What Can We Learn from the Rocky Fire?

The San Mateo County Strike Team deployed to the Rocky Fire (Lake, Yolo and Colusa County). The personnel included 7 firefighters from Central County Fire Department. The Rocky Fire began on July 29, 2015 and lasted until August 14, 2015, according to CalFire. Our firefighters informed us that while the working days were long and grueling, there was one common theme found during their operations: property clearance. Out of the many properties they encountered, our crews found homes that were very well protected. Trees were limbed-up, ground fuel was at a minimum, and defensible space was well-defined. Our crews stated that because these property owners had followed a good vegetation management plan, they were able to save their homes.

Our firefighters attended daily meetings with CalFire. Some important messages received from CalFire included reminders that all residents should refrain from using powered equipment on hot and dry days when clearing vegetation. In addition, the standard rules of vegetation clearance should be followed: 1) combustible materials directly up against your house should be removed or kept at a distance; such as storage, yard trimmings, equipment, etc. 2) tree limbs should be trimmed up 3) all dry or dead vegetation should be removed 4) maintain 100’ of defensible space

You may wonder, “How would maintaining 100’ of defensible space help my home during a fire? Does it really make a difference if a fire strikes? A wildfire, will burn anything in its path”. Yes, it does make a difference. A wildfire will burn everything in its path, but maintaining 100’ will help slow the progression of the fire. This allows time for families to evacuate their homes and the opportunity for firefighters to assess your home and decide whether they can protect it or have to pass it and continue to the next home. Ground clearance eliminates the fuel for the fire, therefore nothing left to burn and the fire will stop burning.
During wildland fire operations, fire personnel are required to conduct structure triage, whereby a house is assessed to determine if it can be defended or not. This is called WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) Placard System. (Read below for more information on WUI Placard System).

So what does your home mean to you? What valuables do you store in your home? Memories? Family gatherings? Protect your home and protect the lives of our firefighters who fight to save your home. We all have a role to play. It’s a community effort to be a fire adapted community (FAC).

We can learn from the Rocky Fire, Jerusalem Fire, and all fires of the past. What homeowners did or did not do? Understanding how and why firefighters were able or not able to save a home. What should you do?

Fires will happen and the steps you take to be ready will determine the amount of damage your neighborhood will be faced with. Let’s not wait until it’s too late.

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WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) Placard System

What is the WUI Placard System and What is the Purpose? :
The WUI placard is a National Standard designed to document property information and conditions found during structure assessment, thus allowing firefighters to communicate basic conditions to other out of area responding units, who are unfamiliar to the area. The placard informs the fire crew how to proceed in defending your home, whether it can be defended or not. We are informing you in order to help you increase the chances of making your neighborhood more defendable and to get the best placard possible.

Procedure:
After a wildfire strikes, Firefighters from other cities will place the placard in a location visible from the street. Additional placards may be placed over previous cards when significant changes have occurred.

WUI Placard and Categories: What firefighters consider when placarding
The sign is approx. 8” x 11” on heavy water resistant card stock, with preprinted sections.

ACCESS
Can your home be accessed and allow for an escape route to a safety zone if necessary?
• Road surface adequate for speed – What kind of surface is the engine driving on
• Adequate width (20’); Is there a safe place to spot apparatus?
• Turnaround/turnouts – Is there enough room for the engine to turnaround?
• Bridges within limits for fire apparatus – if there are bridges, can it support the weight of the engine?
• Steep Grades – Can the engine handle incline/declines?
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DEFENSIBLE SPACE

• Does the structure have adequate defensible space based on topography and fuels?
• Can defensible space problems be diminished quickly?
• Will building materials and yard clutter compromise safety? What’s in the garage? Construction of roof?
• Are there vent openings, open eaves, large glass windows facing fire front, decks with vegetation below? If embers enter through the attic or foundation vents, will this be a problem?

Firefighters must move quickly when assessing each neighbor; a home that is not kept up, is not defendable and the firefighter must move on.

CCFD’s Level of Service

While California is still experiencing a significant amount of wildland fires, our resources here at home and throughout San Mateo County are not impacted. When our local strike team is deployed, personnel are brought in to cover staffing levels. Our level of service remains within our standards and still allows us to provide exceptional customer service to our residents.

For additional information or questions, please contact Central County Fire Department at (650) 558-7600.

Featured photos......

All the photos presented on this newsletter are courtesy of Central County Fire Department while at the Rocky Fire that started on July 29, 2015 in Lake, Yolo and Colusa Counties. This fire burned approximately 69,438 acres.