

OC Fire Watch



TO: All Concerned

FROM: Kevin McKeown / Supervising Park Ranger / OC Parks
OC Fire Watch Liaison

DATE: August 23, 2011

SUBJECT: OC Fire Watch Drill
August 19-20, 2011

OC Parks recently conducted an OC Fire Watch drill to test the efficiency and capabilities of the OC Alert system, and the response capabilities of our OC Fire Watch volunteers.

Red Flag Warnings are issued by the National Weather Service and the Orange County Fire Authority based upon low relative humidity, high temperatures and sustained winds. In such an event, OC Parks and OC Fire Watch volunteers prepare for the likelihood of a Red Flag Alert and possible deployment within 24 hours.

On August 19, an automated Alert OC email, text message or telephone call advising of a simulated Red Flag Warning went out to each OC Fire Watch member. A simulated Red Flag Alert was issued the following day at precisely 8:30 a.m., and all OC Parks Rangers and OC Fire Watch volunteers sprang into action.

As trained, all available OC Fire Watch volunteers contacted OC Parks Volunteer Services Coordinator Michelle Sanders, who coordinated each response to a selected observation post at one of 11 OC Parks identified at highest risk for fire danger. Upon receiving their assignments, the OC Fire Watch volunteers safely drove their personal vehicles to these sites, and provided a highly visible presence at these parks. Michelle maintained a thorough accounting of all available OC Fire Watch personnel, and ensured that these resources were deployed to as many facilities as possible.

The drill concluded at 12:30 p.m., when the simulated Red Flag Alert was cancelled. Reports are being collected from the volunteers who participated in this event, and valuable lessons were learned from this drill. Suggested improvements include updating the stationary observation post locations, providing better directions, and increasing the use of amateur radio communications. These suggestions are currently being explored for future deployments.

In all, 34 OC Fire Watch volunteers responded to the Alert OC notification to offer their availability, and staffed 18 different stationary observation posts in all but one identified OC Fire Watch facility.

The fire season in Orange County has not closed for several years, and wild fires can occur at any time of any year. Through the valuable assistance offered through the volunteers of the OC Fire Watch Program, we hope to limit or eliminate the spread of wildfires in our fire prone areas of Orange County. We thank our volunteers for their dedication and service.