

Evacuation Drill Held for Briggs Terrace/Paradise Valley

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Photos by Mary O'KEEFE

CERT member Paul Dutton talks to a resident leaving the Briggs Terrace area during the fire evacuation drill held Saturday.

By Mary O'KEEFE

Last Saturday the residents of Briggs Terrace in La Crescenta and Paradise Valley in La Cañada Flintridge were able to experience what would happen if there was an evacuation in their neighborhoods due to fire. Both of these residential areas have one way in and one way out, making evacuation a challenge in case of an emergency.

For months the Crescenta Valley Fire Safe Council, Los Angeles County Fire Dept. and LA Sheriff's Dept. – Crescenta Valley Station worked to prepare for the drill. Residents were notified via an All Call system, emails, CVW news articles and door-to-door information that was dropped at the front door of every residence.

The purpose of the evacuation drill was to let residents know how quickly they would have to respond to a real evacuation. The Station Fire in 2009 covered a lot of acreage and required hundreds of evacuations; however, recent fires, like the Woosley

and Camp fires, have shown how fast fires can move when wind-driven. There are about 500 residents within these local neighborhoods and all would have to exit via the one road.

The drill started with a robo-call to residents from Alert LA – Los Angeles County Notification System. This system is overseen by the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management. The recording first stated the event was a drill and asked residents to proceed to Rosemont Middle School where they could drop off the surveys that had been delivered to their home a week prior. That data is still being reviewed.

LACoFD and LASD drove the neighborhoods with lights and sirens, which is what would happen if there was a real evacuation.

“It is very important to conduct drills like this, to make sure residents are prepared and informed,” said Crescenta Valley Town Council President Harry Leon.

He added the CV Fire Safe Council, CVTC and CV Chamber of Commerce worked hand in hand to be prepared for wildfires.

Helen Chavez, assistant director of the Office of Emergency Management, said it was an important drill.

“It’s important for [residents] to educate themselves,” she said.

Her office had a booth at Rosemont Middle School with wildfire and evacuation information. There were other informational booths set up including the American Red Cross, CERT [Community Emergency Response Team] and CV Fire Safe Council.

Shields Avenue resident Sally Lane said this type of drill was needed so residents would be prepared.

“We all will need to get out,” she said.

She has lived in the Briggs Terrace area for 46 years and, during that time, has seen many fires and evacuations. She knows well how important it is to be informed.

“We want to extend our appreciation and thanks to everyone who participated in the Briggs Terrace/Paradise Valley Evacuation Drill. We had nearly 150 vehicles exit the two areas within about 15 minutes, and we received some valuable feedback and concerns from the residents. We were able to identify minor hiccups with the Alert LA County mass notification system, which is precisely why these types of drills are necessary. Thank you to the Crescenta Valley Sheriff’s Station, Crescenta Valley Fire Safe Council, Crescenta Valley Town Council, American Red Cross, Dept. of Animal Care and Control, the Office of Emergency Management, the 5th Supervisorial District and, most important, the residents. Through this partnership, we achieved a very successful evacuation drill,” said Assistant Fire Chief Anderson Mackey.

Additional support came from the LACoFD, CV Chamber of Commerce, Montrose Search and Rescue team members, U.S. Forest Service, and Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger.

“On behalf of the CVFSC, I would say the evacuation drill was a big success. We learned a lot about the streets’ capacity for handling a mass evacuation, and about how we can tweak the notification systems to make them more effective. Special thanks should be given to Assistant Chief Anderson Mackey and Maria Grycan of the LACoFD, and Captain Todd Deeds of the Crescenta Valley Sheriff’s Station. The three of them led the planning for the drill with the help of Supervisor Barger’s office. Particular thanks go to Maria Grycan who coordinated the participation of the many County agencies and local stakeholders involved in the drill. The CVFSC looks forward to continuing its work with the County, the U.S. Forest Service and other community groups to make our community safer,” said Brian Ray Hodge, CVFSC.

👉 Mary Okeefe



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