

FIRE SAFE OCCIDENTAL

A Connected Community Is A Safer Community

TOGETHER, WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED A LOT IN JUST ONE YEAR!

Fire Safe Occidental (FSO) organized only one year ago; but we hit the ground running and with help from dedicated volunteers from our community a lot of good has come from our efforts. As you probably experienced during the Kincadee fire, blackout, and evacuation, there is still a lot to do in order for Occidental to be a fire-resistant area and a well-prepared community in case of an emergency.

FSO members @ Dec 7th Community Parade



UPCOMING EVENTS

- January 12th - Generator Talk
- Jan 21st - Community Potluck

LOOKING BACK...

In the past 12 months, FSO has grown from 12 to over 600 **members**. We held five Community **Educational meetings**, organized local neighborhoods and have 12 of our 16 designated **neighborhoods** active in some capacity. Because of our active organization, we received a **grant** from Fire Safe California as one of two communities selected for a statewide pilot program to engage local communities in wildfire prevention plans. FSO has also been recognized by Sonoma County as an important player in planning and outreach for their fire preparedness and prevention activities and we continue to act as a spokesperson for Occidental to local, state, and federal government agencies in getting priority and resources to our area.

Because fires work across eco-systems and don't follow our community boundaries, we also established an organization named Safer West County (SWC) to foster risk reduction and preparedness across the multiple watersheds that surround Occidental from south of the Russian River, west of Sebastopol, north of Bodega Highway, and east of the coast. SWC has already earned 501-C3 non-profit status from the IRS and, in conjunction with the Gold Ridge Conservation Resource District and Fire Safe Sonoma, has applied for a Ca I Fire grant to create a Community Wildfire Protection Plan for this broader area. We received important support from ours and surrounding Fire Depts, OAEC, Bohemian Corridor Business Alliance, Bodega Land Trust, and more!



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POST KINCADE:

During the Kincade fire, residents got the unwelcomed opportunity to test our emergency preparedness. Thanks to everyone who responded to FSO's post-fire survey, here is some of what we learned:

1. Residents were aware of the fire and risk long before an evacuation was called. This was not the case in the 2017 Tubbs fire, so it is important we not get complacent from the ease of this recent evacuation. Post-evacuation, many people are requesting an actual community fire drill (which was postponed because of the fire) and FSO is working to renew that effort again.
2. Most people surveyed felt better prepared for evacuating because of Fire Safe Occidental's education programs—community meetings, newsletters, and handouts at the Farmers Market. We will continue educating the community over the coming year.
3. Notifications worked well for the most part. Many people received their Nixle or SoCo alerts and 43% heard the local Occidental siren (39% were already out of town). Unfortunately, there are numerous pockets in our area where the sirens cannot be heard and people have requested we ask the surrounding Fire Departments of Graton, Bodega, and Camp Meeker to all sound their sirens together to eliminate some of the holes. There was also a need for the siren to continue longer to ensure people really knew its meaning was to get out. People who had weather radios stated that they also worked, though few have them. This could be extremely important if our power were to go out before an evacuation was announced and WiFi and cell service lost.
3. cont. (a model that worked well was the Midland WR120B, available through Occidental Hardware or Amazon).
4. A large number of residents realized they did not have adequate knowledge of alternative roads and did not own maps should their cell service map be unavailable. There is a strong desire for emergency services to include recommended routes when sending evacuation notices. FSO will work with county services to improve evacuations and notification.
5. Forty-three percent of people left before the evacuation was official, and 54% left sometime after. While most of survey respondents did evacuate, there were almost 5% who stayed. Some of the discussion around staying or leaving late pointed to other action items FSO wants to tackle in 2020:
 - a. Better information and resources are needed for animals, especially large animals that cannot travel in a person's car like horses, goats, and other livestock.
 - b. Many people complained they did not feel there was adequate protection for homes left vacant during an evacuation from vandalism or theft.
 - c. People need info and resources for sheltering in place if evacuation is not an option.
6. Leaving early was by far the easiest circumstance. Those who waited encountered long traffic delays as well as limited options for where to go to. Given our narrow roads, we will continue to push for people to leave early to improve their safety and the safety of others. We will ask Sonoma County Sheriff's Office to stage evacuations although a different circumstance may not allow staging.



POST KINCADE (continued):

7. The trauma from the Kinkade fire throughout our community is real. While we did not lose homes or lives, many of us lost 10 to 20 days of our lives and until the rains came felt a significant sense of danger day in and day out. Fire has become a new norm throughout the western states and climate related trauma may become a more common problem personally and collectively. FSO is reaching out to find our community support for building emotional resilience as well as tools for helping in times of high stress. Stay tuned!

Here are some interesting notes of what people said they would do differently:

- a. Leave sooner
- b. Go farther away
- c. Grab all the papers/improve go-bag contents
- d. Plan places to go ahead of time/make reservations
- e. Hose down around the house and/or leave buckets with water
- f. Empty the freezer; plan for at least 2-3 days away
- g. Stay home or leave much later when real danger is close
- h. Keep car full of gas or charged
- i. Keep doors locked; firemen will get in if they need to
- j. Plan routes ahead of time

LOOKING AHEAD...

FSO has two upcoming meetings in January.

- A majority of people stated they planned to add back-up power systems. Therefore, FSO is sponsoring a **January 12th** meeting at the Salmon Creek School on the types of **generators**, their safe hook ups, use, and more.
- **January 21st at CYO Camp** we will hold a community **potluck in appreciation** for our firefighters and also a kickoff to 2020 FSO. Please join us as this will be a great opportunity to let us know your priorities for FSO in 2020.

There are many ways YOU can help continue this important work.

Our efforts to date have been primarily funded out of the pockets of FSO Steering Committee members. While we are applying for grants to help fund our many efforts, we also need wide-spread community support to show grant funders momentum. **Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to Safer West County.** You can donate online on the link above.

Fire Safe Occidental is only as strong as the time, energy, and resources contributed by the community. If you have even a small amount of time, **we could use your involvement!** Here are some of the things we need help with:

1. Grant writing experience
2. Social media posting
3. Newsletter writing and layout
4. Researching resources and applying for them
5. Being active to build a strong FSO group in your neighborhood and to identify and mitigate risks to your home and to your neighbors.

Wishing you a safe and happy holiday and looking forward to working with you in 2020!

Amy Beilharz ~ Bob Burnett ~ Bob Fink ~ Penny Fink ~ Carol Hetherington ~ Elizabeth Lawson ~
David Shatkin ~ Carolyn Sells ~ Paul Stange