Notes of March 8, 2014 Meeting

Station 44

Diamond Springs – El Dorado Fire Protection District

6109 Quartz Drive, El Dorado, CA

Call to Order: Pat Dwyer called the meeting to order at 9:05. Board Members present: Pat Dwyer, Ken Hasse, Rod Repschlaeger, Kevin McAllister and Marilyn Olson-Petersen.

Announcements: March 16th - Friends of Seniors Spaghetti Feed Fund Raiser is scheduled for Sunday March 16 from 1:00 to 5:00 at Firemen’s Hall. This year it is co-sponsored by Fire Safe Council and funds will be used to restart our Senior Assistance Program for fire safe clearance. Tickets are $10.00 and will be available at the door and from Pat after today’s meeting. Raffles, prizes and baskets have been donated. It should be a fun event.

Next Month - April 12 - Logtown Spring Clean-up Day. El Dorado Waste Disposal will donate green/waste dumpsters and accept bagged household trash; no construction nor hazardous material. Snowline Hospice will be there collecting furniture/clothing etc and e waste as well.

Our Chipping and Dumpster Program will be out of money by the end March. So if you want to use the service please advise us immediately so we can schedule it. We were successful in securing a $200,000 grant but those funds, because of government processing, will not be available until the end of summer in August/Sept – really too late to be effective this spring when we need the service. As backup we will send out a notice/post on our website a listing local companies that are available.

Introductions: We are fortunate to have representatives from other local Fire Safe Councils join us today as we host our Special Event: Fire Incident and Evacuation Planning: Steve Willis, Lake Hills Estates Council and Ernie Lori, Grizzly Flat Council. Logtown is now in process of updating its Community Wildfire Protection Plan. This document acts as a core guide to identify what actions we can take to keep our properties safe. It assesses the history of fire ignition sites, condition of fuel loads/terrain/weather patterns etc. Preparation of the initial plan costs about $5,000.00 and is a little less to update.

Panel of Experts: Chief Mike Webb, Battalion Chief & Incident Commander of Cal Fire; Ken Earle, Battalion Chief Diamond Springs El Dorado; Deputy Jamie Morgan, El Dorado Sherriff Office of Emergency Services; Henry Brzezinski, El Dorado County Animal Services, Tami Martin Red Cross; Rich Todd, Health Department and Don Spears, Community Development (Transportation). Tháis exercise will be a dry run for other local fire safe councils. What we learn from here today we can duplicate in other areas of the county; perhaps one or two presentations a year. Pat handed out evaluation sheets for attendees to comment on the presentation so we can improve as we go along.

Chief Mike Webb, CAL-FIRE. As Battalion Chief (located at Motherlode “Y”) he is responsible for Hwy 50 Corridor to south El Dorado County. He is from this area; started as paramedic, joined Cal Fire in
Northern California and rotated back locally to our area. He maintains watch over approximately 1 million acres of diverse land; grass lands to heavy vegetation with timber and interfaces with urban areas. Some communities include: El Dorado Hills, Latrobe, Shingle Springs, Diamond Springs, El Dorado, Logtown, Nashville, Placerville, Camino, Pollock Pines, Pleasant Valley, Mount Aukum, Grizzly Flat and Omo Ranch. Their crew consists of 3 Battalion Chiefs located in El Dorado West and East and Amador. EQUIPMENT consists of 14 Type 3 Fire Engines, 2 Type 2 Bulldozers, 9 Type 1 Hand crews, 2 Air Tactical Platforms (Grass Valley and Columbia), 4 Air Tankers and 2 Helicopters. They try to keep these all on hand but they may be diverted to other areas. Their primary FIRE MISSION is to serve and safeguard people, protect the property and resources of California. This is a very broad mission. Wildlands have changed considerably over the years from their watershed/wildland mission. As such it had to be re-prioritized, but the mission is still to protect life, people and the environment. FIRE PROTECTION OBJECTIVE is to strive to contain 95% of all unwanted fires at 10 areas or less. Their FIRE SUPPRESSION SUCCESS in 2013: 294 Fires; 827 Acres, 2 Residential Structures Lost, 10 Fires Greater than 10 Acres, 97% Fire Suppression Success. These figures reflect that we are meeting our operational mission. We have equipment/personnel strategically placed throughout the state and we can have a helicopter in our area in 20 minutes. Cal Fire’s number one job is to keep fires small: hit them hard/keep them small. This is accomplished with cooperation/coordination and Mutual Agreements with other local fire departments and allied agencies such as Sheriff’s Office/OES, CHP, DOT, Building Department, El Dorado Irrigation District, and PG&E. This close coordination is essential when there are limited resources and need to maximize efficiencies. Local fire agencies are reimbursed when acting on State’s behalf thus enabling locals to recover costs for mitigating a problem. Mike expressed that the relationships between these entities is “top notch”. Cal Fire has “Incident Teams’ ready to go to manage major fires (like Rim Fire) and Mike was pleased to advise that such a Team has not been deployed in our area in 30+ years – that says a lot for the local control suppression work being done. The agencies work together over geographical and geo-political lines to get the equipment to where it needs to go. A critical element is the interagency dispatch center. It acts as a one stop shop for flow of information and coordination. Mike says it has been key to their success.

Community Plans (CWPPs) and Educational Outreach are components that cannot be understated. Cal Fire often is in the reactive mode on the day of the incident. Hosting a community meeting to discuss “advance preparation/prevention” educates residents. Mike has nothing but praise for hosting events like this – he is pleased to be here. It enhances their ability to meet their objectives. The READY-SET-GO Program is an excellent educational tool outlining actions for defensible space, hardening of structures, evacuation planning – these are all critical to save you, your family and property should an incident occur. Individual action to protect your home is essential to survive a wildland fire. Budgets are tight at local and state levels and we are always asked to do more with less. Equipment can be directed to other sites. Preparation/Prevention is KEY. The fuel breaks, clean up days, defensible space, preparedness plans organized by you and your Fire Safe Council help keep this community safe.

Local Fire History: Mike showed a 50-year fire history map of our area. Usually in summer we have 100 degree temperatures, 10-15 mph winds, south west direction, 20% humidity, grass land and oak woodland fuel types, varied terrain and ravines. The fire that started in Shingle Springs traveled to
Plymouth in one day. We do have a real risk in our area. He advised that manzanita brush need trimming as their leaf embers contain oil, burn long and travel far and can create many spot fires. The number one cause of fire in our area is “Escaped Control Burns”. The 6 step “Burn Permit” process is a “prevention” action. Do your burning and brush clearing early – do not wait for the hot days in summer. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and hats off to all of you for being active in your community.

Ken Earle, Battalion Chief, Diamond Springs El Dorado Fire. Area covers about 98 sq. miles. Ken was a paramedic for 30 years and fire fighter for 20 and most of his experience is between Georgetown and El Dorado. His topic today is Structure Protection Strategies. The Fire Department has limited resources. As much as we all would like in the event of a fire to have a fire truck come out to our home, put out the fire and move on – or better yet stay there – that is not possible. We have to prioritize where to allocate resources. The existing condition of the structure will dictate the action plan. This all comes back to prevention and education. There are 3 Triage Categories: (1) Not Threatened (so well prepared - can move along to evaluate next structure) (2) Threatened and Defendable (can do some things/then leave or stay to defend) (3) Threatened and Non Defendable (do not have resources/ time/ability to save that structure – it would be a calculated loss.) He proceeded to show several slides with varying defensible space around a structure to demonstrate how each would fit into the 3 categories noted above. Existing State law (LE100) requires there be no continuous vegetation within 100 feet of the structure. Defensible space is critical to the decision making. Some critical terms to know: “Safety Zone” is defined as a HUGE area where nothing can burn about size of football field and “TRA” a Temporary Refuge Area –smaller area mainly for firefighters to gather. Water resources are limited and used cautiously especially in a drought; they apply fire suppression tactics that use less water. Tactical Actions taken for these Triage Categories are 1) Check and Go – they check first for “life” safety (any persons in the house) and then move on – may have 20 houses to check. The READY SET GO Brochure has list of suggestions for when you need to leave home i.e. leave doors/gates unlocked -easier access for Firemen and Animal Services, turn off gas. Fire department’s priority is human life and putting out fire, if have resources available will help with pets but that is Animal Services primary role and they are present at the scene early on. 2) Prep and Go - is where there are a few things they can do quickly (move lawn furniture inside, firewood away from house) and then move on to next one. 3) Prep and Defend. We have resources (engines, dozer etc). House needs little work and we have resources to do the work. Fire retardant is great in grass but does not do as well with trees; it does not go down through the canopy. Dozer lines can be effective to slow the fire down. Use of water sprinklers on the deck is not recommended as if everyone does, it draws down the water supply overall and has minimal effect if you consider that a major 100 foot fire flame is coming toward the house. The fire can be so intense that even opening up a fire hose – the water evaporates before it can reach the flame or is redirected by the wind. It is physics. They sometimes let the fire hit the structure then go in behind immediately to put out the flames. Usually fire ignites with leaves in gutters, piles of leaves on ground, embers get into attic or basement vents. Keep gas cans away from house – in garage and put lawn furniture and wood piles away from house perimeter. 4) Bump and Run where we try to get in front of the fire. Crews “leapfrog” from house to house in an attempt to get in front and steer it away from the homes often using air craft and proceed up the line leap frog the fire with strike teams. 5) Anchor and Hold Tactic. Where you have
to draw a line - stop line - in the sand. Need unlimited water supply for this and in the Malibu Fire (rare incident) they bulldozed down houses in the front of the fire to create a stop line. 6) **Tactical Patrol.** 80% of damage happens after the fire has past – smoldering embers. Patrol Teams go back to the structures and make sure there is no secondary event to “rekindle”. There are multiple factors to consider in suppressing a fire and they adopt a **Span of Control Strategy** – where no individual is in charge of more than 5 things as when under stress the mind focuses down and 5 things is about the most one individual can handle effectively. Access to water: if hydrants are available and active they will use them; they also have access to fire water tanks and when electricity goes out they use static sources like swimming pool and ponds. **“Fire Front Following”** - here the is fire burning intensely and moving quickly; let it go by and then right after it goes by we move behind the fire and put out fire.

Deputy Jamie Morgan from El Dorado Sherriff Office. We have Reverse 911 System in our office – a **Emergency Notification System.** In El Dorado Co. we have capability to create a map and monitor the 911 calls from that area. We have a self registration portal for the Emergency Notification System where you can register on-line with a password at the El Dorado County website and enter your cell phone into the system. This way you can be out of town and still get an alert notification. You are responsible for “updating” the cell # information. Your landline number is automatically entered into the system. Jamie suggests you use your Tax Assessor Parcel Record Information and enter your address exactly as listed on that document as that is where they get your information.

**Preparation on Evacuation.** We have 3 different types of evacuation 1) **Precautionary** 2) **Voluntary** and 3) **Mandatory.** Best Alert is “Door to Door”. We do not rely on reverse 911, that is a tool, but the best is Door to Door. In a wildland fire you will get either a Voluntary or Mandatory Notice. We set up near the Command Center. We organize ourselves into teams to address the various elements of the threat. When we knock on the door for a Mandatory Evacuation – that is not the time to start to prepare. You should already be prepared. You need to be ready grab your keys, get your “GO” kit and get out of there. It is not the time to restack the wood pile. You may get a “Voluntary Notice”. We do not know how long you may have but it does mean we believe there is a chance as the fire progresses that you may need to be evacuated i.e. Mandatory status. Voluntary Notice is the time when you start to gather your papers, medications, select pictures, your pets/livestock and voluntarily leave the area. A thumb drive or back up hard drive for valuable documents/photos etc. is helpful to have on hand. You should be aware of every possible route to get out of your neighborhood. It does not necessarily mean a road – it could be a foot path. If a road becomes clogged you may need to get out of your car and walk out. This happened in the Oakland fire.

Our role is to protect lives and property. We are very organized and strategic in our evacuation and we do our job well. We know an Evacuation Notice will create traffic congestion on the roads. We do not mandate a large scale evacuation ie. City of Placerville – we are very specific and strategic to the area under threat. There comes a point where the “inflow” of Emergency Services and “outflow” of residents reaches critical mass; at that point it means the emergency responders are not able to come in and do their job. We evaluate the ingress and egress and may set up road closures. This is difficult for people trying to come in. This may surprise you but we spend more time/energy keeping people from coming into the area. They have every possible reason/ excuse you can think of but we cannot send them into a
life threatening situation. Our goal is to get people away from the danger safely and to provide access for the emergency responders. It only takes one person in a car to clog up a road which would prevent a fire truck/bulldozer from passing and performing its duties. Those that choose to stay in their homes and not heed the mandatory evacuation can endanger themselves and their neighbor’s properties. Preservation of “life” is the highest priority and if a Fireman receives a call to rescue an individual he will need to identify the nearest resources which most likely will come from those protecting neighborhood homes nearby; hence placing them in greater danger. One person’s action (or lack thereof) can seriously affect the surrounding neighborhood. In a life threatening situation, leave the area safely do not try to get back. Leave your doors and gates unlocked. He suggests having box in your vehicle with 3-days medication, basic toiletries, etc. as you may be at work when all this is happening and if you come home to a road block you will be prepared with this “GO” kit.

Evacuation routes may come from threats other than fire i.e. chemical spill/toxic plume on Hwy 49 coming up the ravine. The Incident Commander will designate a route that is the safest for the type of threat; it may not be most convenient but it will be the safest. These routes will always be tested first by the responders. They base their decision as to which route on the conditions of the threat at the time and that route can change as the fire/threat changes. It can happen in the early stage with a fast moving fire where they do not yet have a shelter designated and you have been given a Mandatory Notice and you ask where do we go – answer may be curt at that moment “anywhere but here” but you will shortly be given the shelter location. A lot of entry/re-entry requests from residents are valid but this is where your advance preparation comes in -- having those medications etc ready when you exit or available in your vehicle and having practiced an evacuation plan (READY/GO) with your family.

Henry Brzezinski, El Dorado County Animal Services. Their Office is more about education and helping animals than enforcing law though we do cite violators with misdemeanor/felonies for animal cruelty. We also do animal rescue. He introduced other staff members present. His staff are animal lovers and jokingly added - they “like” people. So know they are concerned about the safety of your pets and livestock. Animal Services takes direction from Incident Commander/OES. They are on the scene early. They go into the area as soon as it is authorized and safe to do so. If there is danger they will not go in.

Laws now include animals within the disaster rescue plan. They have mutual support relationships with other counties/agencies/non-profits groups for assistance in animal rescue and shelter accommodations.

Most important is to Plan Ahead For Your Animals. Microchip your animals and license them within the County. Most officers have scanners and they can call 24-7 to identify owners. Have available air crates, kennels, leash/reasonable collar to be able to walk your animal safely. If you have to go and leave them, contact our staff to let us know (Animal Services Office 530-621-5795). Take with you water, medication, and Vet record. It is best to not set livestock free; easier for us to access. We have a PIO (Public Information Office) which we keep up to date status of animals and shelter locations. Amador and El Dorado Fair Grounds and our new shelter location off Missouri Flat Rd. are used as shelter locations. Henry brought some Brochure for Animals Disaster Preparedness. Good idea to identify pet friendly hotels in advance or discuss with family where to take the animals. Please do not call 911 for information on animals – call our office. Have your vaccinations up to date as we want to avoid animals
getting sick or spreading disease. Either keep house open or call us to let us know where the key/lock is for horse trailer etc. Also please train your horse to enter a trailer.

Tami Martin, Red Cross, is a Disaster Program Manager for Amador, Placer, and El Dorado Counties. She has a passion for helping with Shelters. She has witnessed first-hand areas impacted by hurricanes, tornados and wildfires. She has teams ready for small incidents to major ones such as Rim Fire. They have 24 shelter trailers in place throughout the county with 50 cots for most and 100 for others. All set up with basic essentials, bedding etc. Sometimes the location is determined by the Incident Commander or Sherriff as they know the direction of the disaster. Amador and Placerville Fair Grounds are common locations and they are also able to take small/large animals and allow “co-habitation”. That is where the animals are allowed in Shelter area but kept separate. Some people are allergic and hence the need to keep them separate. Often the evacuation is short term and within hours you will be able to return to your homes. They make sure you are safe/comfortable and they have snacks available. If it turns into a longer situation then it becomes a designated shelter to accommodate overnight use, meals, showers, ADA compliance, cell service. They pre-survey the shelter in advance to determine what services etc are available. Sometimes there is a kitchen on site and other times they will bring in a mobile kitchen. They also partner with local ham radio operators as telephone lines are often down and this provides another source for communication. Health and mental health services are available. For example if you are a diabetic they can help with Rx if you were unable to bring your supply. She suggests that you set aside an extra supply (rotate it to keep Rx up to date) and have it available for emergencies. They have a Sherriff’s Chaplain Service which is very helpful in calming people in these stressful situations. The Shelter also serves as place for “Status Briefings” to keep people informed. There may only be a few residing in the shelter but it accommodates more when others in the affected community want to hear the briefing. She has available “Preparedness Brochures” to help identify those critical items/tasks. Flash drives are most helpful in preserving key documents. She suggests preparing a short list of what you would need if you only had 1 hour to evacuate. Do the pre thinking now; not when the emergency alert comes. Another idea - have your vehicle pointing outward and outside the garage. If the power goes out the garage door will not open automatically; a senior couple was ready to go but could not open the garage. Remember to take care of your own home with Smoke Alarms and Fire Extinguishers. A Training Drill for the whole family is essential in case you do have an alarm go off. Also have a place for an extra car key as perhaps you cannot get into the house- find a safe location for a spare key.

Fire Incident Exercise. Mike selected an exercise and they will run through it as it typically happens. He wanted to have us hear, feel and see what it is like to manage a fire. A call comes in and identifies the location and they determine what to dispatch to the area; they start organizing themselves; defining the control objectives and prioritizing tactics and determining potential evacuation routes or road closures. Teams arrive on site and report in conditions. Our scenario: It is a Red Flag Fire Warning Day, 2:00 pm, 90 degrees, NE winds 10-20 mph, Humidity 18%, Location – Union Mine area/Dolomite Drive and Galena. When on site they determine what additional equipment/teams to dispatch. They establish a command station at Station 44. It was a frenzy of fast communication, but they all clearly knew what was communicated. They determine an Evacuation Route and work with Sheriff’s Office and Animal Services
They receive 30-40 911 calls and can plot/track the location/movement of fire. Mike has a special code system (alpha/numeric) grid to plot the tactical strategy and deploy his. He has to establish perimeter control and also protect structures. His concluding point: the less time they have to spend on defending a structure the more time they have to put out the fire. They have a comprehensive approach to assess the threat and immediately request the necessary resources. What is of concern-- if we are on a red alert day it is likely that other nearby counties are in same situation hence there may be other communities requesting the same resources.

Questions/Discussion: When residents are given a Mandatory Evacuation Notice they will be told of an evacuation route that is pre-checked and safe. It may have restrictions as to size of vehicle. It is also important to note the “route” may change as the fire changes and residents will be advised by officers directing traffic. A 72-hour evacuation is not unusual as time is needed after the fire is under control to check and make sure the neighborhood is safe for re-entry: utilities OK, fallen trees cleared. Road closures may be set up. There are several levels of access. First level is for fire crew, next utility crews and then residents only. If a relative arrives they will not be allowed in until there is some clear identification that they reside at that address. Evacuations can operate efficiently and you can move considerable numbers quickly especially on an improved road - like Crystal. Key - keep the traffic moving so as not to create a log jam. There will be personnel directing traffic. Most likely they will identify an improved road. They do not want motor homes or trailers. If Mica is used it would be for personal vehicles. Mike suggested they will check out the option of a “Safe Area” as there may be a suitable location for one. If you have medical needs or sick animals best to take advantage of the “voluntary evacuation” time and leave. When they request resources at the beginning they usually know within 5 minutes where/when those resources will be available and plan accordingly. Staff know the local topography/fire history and fire dynamics to be able to predict the direction/severity of a threat. But they need patience- about 20 minutes- observing progress/direction to identify areas to be impacted, make appropriate tactical decisions to contain the perimeter and protect life/structures. They are multi tasking all along.

Pat – Thank you all for the excellent presentations.

Adjourn to April 13, 2014 Community Clean Up Event – 7:00 am to 2:00pm