

Twin Oaks Valley Equestrian Association (TOVEA)
2018 Community Forum
February 26, 2018

Focus on Fire

Heritage Park, Walnut Grove Park, San Marcos, CA

Event MINUTES

1. **TOVEA Board Introductions** (Twin Oaks Valley Equestrian Association) – members present: Pat Rowe, Patty Morton, Lynne Malinowski, Dawn Haake, Stephanie Lassalle, Vicki Miller-Strand, Lori Hall-McNary.
2. **Opening remarks** about the reason for and purpose of the meeting, provided by Pat Rowe.
 - a. **Reason:** Recent fires have spawned numerous equestrian workshops and clinics preparation for emergency situations, such as micro-chipping, large animal evacuation plans, etc. Here we are thankful for having representatives for such a large and varied stakeholder group under one roof. I think this is the first of its kind that I've seen recently.
 - b. **Lilac Fire** - Timeframe: Started at I-15/I-76 intersection around 11:15 AM December 7th 2017; exploded to 500 acres within 20 minutes; 100% contained 16 December 2017 (10 days later); **Results:** forced evacuations of 10,000 residents; over 100,000 residents advised to evacuate; cut the power to 20,000 people; burned 4,100 acres in Bonsall area; destroyed 157 structures and damaged 64 others. Forty-six horses were killed at the San Luis Rey Downs training facility in Bonsall. Two horse trainers were seriously injured trying to save their own and others' horses. Over 800 horses were taken into the Del Mar Fairgrounds alone.
 - c. **Other recent fires: Creek Fire**, which killed 29 horses at the Padilla Ranch in Sylmar, CA. The **Thomas Fire**, largest in CA history, compounded by subsequent mudslides in early January 2018.
 - d. **Purpose:** To share lessons learned from recent fire events in order to be better prepared for the next with respect to large animal evacuation. All of us in this room are probably here for a couple of main reasons 1) our ties to and involvement in the equestrian community and 2) our responsibilities as major stakeholders to saving lives and property in emergency situations. Some of us may have been directly impacted by the fire, in different ways. Others may have been on the periphery, helping or trying to find information on how to help. One thing for sure is that at some point in time, there will be another emergency event. We just don't know when and where.
 - e. **Agenda** – each agency rep will share their emergency event experiences with the group, organizational policies, best public sources of information

and how others can best assist and coordinate. They will attempt to address questions and key points brought up by you, the attendees.

- f. **Endstate** is that everyone exits the meeting with a better understanding of policies, requirements and responsibilities of each stakeholder. Knowing where to get information about evacuation centers, know what services can or cannot be provided, know the capabilities and constraints that each organization can provide. There may still be a gap between what people think what should be provided or allowed and what actually is provided or allowed at this point. Some of these gaps may be bridged in the future. These could become goals, with intermediate action items. Others may continue to exist for a variety of reasons. What is important is that we have a good idea of that “as-sis” and realize this is our current reality, with its boundaries and constraints. identify the “could-be”.
3. **Introductions** provided by the Attending Organizations, including Cal Fire (Nick Schuler), San Marcos Fire Department (Dave Schloss), San Marcos Sheriff’s Department (Kevin Menzies), SD County Department of Animal Services (Laura Ward), City of San Marcos (Buck Martin), San Diego Humane Society Animal Rescue Reserve (Tonia Haynes) and Valley Center Disaster Animal Response Team (DART; several reps).
 4. **Audience Input** – Pat transferred the discussion over to the audience for input. The following questions and points were raised by the audience.
 1. Communication – most important aspect of an event. Need accurate, timely communications during emergencies.
 2. One challenge with Facebook pages is that they are easily overwhelmed with all kinds of information.
 3. Question about Kickstarter program called Evacu-pet – in conceptual stages.
 4. What happens when communication channels break down (emergency numbers become overwhelmed, busy signals, recordings, etc.).
 5. How can we streamline communications for professional services for vets and evacuation centers?
 6. Need to have better communication around evacuation sites, including local emergency evacuation sites, which direction the fire is going, etc.
 7. Bigger picture challenge – the communications infrastructure has to be made in the beginning, and how then is that information disseminated (a single source of truth).

8. How do we minimize the confusion to narrow communication, people know where to go, and it's the right information.
9. Difficulty evacuating with limited exit routes and no traffic control.
10. Why were there trailers backed up and not able to enter the area around San Luis Rey Downs during the peak of the fire?
11. Why were personnel not allowed back into the San Luis Rey Downs area once they left?
12. A lot of larger rescue rigs were coming from areas not familiar with the local roads.
13. The two agencies – Dept of Animal Services and San Diego Humane Society – the responsibilities will be changing in some regions which could change who is responsible for each region. Could we clarify roles and responsibilities?
14. What resources do the local agencies have?
15. Who is responsible for the resources brought in to address fires, especially when things seem under control then things reignite?
16. Poor horse identification, folks could not locate their horses.
17. Could fire department and law enforcement personnel take a class to help folks handle horses?
18. One audience member reported an instance where firemen on the scene were not able to help because they hadn't received orders. Need to clarify the how this works.
19. Can we have more control burns and better fire breaks – fires spread too quickly now.
20. Fire department was challenged to fight the fire because they were waiting for the helicopter drops?
21. Need clarification on how the fire department defines and prioritizes structures (because the barns were structures but not homes the fire department would not put the fires out?).

5. Targeted Responses by Attending Fire, Sheriff and Animal Control Resources:

- There is intense competition for resources, rigs and personnel. Example: DC10 (plane) availability for fires – which is only available on certain days, first day DC10 was available, second day wasn't due to pilot flight hours, but on day 2 it was requested again, helicopters are requested for the entire fire.

- Lilac fire dispatch – there was also a fire at Rincon. At the Lilac fire there was early recognition that there was going to be a problem with this fire days in advance.
- Communication and how to share incidents could always be improved, but it is still difficult with a fire that spreads this quickly to get the message to everyone in time.
- The 2-1-1 number provides callers with available emergency information.
- Process of getting information out: When a fire is recognized initial information is provided about potential impacted areas. A Sheriff is notified to the command post and maps are reviewed to determine evacuation areas. Sherriff makes sure that there is a unified voice and local media (AM and FM radios) is notified of instructions. Fire Department looks at weather to predict where fire is going to go, then contacts the Sheriff's rep in the command/control center. All home phone numbers in that area will be called (*cell phone numbers must be pre-registered on ReadySanDiego.org to get the reverse 911 call*).
- Don't solely rely on the evacuation call – it takes time to create a map and deploy a call. ReadySanDiego.org is a website where people can go to get information on preparation and link your cell phone.
- Roads with gates through private areas – the Fire Departments will open the gates when possible. Department representatives are notified to prepare for evacuation planning.
- Fire department considers anything that is a building as a structure and each fire crew determines what they can save. They first save lives, then they save property and prevent spread. This is often dictated by the experiences of the staff responsible for the area.
- Once a perimeter has been established by the Sheriff only the Humane Society, Animal Services, ARR, etc. with credentials can get through. The Fire Department outlines the area for the road closures and the Sheriff's Dept enforces the entry/non-entry. This is done because they do not want to put human lives at risk and complicate access and manueverability for emergency service personnel.
- Humane Society and Animal Services needs to be contacted to know whether there are animals that need to be evacuated. They then get approval for access ensuring there is access control and way for people to get out safely.
- Sheriff Dept communicates with Animal Services, and dispatchers are doubled. Animal Services **Emergency Line 619-236-2431** – the 24 hour phone line for animal services.

- Animal Services has a list of resources for animal recovery and they have never run out of resources. Not all animals are evacuated – some are managed in the area where they are housed.
- San Diego Humane Society also has Animal Rescue Reserves (ARR) that is a highly trained group that helps care for and evacuate animals. **619-243-3466 is dispatch number**. In the event of a fire they are manned 24 hours a day.
- Humane Society/Dept of Animal Services requires animal services volunteers such as DART to receive training and acquire their own equipment – other communities are open to join if they're willing to do the required work. Training is provided by Animal Services, but the work is coordinated by the group itself.
- Controlled burning – environmental regulations, smoke management, etc. impact when and how they can do them. There is a lot of brush management and fire breaks. Fires have completely changed in the last 10 years – the fires are behaving completely differently than in the past. Recent fires are occurring when several other fires are breaking out in multiple communities – now calling them mega-fires. Firefighters are trained to become defensive, structure defence – with high winds they are unable to be offensive. Some fires simply cannot be stopped.
- Create defensible space around your home – make sure there is an address at your home, your driveway is accessible, make sure your property is cleared. You only have to clear 100 feet from your home, work with your neighbors to clear it.
- Unofficial evacuation sites need to band together to create a common resource for evacuation options, understanding of liability, needs, etc. Private ranch owners – be careful when opening up your properties to evacuations - you become responsible for abandoned animals if folks don't come get them. It's important to note that liability and credentials can limit the available resources from responding.
- Make sure you communicate with your neighbors, make sure you have a plan, know where you can go and can get the support of those who can help you.
- Horse owners/boarders need evacuation plans and to understand what options are available on the property in addition to what evacuation options are available off property. Animal removal may not be an option in all cases; the fire may spread too quickly.

- DART reminded folks that preparedness is important and that communities can have DART teams.
- Hidden Meadows is instituting an early notification system for early evacuations given their single way out of the area.
- Deer Springs Fire Safe Council (<http://www.deerspringsfiresafecouncil.com>) – Craig Cook puts together a good newsletter together. They offered the first workshop on large animal evacuations.
- We have a great community with the best of intentions. During the last fire, many people came together as one to help.
- Last point, if truck/trailer drivers had been allowed by FD or Sheriff's Dept in to an evacuated/dangerous area and those driver(s) had been overtaken by fire and died, we would be having a different conversation.

6. Action Items –

1. TOVEA is developing an emergency response/evacuation plan guidance document geared to this area which will include the pertinent agency information and contact numbers covered during this forum.
2. Contact the Animal Services team for DART information.

7. Thank you and farewells

Important Communication Channels:

- Information: Dial 211
- Animal Services Emergency Line 619-236-2431
- San Diego Humane Society Dispatch: 619-243-3466
- Emergency Notification Registry: ReadySanDiego.org