

TEA FIRE FORUM QUESTIONS

1. In dollars, what is the estimated loss/damage figure from the Tea Fire?

This will be determined by the County Assessor, and they have not provided the information at this time.

2. Have local fire agencies critiqued Montecito Fire District's Response?

The Incident Management Team, Cal Fire Team 10, which assumed command on Friday November 14, did have an after action review of the incident that included input from all agencies that were a part of the unified command.

3. Do we have appropriate equipment to protect our community?

MFD has standardized and appropriate equipment for the needs of the Montecito Community. The District has one (1) 4x4 brush truck (Type 3) similar to those used by the Forest Service for brush responses, as well as four (4) structure protection engines (Type 1) , one (1) Urban Search and Rescue Vehicle, and one (1) Paramedic Squad. In addition the District has 8 staff and utility vehicles. The majority of emergencies in the District call for medical aid and structure protection. Structure protection equipment can carry more tools and more water than a brush truck and the District's call volume supports the justification for fully standardized structure protection equipment.

While a brush truck may be considered more "nimble", they do not offer the same capabilities that larger (and Nationally Standardized) Type 1 and Type 2 Engines offer. Additionally, Mutual Aid that comes in from other areas are the same Type 1 and Type 2 equipment. These engines are standardized throughout the state for structure protection.

4. Given the risk does MFD honestly have enough manpower and equipment to protect our community?

No we don't, however, no jurisdiction has enough resources for a worst case scenario which is why the state of California has developed a robust and well coordinated mutual aid response system.

However, even with this system, mutual aid resources don't arrive immediately. It takes time to process requests through dispatching centers, assemble the resources at their originating jurisdictions and travel time before they can arrive.

5. Is it in the public's interest to blend MFD with County Fire to get adequate fire protection?

It is our belief that the community of Montecito would get **less service**, not more if consolidated with County. **Currently all revenues from taxes that go to Fire**

Protection stay 100% in Montecito. If Santa Barbara County Fire absorbed this Fire District, the funds would likely be dispersed throughout all Fire Stations, thus benefitting the rest of the county that is serviced by Santa Barbara County Fire, not Montecito residents.

Regular staffing of the two Fire Stations that the District has includes 1 Chief Officer, 2 Engines and a Paramedic Squad to cover approximately 21.7 square miles. (The District has been researching properties to add a third station to the East end of the District.) This does not include the additional staff members that work 8-5 Monday through Friday; this adds an additional 10 trained overhead personnel available to respond weekdays.

Santa Barbara County Fire has 16 fire stations to cover 2737 square miles. On average, that is one station for every 171 miles. In addition, they staff only one Duty Chief Officer in North County, and one for the South County.

MFD has 1 station every 10.5 miles. (If a third station built, this will be one every 7.23 miles.)

Additionally, all Santa Barbara County and all neighboring resources are available as mutual aid in addition to MFD's resources. Consolidation would reduce the number of resources available county wide.

If consolidated, it is likely that Santa Barbara County Fire would eliminate most of the existing staff and Chief Officer positions. This will not provide additional service to the community. Not only would it reduce the service by covering larger areas with less equipment, but consolidation would reduce the amount of experienced overhead personnel available to respond. All staff members of Montecito Fire are cross trained to perform multiple positions besides their designated job description, making them additional valuable resources to the community. The majority of these resources would be eliminated with a County Fire consolidation.

Finally, Santa Barbara County Fire Department already receives money from the State of California to fight wildfires in Montecito above Highway 192 in the State Responsible (SRA) lands. This is a contractual obligation that mandates that Santa Barbara County Fire's resources must respond to Montecito to fight wildland fires in SRA lands.

6. Did MFD realize quickly they were in trouble and quickly call for additional support?

Yes, MFD did realize the conditions were progressing quickly while responding to the incident, and initiated evacuations, call backs and ordered additional resources early on. The timeline is provided in the handout that was distributed at the Community Forum. These handouts are available at the Montecito Association and at Montecito Fire District Headquarters.

7. Was there a delay in Command? How long did it take MFD chief to reach the command center?

An all employee call back was initiated at 5:55 pm. The Fire Chief arrived at approximately 6:05 pm. The Fire District requires the Fire Chief to live within 20 miles of the District. There was no delay in response from District employees, and command was established timely.

8. How can the community encourage and expand the volunteer firefighting efforts in Montecito?

We have offered assistance in providing appropriate training and joint drills with a community volunteer fire brigade, and we have extended the offer to assist in legitimizing a local volunteer fire brigade in the community.

The California State Health & Safety Code provides guidelines for the formation, organization and documentation necessary for volunteer fire companies within unincorporated towns and incorporated cities to ensure volunteer firefighters are provided a reasonably safe working environment and ongoing training to ensure skills are practiced.

As with any endeavor, it is easy to start a program, the real work is in maintaining the program. It requires someone with a vision, leadership and management skills to formulate and organize a fire company, as well as create a plan of succession so that the newly formed fire company maintains its operational status.

Montecito Fire Protection District has always been willing to support community groups that understand the requirements involved with forming a volunteer fire company and are willing and able to comply with the associated State and Local regulations.

Additionally, we recommend that neighborhoods organize themselves with the help of MERRAG, and develop phone trees and other notification methods. They could also assign a neighborhood representative to fire watch on days that have high temperatures, low humidity, and winds.

9. Could the Mountain Drive Community Association volunteer fire department have more dialog with the MFD?

Yes, Montecito Fire has already extended an offer to assist MDCA in training and helping to facilitate the acquisition of new equipment to replace what was lost in the Tea Fire.

10. Is the MFD going to offer guidance on staying and defending against fires; should sheltering in place be promoted?

Sheltering in place can be appropriate in some conditions, but not all. Westmont College was a good example of sheltering in place. The structure was fire resistant (cinderblock construction with a flat roof) and had brush clearance around the building. Along with proper training the property owner must have a defensible structure before considering sheltering in place.

Montecito Fire District is not convinced that stay and defend is the best option for residents of Montecito, particularly given the recent outcome of the fires in Australia where this policy was initially established as an accepted strategy. However, Montecito Fire has and will continue to assist residents in establishing defensible space around their properties. MFD has two wildland specialists that can meet with property owners to assist with property assessment and provide additional information.

11. Was there a problem with radio communications?

The Communication Plan that is outlined in the Operational Area Mutual Aid Plan was utilized the night of the incident. The Plan offered the choice of 3 Command Frequencies and 4 tactical channels. Command Channel options included Los Padres Forest (LPF) – Forest Net, Santa Barbara County Fire (SBC) Channel 2, and Santa Barbara City Fire (STB)- Green 2. LPF Forest Net was not used because the fire was moving away from the forest. SBC Channel 2 was not available because the channel was being utilized for other incidents. STB Green 2 was chosen after getting permission from Santa Barbara City Fire Department.

Three of the four tactical frequencies mentioned in the Operational Plan were utilized to alleviate heavy radio traffic. In the After Action Review conducted by Incident Management Team 10, it was recommended that the Operational Area acquire a multi-jurisdictional frequency that is available for extended attack incidents.

12. I never got a Rev. 911 call. Do we have an adequate emergency warning system in Montecito?

There are no fail proof systems. First off, the Rev 911 system is the Sheriff's Department's program, not the Fire District's. We do not operate the system, nor do we maintain it, but it is one of many tools to utilize for emergency notifications.

What we did learn was that COMMUNITY networking WORKS. The Mountain Drive Community Neighborhood demonstrated this. MERRAG has encouraged neighborhood networking and offers tools and mentorship to build on this concept.

13. Do we have an adequate emergency warning system in Montecito? Why don't we have sirens to alert the community?

The District has many sources of notification including, but not limited to Reverse 911. Local media was broadcasting evacuation information on TV and radio within minutes of the on duty chief officer ordering them.

Sirens are something that the Fire District will look into as a viable option; however there are many hurdles to overcome to make them happen. We would encourage a committee of local residents to contact the Montecito Association to assist in making this a reality.

14. Was there a water pressure breakdown during the Tea Fire?

There was not a water pressure breakdown in Montecito, however the City did experience some problems. Montecito Water District representatives arrived early and worked with fire officials to ensure adequate water pressure from their systems throughout the event.

15. Why was a Red Flag Alert not called?

The conditions in the canyons within the burn area were very localized, and the National Weather Service did not call for a Red Flag until after the fire had started.

Cal Trans has previously agreed to allow for opening the Sycamore Canyon gates when Santa Barbara County Chief's determined a Red Flag condition.

The Santa Barbara County Chief's determine Red Flag when large areas are affected by adverse weather conditions and/or local resources are at draw down due to fires in other areas. Neither condition existed county wide to determine a declaration be made by the County Chief's.

However, Montecito Fire District recognized the potential threat and did staff an additional fire engine that day based on weather conditions.

16. When was Sycamore Canyon opened up? It was closed when I went there? When can Sycamore Canyon be opened again, and if not why?

The gate was opened at the bottom end by Chief Langhorne (MFD Fire Marshal) at 6:03 pm. He had to wait for law enforcement to arrive before Curtis Vincent (MFD Wildland Fire Specialist) was able to open the gate at the top to prevent cars from traveling UP the road. Curtis Vincent reported on the radio at 6:20 "the gates were opened at both ends about 20 ago.". The gates WERE opened timely. However, what didn't happen, and this is a lesson learned, was that the sign indicating "road closed" was still in place. This confused evacuees and made them think the road was still closed. We have worked with Cal Trans, who has advised that they will put a sign in place that allows for

it to be flipped to reveal a message that indicates the road is open or closed, and locked in place.

This is a Cal Trans jurisdiction, and is outside of the Fire District's jurisdiction, but we have stressed our concerns to Cal Trans.

17. Where exactly were all the engines, there wasn't one at my house or in my neighborhood?

It is important to note, there were only 20 engines fighting this fire for the first 2 hours. And they were trying to protect 2860+ parcels. When they were not assisting with evacuation notification, they protected (or tried to protect) the homes they could "safely" get to that were defensible. That's one engine for every 143 parcels (of which many had more than one structure...) While fighting fire is a dangerous job, fire crews must make quick decisions on which property is "safest" for them to protect and engage where they can. There are many hazards they must consider, including their ability to escape.

There were only 20 engines early on, because that is all that can get here quickly in the south coast. The rest are ordered – initial orders were placed at 6:03pm, but they take time to process, assemble, and travel here. The initial attack resources focused on assisting with evacuation notices and structure protection where they could. The first outside assistance arrived at 7:55 pm.

While you may not have seen a fire engine in your neighborhood, there may have been other patrols that had responded in and determined that your neighborhood was still safe, (which was the case on Chelham Way) or determined that the fire was already too established to safely engage in structure protection.

18. Where and when were the fire engines between Coldsprings and Mountain Drive?

Initial attack engines from Montecito arrived within minutes of the dispatch and began evacuation and structure protection in the area below the fire. Initial attack resources from Santa Barbara City & Santa Barbara County were assigned to Mountain Drive Structure Group just after 1800 hours.

19. Why did Insurance company gel trucks have trouble gaining access through road blocks?

FIRESCOPE (Firefighting Resources of California Organized for Potential Emergencies) is a legislated organization that deals with fire & rescue regional policies and issues. FIRESCOPE approved guidelines when encountering private fire resources (which includes Insurance Pre-treatment trucks) on incidents. FIRESCOPE supports the use of private vendors to perform pre-suppression fuels treatment and steps to protect structures prior to the fire's arrival, but they are excluded from working within an area under evacuation.

20. How will MFD improve public communications?

The District's public information officer arrived at 6:15pm. From that point on, all changes or updates to evacuations were made as they were approved, to the County EOC, media representatives, the MERRAG Membership Email database, the Montecito Fire District Website, AND on our own Radio Station 1680 AM.

The Sheriff's Department and Incident Commanders established the evacuation boundaries in the Fire District Conference Room/DOC, just steps away from where the public information officer was working. Information was provided timely and circulated quickly, utilizing multiple sources of information dissemination which is documented.

It is important to note that the AM Radio was never intended for live broadcasts; it was established to provide information on local events and emergency information dissemination. Local Media outlets are expected to provide live coverage as necessary.

Evacuation information was broadcast live, and continually on KEYT from 6:00pm until 11:00pm. Other news and radio stations also had coverage throughout the evening.

It has been reported that coverage for the AM Radio station was limited, particularly in the evacuation areas, and the District is currently looking into ways that the AM Radio coverage can be improved throughout the community. We are also researching other web based notification methods.

21. Is the MFD going to bring fire awareness and safety issues to student orientations?

Yes. We have had a fire safety and awareness program for students in elementary school (K-6) which is delivered annually to all schools within the district, and will be adding a wildland fire component to this year's program.

At Westmont College, we have worked with the school to help establish their shelter in place program. This includes training during the orientation provided to parents and students at the beginning of the school year. We plan to add wildland fire safety component to this program.

22. Why is MFD not demanding swift prosecution of the people who trespassed and started the fire?

The prosecution of any possible suspects is outside of the Fire District's Charter or responsibility. MFD did assist in the investigation, which was handled by Santa Barbara County Sherriff's Department, and it is now the responsibility of the District Attorney to determine how they will move forward with prosecution. Any community concerns with the progress of the case should be directed to the District Attorney.

23. What was the role of City Fire and why did it take so long for them to get to the Riviera?

Santa Barbara City Fire participated in the Unified Command of the incident. Questions relating to the Riviera should be directed to Santa Barbara City Fire as it falls within their jurisdiction and it would be inappropriate for Montecito Fire to speak on their behalf.