levels are an important factor in wildfire conditions. When fuel moisture levels are very low, the vegetation is much more flammable, and can contribute to a brush fire growing large and dangerous to lives and homes.

Virtual Multi-Agency Wildfire Response Exercise

City staff participated in a virtual exercise with regional response partners on Thursday, August 6 to enhance coordination of wildfire communications and response. After the exercise, City staff will participate in virtual Emergency Operations Center (EOC) exercises to prepare to respond effectively from remote locations if needed due to the pandemic. The City has been running a virtual EOC since the beginning of the pandemic when most City staff began working remotely for COVID-19 safety.

Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) Preparations

Southern California Edison (SCE) has, and will, proactively shut off power to large sections of Malibu when high temperatures and winds and low humidity create dangerous fire conditions in order to prevent their equipment from starting a fire. The City opposes this policy and has developed plans to respond when SCE announces that it may implement a PSPS due to dangerous fire conditions. The PSPS plans include putting out emergency alerts and offering power outage preparedness information to residents and activating the Emergency Operations Center, and implementing the City's Zero Power Plan.

Zero Power Plan

The City has a Zero Power Plan to be able to communicate emergency information during widespread power outages that are PSPS or caused by high winds. One of the major challenges posed by the 2018 Woolsey Fire was that cellphone, internet, power, and landline phone infrastructure was damaged in the fire, causing a virtual citywide communications blackout that hindered emergency communications to the public and among agencies, hindered evacuations and made the fire even more dangerous. The Zero Power Plan includes setting up Emergency Information Stations at locations across the City where printed information can be posted; access to Changeable Message Signs; and an agreement with KBUU 99.1 FM, Malibu's local radio station, to broadcast emergency messages from the City; putting emergency information on a phone hotline; City fleet vehicles outfitted with loudspeakers and flashing light bars that staff and CERT Team volunteers can use to assist with evacuations when communications are down; and more.

The City has also partnered with the CERT Team to install radio repeaters in several key locations in Malibu to boost the signal of handheld radios so that the City and CERT Team members can communicate when power and communications are down.

The City has recently purchased back-up generators for key traffic signals along PCH in Malibu to allow the signals to continue functioning during an extended power outage. Currently, backup batteries on traffic signals only last for several hours. When there is a serious threat of a fire, or during a wildfire, disabled traffic signals pose an additional hazard when residents need to be able to travel or evacuate safely.

Residents should be prepared for power outages when high winds are forecast by making sure they have emergency plans including evacuation and reunification plans; emergency lights, battery, solar-powered, or hand-crank radios; and know how to open your garage door or driveway gate manually. Learn more about the City's PSPS preparations and how you can be prepared at www.MalibuCity.org/PSPS.

How You Can Be Prepared

The City advises residents to make sure they, their families and their communities are prepared for wildfires, and has started a public outreach campaign for 2020 Wildfire Season Preparedness to offer tips and resources that will be posted on social media, Nextdoor, the City website and e-notifications to help them get prepared.

The first step is to download the City's new, free Emergency Survival Guide at www.Malibucity.org/SurvivalGuide or request printed editions that you can distribute to your neighborhood or organization. To request copies, email skaplan@malibucity.org or call 310-456-2489, ext. 368.

Check Your Emergency Plans and Supply Kits, or Get Started Making One

Residents should review their family emergency and evacuation plans and check their "go bags" and emergency supplies to ensure food, water, medication and batteries have not expired. If you do not have an emergency plan or supply kits, you can learn how to get started with City's free Emergency Survival Guide, available online at www.Malibucity.org/SurvivalGuide.

Maintain Situational Awareness

Situational awareness is critical to being prepared and staying safe when disaster strikes. You should make a habit of monitoring local news (AM and FM radio and local TV news) so you know and are prepared when hot, dry, windy weather and Santa Ana winds make for dangerous fire conditions in Malibu. Make sure you are signed up to receive emergency, traffic and weather alerts from the City by text and email – go to www.MalibuCity.org/news, scroll down to Alert Center, select Emergency, Traffic, Weather; and Los Angeles County – go to <https://lacounty.gov/emergency/alert-la>. Monitor heat, wind and humidity by following the National Weather Service (NWS) Los Angeles/Oxnard on social media at <https://twitter.com/nwslosangeles> and on their website at <https://www.weather.gov/lox/> where you can see current hazards and sign up to receive weather alerts.

Harden Your Home

The City's Fire Safety Liaison is available to visit your home, assess the property's wildfire risk and provide a checklist of ways that you can harden your homes against flying embers, which are a main cause of homes catching fire during a wildfire. Tips include clearing away dry, flammable material, furniture, and vegetation from adjacent to the home, covering eve vents with metal mesh, and creating defensible space around the house. The outreach also includes tips on situational awareness, early evacuation, and creating a family emergency plan. To schedule an appointment, email FireSafety@malibucity.org or call 310-456-2489, ext. 387.

Weed Whacker Fire Safety Campaign

The City is conducting widespread outreach to homeowners, contractors, homeowner's associations, neighborhood groups, construction sites, landscapers and gardeners on how to avoid starting fires while using weed whackers. Every year, brush fires are started by the use of power tools in vegetated areas. The City created a flyer and social media messaging in English and Spanish offering tips such as switching from metal blades to plastic blades or nylon cords. The flyer is available to download or print at <https://www.malibucity.org/DocumentCenter/View/26713/Weed-whacker---Tip-to-reduce-fire-dangers> and in Spanish at <https://www.malibucity.org/DocumentCenter/View/26722/Weed-whacker-flyer-SPA>. To request print copies, email skaplan@malibucity.org or call 310-456-2489, ext. 368.

Get A Dolphin Decal For Resident-Only Road Closures

In the event of a Resident Only road closure, the City's Dolphin Decal can help residents get through restricted areas. The Dolphin Decal was established to help emergency personnel in identifying residents and other individuals who need to access their homes and businesses when road closures are in place during emergencies. Motorists will be checked for proof of residency or business or to ensure they have a Dolphin Decal on their vehicle. For more information, or to request a Dolphin Decal, visit <https://www.malibucity.org/229/Dolphin-Decal-Access-Program> or call 310-456-2489.

National Preparedness Month Virtual Trainings, Webinars and Exercises in September

Community preparedness events are being planned all month long in September as part of National Preparedness Month. Events will include a series of virtual webinars and community meetings open to the public using video conferencing.

Learn more about the City's emergency preparedness activities at www.MalibuCity.org/Emergency.

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