

The ABCs of Evacuation

Some lessons from the Dixie Fire

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Why Do We Evacuate?

- **#1 - Public Safety !!**
 - Get people out of harm's way
- **#2 - Allow emergency personnel to do their job effectively**
 - Don't have to divert resources to rescue residents

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Who Authorizes Evacuations?

- Locally, it's the Plumas County Sheriff
 - Relies on best available information at the time
 - Incident Command Staff
 - Emergency responders in the field
 - Weather forecasts
- Can issue both evacuation warnings and orders
 - Warning ... "Get ready to evacuate"
 - Soft closure ... residents can come and go / visitors must leave
 - Order ... "GO!"
 - Hard closure ... everybody leaves / no return until order rescinded

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Public Notification

- Emergency alerts sent via phone to residents
 - GENASYS system (formerly CodeRed)
- Sheriff also uses Facebook page
- Local resources supplement PCSO information
 - Fixed sirens on peninsula and east shore
 - Mobile sirens and loud speakers on fire trucks elsewhere
 - Emergency broadcast radio ... 1700 kHz AM
 - Door to door contact by emergency personnel

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Local Practices

- If time is available ...
 - Emergency personnel will go door to door
 - Search & Rescue, fire department or deputies making contact
 - Flagging used to indicate homes visited
 - Notes kept regarding contacts, resident response, empty houses
- Do NOT expect follow-up visits
 - Once contacted, the rest is up to the residents

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A Tale of Two Evacuations

- 2018 Camp Fire – Paradise / Magalia
 - No prior warning, very fast moving fire, alert systems destroyed early
 - Catastrophic evacuation ... chaotic and deadly
- 2021 Dixie Fire – Lake Almanor West
 - Ample early warning of approaching fire
 - Time to prepare
 - Evacuation Warning issued, followed by Evacuation Order
 - Orderly and safe evacuation ahead of flames

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Conditions Here During the Evacuation

- Infrastructure shut down
 - Closure of roads, stores, hospital
 - Power and communication outages, no mail, no garbage service
- Horrible smoke
 - Hazardous air quality for many days ... unhealthy for all
 - Air tankers could not operate most of the time
- Uncertainty
 - No guarantees that Lake Almanor West was going to survive
- *Be glad you weren't here!*

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If You Choose to Stay

- Realize that you have chosen to ignore a lawful order
- Once notified, nobody is obligated to further assist you
 - You are fully responsible for your own wellbeing
 - You are on your own
- You must shelter in place
 - Cruising the neighborhood is not allowed
 - If you leave, you cannot return until the evacuation is over
- If you interfere with or obstruct firefighters ...
 - You may be subject to arrest

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The Importance of Valid Information

- Accurate and timely information is essential
 - Often difficult to achieve in chaotic circumstances
 - Good information allows good decision making
 - A matter of public safety and credibility
- Rumors and speculation are destructive
 - Bad information can lead to needless worry or even tragedy
 - Rumor mongering and idle gossip should be avoided

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Old Lessons Relearned

- Prepare for fire BEFORE it arrives
 - Update your evacuation list, departure plan and home inventory
 - Register for Genasys (including your cell phone)
 - Maintain your defensible space
 - Support community cleanup efforts
- Stay informed, alert and ready to act when fire is nearby
 - Awareness doesn't cost a thing, and it may save your life
- Don't delay departure
 - If an evacuation warning is issued, pack up and be ready to leave
 - If you feel unsettled, leave early (before an evacuation order is issued)
 - When an order is issued, get underway promptly

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