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San Diego Fire-Rescue Increases Staffing in Preparation for Increased Fire Activity

STRONG SANTA ANA WINDS EXPECTED THROUGH EARLY NEXT WEEK

SAN DIEGO – San Diego Fire-Rescue (SDFD) has increased the number of on-duty firefighting crews, staff and fire apparatus in our city because of high temperatures, low humidity and the Santa Ana winds which are forecast to begin on Sunday.

In addition to our traditional apparatus, we contracted a fixed-wing air tactical (air attack) platform and supervisor, and we have a helitanker on the ground at Montgomery Field Airport capable of dropping 2,600 gallons of water/foam/retardant. General Atomics is also prepared to respond to our city or a regional emergency incident with their intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) fixed-wing platform.

“Augmenting the City’s existing aerial and ground fire suppression resources at this time of the year when historically we have experienced the greatest loss of life and property is an important element in keeping San Diegans safe,” said Fire Chief Brian Fennessy. “We are doing all we can to respond quickly and with much more to bear both from the air and ground to quickly stop fires before they become large life and property threatening fires. We encourage all community members to do everything they can to prepare for the weather we will experience in the coming days. The best thing anyone can do is to have a plan ready in advance. If you haven’t yet talked to your family about an emergency plan, there’s no time like the present. Putting a plan in place and practicing that plan will give you the best chance of staying safe during an emergency.”

As far as our apparatus go, an additional five brush engines, five standard engines and three water tenders are currently staffed through Tuesday, Oct. 24. We have also increased the number of pilots and helicopter flying hours as well as the number of dispatchers in our Emergency Command & Data Center. SDFD closely monitors weather conditions and will extend the increased staffing depending upon weather changes. Brush engines are large off-road capable fire apparatus which carry between 600 and 1500 gallons of water. SDFD water tenders carry 3000 gallons of water and provide water supply to engines at vegetation fires.

SDFD recommends vigilance on the part of the community all year round, but the risk of wildfires has proven to be higher during October. Several years of drought coupled with heavy rains this past winter created significant fuel in the form of underbrush and grass. This fuel, combined with hot temperatures, and low humidity, create conditions which are conducive to easily ignited and fast burning wildfires. As we know from our history, Santa Ana winds cause tremendous difficulty in fire suppression efforts because wind direction can be unpredictable and winds cause wildfires to spread more quickly.

With our many canyons, San Diego has hundreds of linear miles of wildland urban interface (WUI). Each year, wildland fires consume hundreds of homes in the WUI. Studies show that as many as 80 percent of those homes could have been saved if their owners had followed a few simple fire-safe practices.

Wildland fire-related deaths occur because people wait too long to leave their home. By leaving early, you give your family the best chance of surviving a wildland fire. You also help firefighters by keeping roads clear of congestion, enabling them to move more freely and do their job in a safer environment. Don't wait to be told by authorities to leave. In an intense wildland fire, firefighters and law enforcement officers may not have time to knock on every door. And if you are told to leave, don't hesitate! This is why it's important to discuss and practice an emergency plan with your family in advance of a fire or other catastrophic event. Firefighters routinely train so that when they are called to act, they can do so quickly and efficiently. The same philosophy applies to you and your family. Practicing your emergency evacuation plan can mean the difference between life and serious injury or death.

Visit <https://www.sandiego.gov/fire/safety/tips/readyssetgo> to download your personal wildland fire action guide. The guide is available in English and Spanish and includes extensive preparedness information as well as helpful photos, recommendations and checklists.

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