

PMLA - Moc Fire Emergency Evacuation - Post Emergency Event Review

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Over the last 30 years of living and working in PML, I have been through many fires and multiple community evacuations. The differences between those and the recent Moc Fire is the amount of time we had before the actual mandatory evacuation order came through. Even during the Rim Fire in 2013, there was the initial warning, then the advisory and finally the mandatory evacuation order.

During the Moc Fire, they issued the initial warning and then went right to a mandatory evacuation order within hours instead of days. While we understand the reasoning behind the immediacy of the order, the deenergization of power lines by PG&E, prior to the evacuation made the situation even more challenging for everyone in the area.

After an emergency event, the PML management team and staff perform a post-emergency debrief and review to determine what went well, and what did not go so well, so that we can improve our processes and procedures. For the most part, our response went according to plan. Our staff took action and worked together to carry out their duties prior to leaving to evacuate their own homes and families. Contrary to online postings, our Dept. of Safety staff worked with the TCSO by going street by street in every unit of PML announcing the mandatory evacuation order.

The County OES director, Liz Peterson was in direct, constant contact with us and was very helpful in coordination and logistics. Even so, some folks were not prepared and ready for this emergency. Additionally, we had some members who are not normally permanent residents in PML, but have been staying here due to the COVID pandemic, and they were not ready for a wildfire community evacuation order.

Our PML News Editor, David Wilkinson and his wife Chris helped us by posting to Facebook and eSNAP in real-time while they were in the middle of evacuating and during the evacuation time when they were off the hill to help me augment what I was posting to the membership. It was a great team effort and we appreciate their assistance.

We have received a lot of input from our membership and we would like to thank you for sharing your thoughts regarding the Moc Fire. While we are proud of our staff response and our emergency preparedness efforts and successful implementation, it is important to get feedback and input from our residents. We are all in this together.

We recognize that during an emergency, it may appear that things are chaotic, especially for those within the emergency/evacuation area. It is a stressful situation and getting real-time

information is often a challenge. We are looking at helping our members prepare with advance planning that includes checklists and a grab and go evacuation guide. This will include where to sign up for notifications so that they do not have to search for the information.

It is important to note that the Tuolumne County Sheriff's Office is responsible for issuing evacuation notices and ensuring safe and orderly evacuations, but it takes the involvement of our folks, including the community, to implement successful evacuations.

The following information was provided to us by the Tuolumne County OES, "Tuolumne County's evacuation plan includes early notifications, utilizing the Everbridge system, as well as putting evacuation notifications out on local radio, internet news, newspaper and social media."

The Tuolumne County Sheriff's Office and the Office of Emergency Services believes strongly that Everbridge notifications should only be issued under very specific circumstances, primarily for evacuation purposes. As was the case with the Moc Fire, they use other types of notifications and media to provide information and updates. The My Motherlode.com website is a good resource for this.

When time allows, the Sheriff's Office also goes door to door to notify every homeowner in the evacuation area. Fortunately, due to the leadership of Tuolumne County Fire Chief Casci and Sheriff Pooley, law enforcement personnel had the time to visit nearly every home within the Moc Fire evacuation zone. Additionally, Everbridge reached a total of 44,829 contacts, mymotherlode.com issued 36 updates on the fire, including road closures and the radio stations issued 112 updates on each of their three radio stations. The Tuolumne County Sheriff's Office and the CAL FIRE-TCU Facebook pages had completely up to date information as well. Furthermore, Tuolumne County OES had a community information line for anyone wanting information about the fire, road closures or evacuations. The community information line received over 1500 calls in 4 days.

Tuolumne County's evacuation plan also includes protocols for evacuating those with access and functional needs, which was implemented successfully during the Moc fire. In addition, their plan includes a process for identifying the safest evacuation routes in real time, pushing that information out to the public and working with our law enforcement and other partners with directing traffic.

Lastly and most importantly, Tuolumne County's evacuation plan relies on our residents to take responsibility. We continue to stress the importance of utilizing the information and messaging tools and to put yourself in a position to receive the information the County puts out. Residents must take responsibility for their preparedness activities, including developing their own evacuation plan based on their specific circumstances (ambulatory concerns, pets/livestock, etc.) and familiarizing themselves with what they can expect in emergency situations."

It should also be noted that during emergencies, the PML staff and partners post and distribute information from all local, County and State agencies and resources and share it on the official PML FB pages, other social media and by our eSNAP direct email program.

We are still reviewing notes from our post-event meeting and plan to develop some additional guides and resources for our community, so there will be more to follow in the near future.

Additionally we have some key staff who stood out during the emergency.

Special thanks to Kendra Brown, Rick Laffranchi, Rob Abbott, Susan Capitanich, Teri Cathrein, LC Cobb III, Tommi Cover, Jason Gebrosky, Ed Groothuyzen, John Heller, Ashley Lincoln, Chad Meister, Nathan Moffitt, Clifford Owens, Jake Randuch, Megan Rascoe, Johanna Richter, Clyde Romine, Dennis Sorci, Scott Sumpter, and Matthew Vilmur stepped up during the emergency and we recognize them for their efforts. We appreciate all of our staff members and community members who jumped in to assist others.