



November 10, 2009

OC FIRE WATCH INFORMATION SHEET

What is OC Fire Watch?

OC Fire Watch will allow OC Parks to further support the efforts of our professional fire agencies and local non-profits and community organizations by focusing on fire prevention through community awareness. This strategy is more effective with the participation of everyone affected. Our main objective will be to mobilize people in the community who stand to lose something of value to fire, create a powerful group initiative, and protect lives, property and our natural resources from wildfire.

Why Do Our Wilderness Parks Need OC Fire Watch?

History has clearly demonstrated that Southern California Wildfires are more likely to occur and more likely to spread when strong winds are accompanied by low humidity levels and high temperatures. If the wind speeds are sufficient (25 mph or more) and the humidity levels low enough (less than 15%), this potentially dangerous combination actually prompts an official readiness response called the "Red Flag Program."

Red Flag conditions typically have four progressive stages that are intended to reduce response time to absolute minimums. However, please note that, Stage IV (Cancellation) may occur at any time.

STAGE I: Fire Weather Watch – usually 48 to 72 hours in advance of a Red Flag Alert.

STAGE II: Red Flag Warning – usually 24 hours in advance of a Red Flag Alert.

STAGE III: Red Flag Alert

STAGE IV: Cancellation

How Will OC Fire Watch Aid In Fire Safe Behavior In Our Local Wilderness Parks and Communities?

OC Fire Watch will create community awareness and mobilization by implementing cost-effective strategies to reach target audiences, including stakeholder engagement and community outreach, creative material development, public service announcements, partnerships, media outreach and digital influence, to raise the level of awareness of the dangers of wildfires and inform people of preventative measures that can be taken, including organizing a Red Flag Patrol and community awareness campaign.

Where Will OC Fire Watch Be Headquartered And What Geographical Areas Will The Program Cover?

OC Parks manages nearly 40,000 acres of parks, historical and coastal facilities and open space for the County of Orange as part of OC Community Resources. OC Fire Watch will be an arm of the OC Parks Adopt-A-Park Program and will be headquartered at OC Community Resources Headquarters in Santa Ana, California. The geographical area covered by the program will include Orange County Wilderness Parks and Regional Parks such as Aliso & Wood Canyons Wilderness Park, Caspers Wilderness Park, Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, O'Neill Regional Park, Thomas F. Riley Wilderness Park, and Limestone Canyon & Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park.

How Much Will It Cost To Launch OC Fire Watch?

This will depend on the scope of the program. Fire Watch Volunteers may need supplies, including shirts with OC Fire Watch logo, hats with logo, photo badge with lanyard, fire watch vests, fire watch car magnets, fire watch manuals, wilderness first aid kits, ready bags for supplies, route/area maps, emergency phone numbers and procedures, disposable camera, flashlight, log book, light sticks, etc. Additional considerations could include materials for recruitment, orientation, training, and recognition events, as well as staff time.

Program Design

The OC Fire Watch Program is designed to complement the official steps taken by fire fighting professionals with the goal of providing a highly visible reminder to all citizens in the region to be extra careful and vigilant on days when the Santa Ana winds blow. The program will be managed by OC Community Resources/OC Parks Staff and citizen volunteers. These community members will follow pre-specified patrol routes within OC Parks wilderness areas to watch for fires and/or suspicious activity. Simultaneously, OC Parks, OC Public Libraries and other County facilities within the wilderness areas that have flag poles, as well as participating cities, the Toll Roads, and all Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) fire stations will be alerted to display red flags at

designated locations and along highways and streets throughout Orange County to alert drivers and others to the hazardous conditions at hand. In a typical fire season, there are three to five Red Flag Alerts.

Notification Procedures

The National Weather Service begins the Red Flag Watch program by alerting CALFIRE to weather condition changes over parts of the Western plains that could bring high winds and low humidity over our region. CALFIRE then advises their regional offices and other agencies that would need this information. OCFA is notified by CALFIRE advisories. OCFA will notify the OC Fire Watch and the Red Flag coordinators by email whenever they initiate Stage I of their own Red Flag program. The OC Fire Watch coordinator within OC Parks is the Volunteer Coordinator and the Red Flag coordinator for OC Parks is the Operations Support Group.

STAGE I: Fire Weather Watch (48 to 72 Hours in Advance)

Coordinators will alert volunteers by email/phone of the watch condition and establish who will be available for patrol duty and ask them to stand by.

STAGE II: Red Flag Warning (24 Hours in Advance)

Coordinators will notify volunteers of their patrol duty; partner, route, and shift.

STAGE III: Red Flag Alert

Coordinators will notify volunteers of the Alert status and have them begin the patrols.

STAGE IV: Cancellation

When coordinators receive notice from OCFA that Red Flag conditions no longer exist, they will immediately notify both the active patrols and stand by patrols that the alert is no longer in effect. Following each activation of the Red Flag patrol, an assessment will be made with the goal of solving problems and improving future deployments. At such time all Red Flags will be lowered per protocol.

Volunteers

Volunteers will be recruited from throughout the County through the use of news stories, advertisements and community organizations. Citizens can express their willingness to participate by requesting and completing a Red Flag Patrol volunteer application. Other groups that may be interested in participating include hikers, mountain bikers,

equestrian groups, and docents. Recruiting for volunteers will be done through ReadyOC, participating City websites, the County website, County volunteer database, and the OC Adopt-A-Park website. Volunteers will use their own vehicles and provide their own cell phones, and binoculars. All volunteers must attend one orientation meeting and one training session.

Volunteer Training

The orientation meeting will be provided by OC Parks Volunteer Coordinator and the training session will be provided by OCFA. The two sessions will last approximately two hours each. Among the items covered will be safety, communication procedures, map reading, and how to recognize and report potentially dangerous situations.

After completing the training each volunteer may be issued the following items: shirts with OC Fire Watch logo, hats with logo, photo badge with lanyard, fire watch vests, fire watch car magnets, fire watch manuals, wilderness first aid kits, ready bags for supplies, route/area maps, emergency phone numbers and procedures, disposable camera, flashlight, log book, light sticks, etc.

Patrol Routes

Routes will be established by OCFA in conjunction with OC Parks.

Patrol Shift

Each two-person shift will be limited to two (2) hours.

Contact & Volunteer Opportunity for OC Fire Watch

The contact for OC Fire Watch is Angeline Santiago, OC Parks Volunteer Coordinator at 714-480-2827. If you are interested in volunteering, please visit www.ocparks.com for more information.