

Monthly Message from the Chief

May 2010

This year we kicked off California's Wildfire Awareness Week on Monday, May 3, with an event held at CAL FIRE's McClellan Aviation Management Unit facility. We were honored to have Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger join us along with Secretary Matthew Bettenhausen, California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA), General Mary Kight, The Adjutant General of the California National Guard, and many others.



We stressed how wildfires have long plagued our state, affecting lives, destroying property and impacting our environment, and how the aftermath of these catastrophic events can be just as destructive. Anyone familiar with our state knows how flooding and mudslides often occur in the wake of wildfires. Impacts on our economy resulting from resource, infrastructure and employment losses may be less apparent, but no less real.



From left to right: Chief Deputy Director Crawford Tuttle, Director Del Walters, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Deputy Director of Fire Protection Ken Pimlott, and General Mary Kight.

Every day, more of the state's growing number of residents move into or near wildland areas, creating additional challenges for firefighters. The safety of human lives must come first; evacuations and rescue missions can divert resources from the firefight. This can result in even larger and more damaging fires.

In the past few years, we have seen prolonged drought contribute to the occurrence of huge and destructive fires that require large numbers of personnel and equipment to fight, take days to control and are very costly.

Over 94% of all wildfires are caused by humans. This means the public has a critical role in helping us prevent wildfires. This year's public education message is, "**Wildfire is coming....is your home ready?**"

Consistent with that message we are promoting the "**Ready, Set, Go**" program.

Get READY:

- Create a defensible space by clearing dry grass, brush and leaves from 100' around your home
- Remove flammable debris from roof and gutters.
- Use ignition resistant building materials and designs to help your home resist flying embers that can blow up to a mile ahead of a fire.
- Prepare a disaster plan for your family, not only for wildfire, but for all types of disasters, including floods and earthquakes.
 - The plan should have at least two ways out of your neighborhood in case one is blocked.
 - Know what you will take with you.
 - Know where you will meet and how you will communicate.

Get SET:

- When you become aware of a wildfire in your area, prepare your family and home for the possibility of evacuation without delay.
- Don't wait until the last minute! Wildfire is very dynamic and can move or change direction quickly. There may not be time for officials to issue timely warnings.

GO:

- Leave, before it's too late!

More information may be found at: <http://www.ReadyForWildfire.org>

During the kickoff event and subsequent events held in Yucaipa, Sanger and San Mateo County, audiences were also briefed on the fire potential forecast for the next few months and our response preparedness. There will be an increased large fire risk over the California desert areas in June due primarily to the grass crop. The risk is predicted to decrease to normal by July. Drought conditions, however, continue to persist over northeast California and are expected to remain that way until fall.

Much more on conditions in California and throughout the west may be found at: http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/outlooks/monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf

We cautioned that despite a wet winter in most of the state, the threat of large and damaging wildfires exists in California every year. Wildfires in California are simply a matter of "when", not "if." Those of us having been in the business for any length of time know why predictive services analysts don't forecast beyond August. Strong winds after a

hot, dry summer, or any number of other circumstances, can turn a below-normal wildfire year into a disastrous one.

Knowing that, Governor Schwarzenegger signed Executive Order S-07-10 (<http://gov.ca.gov/executive-order/15067/>) giving California's firefighters the tools and people necessary to safeguard the citizens of California and protect their property and resources by means of prevention and emergency response.



Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signs Executive Order S-07-10 at McClellan.

It's very gratifying to hear of all the fire safety inspections, drills, trainings, operating plan reviews and other preparedness activities that I have been briefed on recently. The majority of them involve CAL FIRE's cooperators. Strong partners are essential to our success.

Train like you fight, and fight like you train. That approach will likely pay dividends in the months ahead.

Lastly, I want to remind you all that I believe prevention, like safety, is everyone's business. That is why I expect prevention and safety to be a part of your mindset as you go about your daily activities, regardless of your assignment.

I want to thank everyone who has participated in the activities mentioned above and wish everyone a safe and enjoyable summer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Del Walters".

Del Walters, Chief
Director