



## CHRISTMAS TREE HILL NEIGHBORHOOD RESPONSE GROUP MONTHLY MEETING - MAY 20, 2018

### MEETING MINUTES

#### ATTENDEES

**Steering Committee Members:** Cinda van Lierop, Anita Bock, Nate Blomgren, David Kunhardt (BC), Collin Woodall (BC), MJ Schramm (BC),

**Block Captains:** Ann Bentley, Kevin Woodall, Leslie Cunningham, Elizabeth D'Orazio (plus BCs listed above)

**Volunteers and Guests:** Jan Turner, Amy Hughes, Joanne Walker

Members welcomed Ann Bentley as a new Block Captain for Zone 5-Block 5.

#### DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Attendees discussed the following recent fire on Christmas Tree Hill:

##### **Corte Madera Residents Escape Overnight House Fire**

A Central Marin firefighter hoses flames at a Corte Madera Avenue residence early Sunday in Corte Madera.

(Central Marin Fire Department photo)

By [Gary Klien](#), *Marin Independent Journal* Posted: 05/13/18



A fire linked to oily rags caused an estimated \$250,000 in damage at a residence in Corte Madera early Sunday, the Central Marin Fire Department said. The residents escaped without injury. The fire started at about 2 a.m. at a two-story home in the 300 block of Corte Madera Avenue, said Central Marin fire Chief Scott Shurtz. The residents were awakened by the fire and called 911. The fire ignited in a garbage can next to the home and spread up the siding and into the residence. Then the flames spread into the vegetation around the property, which is in the wooded hills near the Mill Valley border. No firefighters were injured while extinguishing the flames, and the fire did not damage neighboring homes. Firefighters learned the residents had been staining outdoor furniture earlier that day and placed the oily rags in the garbage, Shurtz said.

Concern was raised about the lack of an alert or information regarding the fire. **Block Captains are reminded that any incident of concern should be reported promptly via group text to Steering Committee members and Block Captains. Block Captains nearest to an incident, if they are aware of it, should please promptly notify Anita Bock and Cinda van Lierop of the incident, irrespective of the time of day or night.**

Cinda van Lierop advised that she will contact the Fire Department about the incident and report back. **Post meeting update: A response to Cinda's inquiry was received from Fire Chief Scott Shurtz which is attached.** Cinda plans to invite the Fire Chief to an upcoming CTH NRG meeting.

2. Attendees discussed the recent Chapman Park Fire Drill:

Cinda and David attended the drill and commented on the alert system's deficiencies, the relatively low participation rate and the long distance to the meeting point adjacent to Nordstrom's Department Store. With that said drills are an important tool in disaster preparedness and CTH NRG hopes to participate at some future date. The use of a computer mapping app/model was impressive. Once received lessons learned information will be shared.

### 3. CERT Training:

Cinda once again encouraged all Block Captains and Steering Committee members to sign up. Classes fill up quickly and those interested in the training should sign up as soon as possible. As noted on the agenda, there is a special CERT training scheduled on October 21-22 for NRG members only. To sign up for CERT: [CERT Calendar & Registration| Marin Emergency Response Training](https://readymarin.org/calendar/) <https://readymarin.org/calendar/>

## STANDING AGENDA ITEMS

### Sub-Committee Reports

**Finance & Operations:** Cinda had nothing of note to report.

**Communications:** The website has been updated with resources needed by Block captains and map has been updated and posted to the website.

**Public Relations:** David advised attendees that he attended the Chapman park Drill and that participation was surprisingly low. He also questioned the wisdom of having the meeting/congregation point so far from the drill community.

**Zone, Block and Situation Management:** Anita asked for resident contact updates, which were provided. BCs are reminded to make every effort to complete their resident contacts and to complete their Excel data base spreadsheets as information is received. Simon Peel has posted all needed forms, including the resident reminder letter, to the Resources section of the CTH NRG website. BCs were asked to pick up needed supplies after the meeting—form letters for residents containing resource information, a zone/block map, a resident information form, and a volunteer form. These documents, together with a blood stop kit and OK/HELP sign should be delivered to all residents by BCs. BCs were reminded about the radio test on Tuesday, May 22 hosted by Jean Schulz and to print and put their names and roles on their BC vests.

**Incident Command:** Nate Blomgren had nothing of note to report but provided a brief overview of IC for the new BC.

The CTH NRG monthly meeting adjourned at 5:20 PM.

**NEXT MEETING DATE: June 24, 2018 - 4:00 PM at Corte Madera Town Hall**

### **IMPORTANT REMINDER:**

**100' of Defensible Space is required by law to help slow or stop the spread of wildfire.**

In January 2005 California revised the state law that requires homeowners to create a firebreak, known as "Defensible Space" around their homes. [Sections 4290 and 4291 of the California Public Resources Code](#) are the laws that require property owners in California to establish "Defensible Space." The law now requires property owners to extend Defensible Space clearance around homes and structures from 30 feet to 100 feet. Wildfires move extremely fast and proper clearance to 100 feet will **dramatically** increase the chance of your house surviving a wildfire. This defensible space also provides an important area for firefighter safety when protecting homes during a wildland fire. We have put

together [downloadable informational flyer](#) that will help you plan your defensible space. If you would like more information or have any questions about defensible space and our defensible space program, please contact the Defensible Space Coordinator to schedule a free site visit. Source: <https://www.marincounty.org/depts/fr/divisions/fire-prevention-investigation/defensible-space>

The fire department has started issuing citations for landscaping which violates the defensible space requirement.

Reuben Martin, the Fire Marshall for the Twin Cities, is willing to visit with groups of residents to identify the fire risks of landscaping. To arrange a meeting contact: [rmartin@centralmarinfire.org](mailto:rmartin@centralmarinfire.org)

## **ATTACHMENT**

### **Response from Fire Chief Scott Shurtz regarding the May 13 fire on CTH**

**Q.** Who comes to the 911 calls for CTH, is it Corte Madera Fire or Larkspur? The homeowner said it took 9 minutes for a fire truck to get to her house; is that a normal amount of time for a truck to reach a home at the base of CTH?

**A.** Units from both Corte Madera and Larkspur responded to the fire on May 13th in addition to units from Kentfield and Mill Valley. This is typical for working fires. The incident on Corte Madera Avenue had firefighters from every fire station in Corte Madera and Larkspur at the scene. During an incident such as this, we move fire engines from the upper Ross Valley and San Rafael into some of our stations to provide emergency coverage during the incident. In regard to response time, it took 5 minutes - 2 seconds from the time of dispatch until the first fire unit arrived on scene. This response time includes donning a complete ensemble of protective gear, identifying the location of the incident on our response maps and coordinating the approach and assignments (such as fire attack, rescue, exposure protection, water supply etc.) while on route. We are not in control of how long it takes the reporting party to communicate all of the necessary information to the dispatcher or the amount of time to process the call and generate the dispatch. For your reference, all 5 responding Central Marin Fire units (1 Battalion Chief, 3 fire engines and 1 medic unit) were at the scene within 7 minutes - 8 seconds from the time of dispatch. It is very common for it to seem like an eternity when you are waiting for help. I hope these numbers help put the response into perspective.

**Q.** The neighbors around the house were not made aware of the fire via any phone or alarm notification and some neighbors slept right through, while others could see the flames from their homes but did not know what to do (whether to evacuate or stay, etc.). There was also no notification the next day via Next Door, etc. Most people read about the incident after the fact in the Marin Independent Journal. What can we expect in terms of communication about these events at the time of the event as well as shortly afterwards?

**A.** That is correct. The Battalion Chief running the incident assessed the risk to the neighborhood and made the correct decision that no action was necessary for neighboring residents. I can understand that some folks are curious about active incidents but when it is determined that no action is necessary, our priority returns to mitigating the incident itself as opposed to providing real time details to curious neighbors. I'm not aware of any standard protocol for fire departments to send out Next Door messages regarding isolated incidents from the previous day. Again, there was no action necessary. Regarding social media, information was posted on the department Facebook page and Instagram account but that was not done by policy. [The Marin IJ is] normally how people find out about incidents that happen around the county. That is how most of the off-duty firefighters learned of the incident.

**Q.** Todd Cusimano, Corte Madera Town manager, was going to look into the technology available for sirens/alarms and get back to the CTH NRG. Could we please get an update on that research?

**A.** I don't want to speak for Todd but I believe he was referring to researching the availability of alternative technologies. The technology is available to activate warning sirens. Ours have not been used or tested in years. When the sirens were previously maintained as a ready resource, they required regular testing. During the testing the Town received significant negative feedback regarding the disturbance it

caused, especially for local seniors who became understandably anxious during the activations. Other issues that remain to be tackled with respect to community sirens are 1) under what circumstances should they be activated and 2) what should people do when they hear it. As we've discussed previously, we may be able to keep the sirens functional as a back-up system to provide redundancy for alerting in major disasters. In any case though, the incident on the 13th was not a scenario in which the use of the community siren would have been appropriate.

**Q.** After observing the Chapman Park evacuation drill on Sunday 5/13 it seems that the OES message that was sent to [AlertMarin.org](http://AlertMarin.org) registered users wasn't received as an 'alarm', but rather a normal text which did not sound the phone like an Amber Alert does.

**A.** That is correct. There are differences between the AlertMarin notifications and the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system. If you would like to receive alerts, it is important that your phone not be silenced or placed in "do not disturb" mode. The following is included in the FAQ section of the AlertMarin web page:

### **How are AlertMarin messages received on my cell phone different from Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA Messages) from the National Weather Service and other government agencies?**

Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) are emergency messages sent by authorized government alerting authorities through your mobile carrier. Government partners include local and state public safety agencies, FEMA, the FCC, the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Weather Service. Alerts received at the right time can help keep you safe during an emergency. With WEA, alerts can be sent to your mobile device when you may be in harm's way, without need to download an app or subscribe to a service. You do not need to sign-up for WEA Messages. At this time, however, not all carriers are providing them. AlertMarin emergency messages are sent by the Marin County Sheriff's Office and our public safety partners throughout the county. We have asked you to sign up to receive telephone calls, text messages, or emails on your mobile device. Our messages often include specific details about a critical event. For more information about WEA Messages visit:

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/com/weatherreadynation/wea.html>

[http://ctia.org/consumer\\_info/safety/index.cfm/AID/12082](http://ctia.org/consumer_info/safety/index.cfm/AID/12082).

**Q.** Our concern is that when we need a true "alarm" we may not have the settings that can override a user's personal settings. The Alert has a limited number of characters for a message and if that's the case we could direct residents to tune into 1330 AM radio for more detailed information or direct them to a website.

**A.** You've hit on one of the key challenges of the public alerting issue. Just like with the siren activation, the main challenge is "what do I do when I hear it?" People want details and direction, not general information that may or may not apply to them specifically. At 2:00 am on Sunday morning we do not have an office filled with call takers, message writers, radio announcers and website technicians standing by to quickly distribute information through multiple modes of communication. Especially information that requires no action on the part of the public. This is why we have been encouraging the use of Alert Marin as a primary mode of alert notification. With the help of Marin OES, we can generate a message with enough detail to be useful and it can be targeted to those who need (or may need) to take action. My understanding is that the WEA system will be modified nationally to accommodate longer messages AND to allow a more geographically targeted broadcast. This will solve two of the key limitations to that system. Unfortunately, I understand that we should not expect that to happen this year. The block captains did not have further information because no action was necessary. This issue of information distribution is a difficult one. I am aware that there are some who would like lots of notification about many different issues or occurrences but there are also many who would prefer not to be woken in the middle of the night for FYI type information. I am also aware that different agencies handle this issue in different ways but we can only address this with the resources available. Limited staffing means that all available personnel are typically involved in the direct mitigation of the incident. This means that **unless there is a specific need for action by residents**, we may not be providing informational updates during

the incident. This may be a more common practice in agencies that have a 24/7 Public Information Officer.

I hope that this information is helpful as you are considering the response to the recent structure fire and other local incidents.