

## FROM THE CITY MANAGER



*Calling 911 is not an evacuation plan. It's not a "magic number" — when wildfire strikes, there are no guarantees. Individuals must make decisions and plans for their own safe evacuation.*

# EXIT STRATEGY

Imagine it's 4:00 p.m. on a hot summer evening. Temperatures have hovered in the 90's for many days. The humidity is very low. There is a Red Flag Warning in effect. As evening approaches, the weather report predicts high winds. Three hours later, a pot, accidentally left cooking on the stove when the homeowners went out for the evening starts a house fire. Embers are quickly spread to nearby brush and the winds take care of the rest.

Disasters are local. It is the town's responsibility to plan for emergencies. They adopted an evacuation plan in October 2018. The plan outlines the roles and responsibilities of the town, Santa Clara County Fire Department, Sheriff's Office and the public.

For wildfire evacuation the town's plan includes how to provide alerts and warnings and set up emergency shelters. The town cannot plan how individuals evacuate. They can only suggest. Evacuation decisions are based on individual preferences.

### Taking Initial Action

What would you do in this scenario? How can you make good decisions about whether or not to leave? Town staff have established communication links to the community. Nixle and Alert SCC provide voice and text notifications to *registered* cell phones

and landlines. Event status information is shared on Nextdoor.com and the town's Facebook and Twitter pages.

Are you connected to these communication resources? Do you leave your phone turned on at night?

### When You Should Evacuate

If time allows, the town will have County Fire and the Sheriff's Office send out an evacuation warning. A warning does not mean to evacuate. It means "get ready." Some individuals plan to evacuate when they receive a warning. This is a good idea if you have horses to move, have only one way out of your neighborhood or just want to have a little extra time (and a lot little less stress) when you leave. It never hurts to leave early and monitor the situation from a distance.

If time is critical, you may just receive an evacuation order. This means "get out now!" Do not wait to assemble any supplies. Jump in the car. You are more important than your possessions.

Unfortunately, there is a third evacuation scenario. The fire moved so quickly and/or telephone lines were damaged so that a notification could not be sent. At this stage of the emergency, local radio and television stations will also be covering the story. Be aware of what's happening. Look and listen. Call 911 if you notice that



the fire is spreading toward you. If you don't feel safe, leave — even if you do not receive an evacuation order.

### Challenges to Evacuation

Depending on the nature of the fire and the winds, a quick evacuation could be challenging. Residents might be confronted with many obstacles: thick, choking black smoke with limited visibility; narrow evacuation routes that can easily be blocked by

# IN A WILDFIRE EMERGENCY

downed trees or traffic accidents or gridlock; intense heat that can melt car tires.

If evacuation by car is possible, a family should drive out in one car as opposed to taking separate cars. The fewer cars on the road the better.

There are members of the community who cannot drive and may not be able to walk. Calling 911 is a last resort to let first responders know



where you are. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that they will have staff to come and rescue you. So the best plan is to talk to neighbors and arrange to be helped to a car.

## Where to Go

The town will announce emergency shelter locations at the time of the event, based on the situation. Keep a map in your car because GPS might not work as infrastructure is burned and systems are overloaded because everyone is trying to find their way out.

Note that pets are allowed at evacuation shelters but must have vaccination records, leashes or crates, food and water with them.

## Learn More

Education is the key to surviving wildfires. Go to [www.losaltoshills.ca.gov](http://www.losaltoshills.ca.gov), click on "In Case of Emergency" and click "Communications in Emergencies" to register for Nixle and AlertSCC. Click "Safety Resources Library" to find information on Fire, Wildfire and Home Safety and many other emergency planning topics.

## PREPARE CAR FOR EVACUATION

- Use a car with the most amount of fuel in gas tank.
- Park car in garage facing street.
- Start packing the car.
- Close car windows but *do not lock* car and leave the keys in the ignition.
- Close the garage door but leave it unlocked (disconnect automatic garage door opener).
- Plan your route. Follow recommended evacuation routes. Do not take shortcuts, they may be blocked.
- Take only one car to reduce road congestion.

## COORDINATE FAMILY

- If not all family members are home, text them and come up with a reunification plan.
- Text or email your out-of-area contact and tell them where you are going.
- Only make phone calls for life-threatening situations so the phones are not overloaded. Texting is fine.
- Arrange temporary housing at a friend's or relative's home outside the threatened area. You will be more comfortable in someone's home than in a public shelter.
- Call Town Hall or other published number to let them know where you are.
- Keep pets nearby and confined for rapid evacuation.
- Pack food, water and supplies for your pets.

## PREPARE THE OUTSIDE OF YOUR HOME

- Shut off gas at the meter only if advised to do so by local officials on the radio or television. (use wrench to move the valve crosswise to the pipe).
- Disconnect propane tanks and turn valves off.
- Close or cover outside shutters, attic and air vents and other openings close to the ground.
- Connect the garden hose to outside faucet.
- Move combustible/flammable items to one spot away from the house - lawn furniture, umbrellas, tarp coverings, firewood, lawnmower gas, ammunition, chemicals.
- Place a ladder against the roof of the house on the side opposite the approaching fire.
- Turn on exterior lights.
- Make any available equipment obvious for the firefighters to use (hoses, spigots, hoes, chain saws, ladders).
- Leave an information note on the front door detailing name, destination, cell phone.

## PREPARE THE INSIDE OF YOUR HOME

- Turn off appliances, thermostats, fireplaces (open damper, close screen).
- Leave *one light* on in each general area of the house so firefighters can see your house in the dark and smoke.
- Close fire resistant window & skylight coverings, heavy drapes and venetian blinds.
- Remove lace, nylon or light material drapes/curtains.
- Move combustible furniture into the center of the home away from windows and sliding-glass doors.
- Fill bathtubs, sinks and buckets with water.
- Soak burlap sacks, small rugs or large rags in the buckets or sink.
- Close doors and windows to prevent draft.
- Secure your home as you normally would but leave sliding glass doors *unlocked*.
- Place valuables that will not be damaged by water in a pool or pond.