

Panic during wildfire?

The importance of neighborhood planning

BY CAREY CHAPUT AND LIN BERNHARDT

Above normal fire potential is forecast for southern Oregon in August and September according to the National Interagency Fire Center. The climate outlooks suggest cooler and wetter than normal conditions, which will promote above average grass growth. Once the region warms up, the afternoon winds will dry out the new vegetation. Because of this, combined with a drier than normal pattern setting up for the July through September period, local firefighters are preparing for an active fire season.

By now, no doubt most Applegate residents have taken steps to protect their property and families from wildfire. Does your emergency plan include your pets and livestock? Have you designated a neighbor to help if you're away during a disaster? Do you know where you will go if you have to evacuate, and where you will take your animals? Do you know what you will take with you?

Panic is not what you want during a wildfire. Preventing panic through strategic preparation and emergency planning of a community for early and safe evacuation is a great challenge. That is why we are pleased to inform you of the efforts taking place to help prepare your neighborhood.

One of the most important things you can do after putting together an evacuation plan for your family and pets is to meet with your neighbors. Although there are many resources available throughout our region, emergency response resources could be extremely thin during a disaster, especially early on. It will be extremely important to be self-reliant, and neighbors can band together to share knowledge, skills, equipment, and information. An effective way to relay information during an emergency is via neighborhood phone

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trees: a proven way to get important information to those that need it. (See insert at right for more information on phone trees.)

The Applegate Animal Disaster Preparedness Committee, a group of Applegate residents concerned about protecting their neighborhoods and focusing on the evacuation and sheltering of pets and livestock, know that one of the biggest impediments to an effective response can be a lack of planning and preparation for our animals. This lack of planning ultimately becomes a public safety issue. Members of this organization are planning on hosting neighborhood meetings in the Missouri Flat and Thompson Creek areas this summer, and they are encouraging residents of other areas to organize meetings in their respective drainages. If you would like to attend or would like help with organizing a neighborhood meeting, please see the contact information at the end of this article.

Planning ahead is a great opportunity to become informed about actions you can take to improve your survivability, such as removing flammable items next to the home, having a 72 hour emergency kit, having an emergency escape plan and conducting a property assessment for future fuel reduction. Through strategic planning and collaboration with your neighbors and local fire department, you can begin to take the necessary action required to protect yourselves, your animals, and your property.

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Why phone trees are important

When increasing public safety is the goal, a plan to open lines of communication between emergency service providers and those affected becomes a necessity. Relaying emergency information in a timely manner can be crucial to public safety.

Phone trees allow the latest information on an emergency to get out to the affected neighborhood. The leader of each pre-established neighborhood phone system is able to effectively deliver necessary information. Using the phone tree, email and other communications provides a way to help residents prioritize their planning. Do they have pets? Have they arranged how to transport them and where to take them? What other important items do they need when evacuating?

Perhaps you would like to be the lead in your neighborhood to establish a phone tree system. Sample phone trees can be found in the Applegate Fire Plan along with information to assist you to organize and gather the necessary information.

Contact the Applegate Fire District,
541-899-1050,
1095 Upper Applegate Road, Ruch,
for a copy of the plan.

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