

FRESNO COUNTY WILD LAND FIRE EVACUATION CARE AND SHELTER PLAN

An Element of the Fresno County Operational Area Master Emergency Services
Plan
September 4, 2002

Summary of Organizational Roles and Responsibilities for Wild Land Fire Evacuation Care and Shelter in Fresno County

Fire Incident Command will determine if evacuations are needed and notify the Sheriff's Department to evacuate. The Sheriff's Department will carry out evacuations and secure the affected areas.

The Sheriff will notify the County Office of Emergency Services (OES) to arrange care and shelter and transportation for evacuees. The Sheriff will provide OES with estimates of the number of persons to be sheltered, the number and type of animals to be sheltered and the transportation resources needed to accomplish these evacuations.

The County Office of Emergency Services (OES), in coordination with the County Department of Adult Services Help in Emergencies Assessment Response Team (HEART), the Fresno Madera Chapter of the American Red Cross (ARC), Fire Incident Command and the Sheriff's Department will select the appropriate location and facilities and obtain authorization and access from the owner to use the facilities for public evacuation shelter(s) and for evacuation transportation.

HEART will assess the care, shelter and social services needs of the evacuees, act as liaison with ARC and other care and shelter providers (Salvation Army, Southern Baptist Convention, etc.) and coordinate the provision of care, shelter and social services to the evacuated population. Any requests for County nurses, mental health workers or other non-fire, non-law enforcement government resources will be requested and coordinated through County OES. The HEART team will provide County OES with care, shelter and social services status reports on a regular basis.

School districts will be requested pursuant to agreements with ARC and/or as required by Section 40041.5 of the California Education Code to provide shelter facilities and transportation for evacuees.

All evacuation shelters will be ARC shelters. ARC will activate, operate and manage the evacuation shelter(s). ARC will provide food, water, cots, bedding, hygiene kits and other essential shelter supplies to shelter residents and other eligible evacuees through its own resources or vendor agreements. ARC may request additional cots and bedding for the shelters from a limited supply maintained by Fresno County OES. ARC can also provide financial assistance to individuals to purchase medicines and eyeglasses if needed.

If the urgency of the situation necessitates opening a public shelter to receive evacuees before the HEART team and/or ARC can respond, County OES will take the necessary steps to select and activate the required shelter(s) on behalf of ARC and will turn over management and operation of the shelter(s) to ARC at the earliest opportunity.

Summary of org. cont.

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OES will also coordinate the care and sheltering of pets and livestock through assistance from the Central California Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and other agencies and organizations as necessary.

Wild Land Fire Evacuation Care and Shelter Communications and Response Flowchart

Communications Flow

Incident Commander (FIRE)



Sheriff's Office (SO)



County OES



County HEART Team



American Red Cross (ARC)



Shelter Landlord (typically a school district)

Agency Response

- Makes decision to evacuate.
- Notifies Sheriff to initiate evacuation.

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- Notifies affected residents.
 - Sets up controlled entry points.
 - Notifies OES to initiate shelter.
 - Reports estimated shelter needs to OES:
(number of people, location,
special concerns, transportation,
animals, etc.)

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- Coordinates shelter and transportation selection
and authorization with Fire, SO, HEART
Team and ARC.
 - Contacts shelter landlord to arrange
for use of facilities.

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- Serves as County Liaison for provision of care, shelter
and social services.
 - Monitors needs of evacuees and requests further care
and shelter aid as needed from providers.
 - Requests County mental health workers, nurses,
and other non-fire, non-law enforcement
government personnel resources as needed
through County OES.

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- Provides care and shelter to evacuees.
 - Activates, operates and manages shelter(s).

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- Provides facility for shelter.
 - Provides transportation resources.

Appendix A - General Information

Over the past ten to fifteen years Eastern Fresno County has experienced several significant wild land fires that have required the evacuation of mountain residents. Several important lessons were learned from both the Powerhouse and Big Creek fires. The topics below address some of the areas of special concern that need to be considered in planning evacuation to a wild land fire.

Fire Incident Command

When the Incident Command System is implemented in a wild land fire, the Sheriff co-locates at the Incident Command Center. Fire agencies may also provide representatives to the County Emergency Operations Center. A large fire will likely involve many agencies with a variety of concerns. Non-fire agencies that might have representatives at the Incident Command Center or at the County Emergency Operations Center include the County Office of Emergency Services, Utilities, California Highway Patrol, CALTRANS, American Red Cross, etc.

Communication of Fire Information to the General Public

The Emergency Alerting System (EAS) may be utilized to provide initial warnings if evacuation is expected or required. Residents in areas that are close to an active fire should monitor radio stations including AM 580 (KMJ) for EAS warnings. Routine updates on fire conditions will be provided by Fire Incident Command to all evacuation centers and fire information centers.

Shelter Sites

Shelter sites will be determined based on the most current information available at the time of the fire. Factors considered will include fire conditions, the number of people that need to be sheltered and the conditions of roads leading to the potential shelter sites. Fresno County's Master Emergency Services Plan identifies public schools as the primary shelter facilities. In the foothill and mountain areas of eastern Fresno County the two school districts that would provide shelter facilities and transportation resources are Sierra Unified in the northeast and Kings Canyon Unified in the southeast. On the westside of the County, the Coalinga-Huron school district would be recommended to provide shelter facilities and transportation resources. The American Red Cross (ARC) maintains shelter agreements with each of these school districts.

Sheltering for Pets and Livestock

Currently there is no specific County plan for dealing with the needs of displaced pets and livestock.

SPCA is willing to assist the County in dealing with displaced animals.

Sierra Unified's Assistant Superintendent indicated that there are areas at the Sierra High School agricultural farm that may be available to shelter a small number of livestock if needed.

Other ideas that are being considered include:

- Providing temporary pens for pets at a site adjacent to the ARC shelters.
- Working with local veterinarians and unaffected animal owners to shelter large animals.
- The Sheriff's Department is working on a list of animal transportation resources.

Appendix B – Specific Area Information

Critical Northeast Areas

On the northeast side of the County the heavily populated areas that could be threatened by wild land fires are Big Creek, Camp Sierra, Shaver Lake, Huntington Lake, Auberry and Meadow Lakes.

Evacuation of organized camps would probably require extra support vehicles. The County Office of Emergency Services (OES) maintains a list of contact phone numbers for organized camps on the eastside.

Auberry Area

Wish-I-Ah Care Center, which is located north of Auberry, houses and cares for approximately 153 patients. The majority of these residents suffer from Alzheimer's disease. In addition to its residents, Wish-I-Ah has about 130 employees. (Approximately 70 employees are on site during the day shift. Far fewer employees work during the evening and night hours.) In the event of a fire this facility presents unique evacuation and sheltering challenges due to the number of residents and their special conditions.

Wish-I-Ah has four main buildings for resident housing and care. A number of additional buildings provide support. In the event of an emergency the facility has backup generators and 210,000 gallons of water storage. The facility uses approximately 20,000 gallons of water per day. In addition to this, there are approximately 40,000 gallons of water stored in reserve for fire fighting needs.

Due to the difficulties involved with evacuating this facility, Wish-I-Ah's Director has indicated that they would prefer to shelter their patients in place if it is determined that this is safe. During a tour of the facility on July 17, 2000, Fire Managers from Fresno County Fire Protection District/CDF and Sierra National Forest indicated that based on current conditions all of Wish-I-Ah's patient housing buildings except "Canyon View", the northwestern most building, should be defensible against most fires. In the event of a wild land fire threat the Canyon View building would need to be evacuated, but Wish-I-Ah should be able to shelter all patients in place in their remaining buildings. If a fire occurred that presented extreme behavior the entire facility would need to be evacuated. Dust, smoke and noise problems will also need to be considered when deciding if sheltering in place is the best option.

The Wish-I-Ah Director indicated that during the Powerhouse Fire it took about 2 hours to evacuate their facility. Currently all residents could be transported by school bus with the exception of 3 to 5 patients who would need to be transported by ambulance. Fresno County Emergency Medical Services should be notified to advise on transportation needs for Wish-I-Ah patients. Sierra Unified School District buses would be requested to transport the facility's residents. The facility could arrange to bring along any necessary medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, other specialized supplies and some bedding that their residents would need. Trucks from the Sierra Unified School District would be needed to transport these items. Some bedding (cots and blankets) and food would need to be provided by the American Red Cross (ARC) at the shelter facility. Generally speaking, the residents would eat the food normally served in a public shelter with the exception that the food might need to be pureed for some patients.

If evacuation of Wish-I-Ah or other parts of the Auberry community becomes necessary, the Foothill Middle School located at 29147 Auberry Road (approximately one mile west of Prather) has been identified as the best shelter site. This recently built school has a large multipurpose room and a gymnasium that can house a significant number of people. A large kitchen and showers are available at the school. Sierra Unified School District has buses and at least one flat bed truck that could be used for transportation of people and supplies.

Sierra High School in the northeastern part of the County should not be considered as a shelter location due to the fact that firefighters typically use this facility as base camp.

Shaver Lake

The populated areas above Pineridge and Cressmans may require the use of both school and "non-school" shelter sites. Potential shelter sites include the Shaver Lake Community Center, Sierra Summit Ski Resort, Big Creek Elementary School, federal and state work camps, Southern California Edison property and campgrounds.

In the event that residents in the Pineridge area and the Shaver Lake basin need to be evacuated and Highway 168 is not accessible, shelter sites may be set up at Sierra Summit Ski Resort/Huntington Lake area and in the Wishon/Courtwright Reservoirs area. The American Red Cross is currently working on establishing shelter agreements with facility owners in these areas.

Above Shaver Lake

The Sheriff and Forest Service indicate that high mountain campground occupants could be easily evacuated using Sheriff and Forest Service helicopters.

The Assistant Fire Management Officer for Sierra National Forest indicates that most population centers in the high Sierras are in relatively safe locations. He indicated that a very unique set of conditions would need to occur for these areas to burn.

Critical Southeast Areas

On the southeast side of the County the heavily populated areas of concern are Squaw Valley, Wonder Valley, Dunlap, Pinehurst, Miramonte, Grants Grove, and Hume Lake.

In addition to the schools in the southeast area, Wonder Valley also has potential as a possible shelter location.

Critical Westside Areas

Areas of wild fire concern on the westside of the County include the Los Gatos Canyon and Warthen Canyon areas. Both of these populated areas are located in the foothills west of the Interstate 5 freeway.

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