

“Ashes to Action”  
A Follow-up Meeting to Review the Foothills Fires  
July 23, 2007



*Helicopter battling blaze of July 5, 2007*

Eighty-six SCRL members met on Monday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, at 7 p.m. in Tresidder Memorial Union to discuss issues surrounding the recent fires in the foothills. The meeting was convened by the SCRL Emergency Committee with the support of the SCRL Board. Also in attendance were invited university staff and City of Palo Alto safety staff.

The chairperson of the SCRL Emergency Committee, Mary Sullivan, summarized the scope of the recent fires.

- a. On June 25, 2007, two juveniles sparked a grass fire that burned 171 acres near the Dish.
- b. On July 5, a fire of unknown origin burned 20 acres near the Dish.
- c. During the week of July 15, a car overturned on Rte. 280 and sparked a small grass fire.
- d. No one was injured and no homes or structures were destroyed as a result of these fires.
- e. Two firefighters at the second blaze were treated for heat exhaustion.
- f. On July 5, electricity was briefly shut off to 2,000 homes for safety reasons.
- g. Fire engines from the Palo Alto Fire Department and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection responded, and fixed wing aircraft and helicopters dropped fire retardant on the flames.

The purpose of the “Ashes to Action” meeting, said Sullivan, was to review the events and to make improvements where necessary in fire prevention, fire containment, and emergency notification.

The first two speakers were witnesses to the flames, Macke Raymond and Leslie Fiedler. Raymond was at a friend’s home on Juniperro Serra Boulevard when she heard people screaming “Fire!” In the next 20 minutes, she helped to hose down the friend’s roof as they watched the flames advance to within four feet of the backside of the trail before the wind changed direction and the fire swept off the hill.

Fiedler stated that when she saw smoke, she began alerting residents along the hillside of the fire. She reported that there was no information about the fire through the university's hotline or radio station KZSU. Fiedler subsequently helped direct traffic away from the neighborhood.

Mary Sullivan reported being contacted about the fire by SCRL Board Chair Jim Sweeney. She called the university hotline to discover there was no news on it about the situation, then called KZSU to ask the station to broadcast frequent bulletins about the status of the fire. As requested by Jim Sweeney, Sullivan composed a news alert to be sent out via e-mail to all SCRL members, including a request for receivers of the message to inform their neighbors who didn't have e-mail about the situation.



Nick Marinaro, Fire Chief of the City of Palo Alto described the action taken by his department and surrounding communities to quench the fire of June 25. That fire involved 30 pieces of equipment from eight different agencies; this included fire trucks, bulldozers, helicopters and airplanes.

*Nick Marinaro, Fire Chief,  
City of Palo Alto*

Laura Wilson, Chief of Police, Stanford, explained that in the event of a fire, the police are secondary to the fire department and mainly deal with traffic issues. They also participate in evacuations. She acknowledged that with the June 25<sup>th</sup> fire, the emergency hotline wasn't activated, KZSU wasn't contacted, and e-mails were not sent out. She stated that the police department is looking into how better to communicate in the future with the public.



*Audience at "Ashes to Action" listening intently to speakers*

Mark Lawrence, radio station KZSU engineer, said that neither the university nor the Department of Public Safety notified KZSU about the fire on June 25. Mark's colleague, Jack Wang, monitored the police radio and fielded calls into the station. Jack arranged to broadcast updates every 15 minutes. Lawrence stated that, in retrospect, they should have broadcasted all information and no music. He also said that it is important for people in charge to notify KZSU when an emergency occurs.

Jay Kohn, Executive Director of Stanford IT Services, explained that there is a project underway with the Stanford Threat Committee to put in place for the Stanford community an emergency response service. Information would be sent via phone, e-mail or voicemail. This will take several months to complete and activate.



Standing: **Chris Christofferson**,  
*Associate Vice Provost for Facilities & University Liaison to SCRL*  
Seated, L-R: **Laura Wilson**, *Chief of Police, Stanford Dept. of Public Safety.*  
**Barbara Cimino**, *City of Palo Alto Emergency Manager.*  
**Nick Marinaro**, *Fire Chief, City of Palo Alto.*

Chris Christofferson described the Foothills Fire-Safety Project, explaining that immediately after the fires, the university made five improvements:

- a. The firebreak area that was previously mowed is now disked.
- b. Firebreaks were widened to double their previous size.
- c. Firebreaks are complete with circles of disking around structures.
- d. Three new firebreaks have been created leading from the trail behind the homes on JSB to the upper trail.
- e. Five fire hydrants have been installed behind the homes.



*Kim Bomar*



*Audience participation*

Following Chris's talk, Kim Bomar, SCRL Board member, facilitated the audience participation portion of the meeting.



*Macke Raymond*

Macke Raymond, SCRL Board member, served as scribe, recording the concerns and suggestions of those present. Issues included:

- a. Emergency notification possibly via siren, phone tree.
- b. Fire Inspection of Peter Coutts.
- c. Removal of dead trees throughout the SCRL area and along Junipero Serra Blvd.
- d. Possible closure of Dish access during fire season.

The Emergency Committee planned to convene to follow up on the audience's concerns and suggestions. The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

\* Jeannie Siegman kindly provided information on how to access the article, "Know what to grab when fire threatens your home," by Nancy Davis Kho. Go to **SFGATE** and type in the name of the article.

## Fire Safety

By Joseph Leung, University Fire Marshal, Environmental Health & Safety

The recent fires in Stanford foothills and Lake Tahoe were a frightening reminder of how deadly and costly fires can be. On campus, dry grass areas considered hazardous are mowed and in the hills, firebreaks are created to contain the spread of a fire.

"While the university offers a general pick up of debris from homeowners twice per year, private homes on campus are maintained by individual residents, not the university grounds crew," says Leung. "We rely on the occupants to keep the area fire resistant."

There are 867 single-family residences on the Stanford campus, excluding student housing. Of these, 612 are detached, with the rest being condominiums or duplexes. Additional private residences are found on the non-academic farmlands that Stanford owns.

Residents can take steps to reduce the risk of fire occurring and spreading. Consider fire-resistant trees and shrubs when landscaping and remove all dead vegetation from around the home, both on the ground and on the roof.

All vegetation and other flammable materials should be cleared from beneath decks, and woodpiles should be kept away from buildings and fences. Residents should look for, and trim, any tree limbs overhanging the chimney or any dead limbs over the house. Chimney outlets or flues should be covered with a spark-arresting mesh screen.

Although this isn't the season for fireplace use, residents should be sure that chimneys are cleaned to prevent the build-up of creosote, a black, tarry substance that is extremely flammable.

For fire safety inside the home, remember to test your smoke detector regularly to be sure it is operating properly.

For more information on fire safety, contact Joseph Leung at 723-0609.