



NEWS



News Headlines 04/13/2023

- Fire, Sheriff and ALA on storm response and impact
- Fire erupts at commercial building in San Bernardino on April 11

Fire, Sheriff and ALA on storm response and impact

By Angela Yap, Mountain News

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San Bernardino County Fire Division Chief Joe Barna, ALA manager Bob Mattison, Captain Don Lupear and Rim Association of Realtors president Derek Leistra.

On April 5, 2023, President Derek Leistra of Rim of the World Association of Realtors hosted a membership meeting at the Lake Arrowhead Resort.

The meeting featured first hand updates from San Bernardino County Fire Division Chief Joe Barna, Sheriff Captain Don Lupear, and Arrowhead Association Manager Bob Mattison regarding the unprecedented blizzard on the mountain communities.

Twin Peaks Sheriff Captain Don Lupear shared how the Sheriff Department prepared for the February-March blizzard, stating, “From February 23-28, Deputies were handling calls in their chained 4-wheel drives. The roads were bad and narrow, but they got to all the calls even if they had to hike.” In fact, Lupear said that Deputy Craig Harris and others packed their clothes and stayed at the Sheriff’s Station in anticipation of the destruction the forecasted blizzard might bring.

“But the next storm was wet so they were stuck for two days due to unplowed roads,” Lupear said. “On March 1, we received two snowcats and a 14-seat over snow vehicle that looked like a bus was stationed in Crestline.”

“On March 8, we started emergency command operations where CHP, CalTrans, Edison, the Gas company, and State reps were involved. That’s when we deployed our mobile field force of 190 people,” Lupear explained. “We got a mobile field force of 14 people in a team. Although some roads were plowed, many back roads were not. They were knocking on doors. We had 23 Deputies here. Harris was stationed at 91 and I was at the command center. Harris and I communicated and it worked out very well. That continued to March 15.”

Lupear said they had over 500 Search & Rescue members on the mountains, and some were out on snowshoes when working. “They walked miles in snowshoes to get to their destinations.

Although there were a few snow mobiles, they were not used earlier as they would sink eight feet down when they hit soft snow,” he explained.

From March 1-15, the Deputy handled over 2,000 calls and completed hundreds of welfare checks, and also attended to 29 fire hazards and 13 death investigations. “Only one death was related to the snow storm, which

was a hit and run in Big Bear,” said Lupear. “The other 12 deaths were either hospice or natural. None of these deaths other than one is related to the storm.”

“Call us instead of watching Facebook, which may have false information,” said Captain Lupear, who views social media as a source that enables the spreading of false news.

“Our Deputy rescued those who wanted to leave the mountain in the snow. Over 300 people wanted to get off the mountain,” said Lupear. “We also delivered 41 pallets of perishable foods.”

According to Captain Lupear, no looting was reported, “We caught two people at Rite Aid, and two other people broke into a house on Kuffel Canyon to take food, as their cars were stuck. “They were sleeping inside the house they broke into when the Deputy arrived.”

“I worked for three weeks straight,” Lupear said. “So did my Deputies and our cars are beat up.”

Lupear also reported that the Sheriff’s Station received a lot of calls from Short-Term Rental (STR) guests, who were running out of food and needed snow shovels. “We had a lot of STR guests that we moved off the mountain who left their cars here.”

When addressing the decision to close/open the mountain for the locals, Lupear explained, “It was a decision made by the fire, CHP, and the Sheriff on when to open up the road. I know some people were not happy, but it was for public safety.”

Publisher Harry Bradley asked about gas and fire issues, and the question was deferred to the Division Fire Chief.

Division Chief Joe Barna from **San Bernardino County Fire** is a long-time resident in Lake Arrowhead. He started off his presentation by saying, “This is the biggest storm I have ever seen. I was actually stuck at home and I coordinated stuff at home. We knew the storm was going to be bad. So on Sunday I had a snow cat pick me up at 91, we partnered with the Sheriff like a navy seal team. No matter what happens, people call 911. Our team was incredible.”

“On February 28, when the county was faltering, we stepped in and authorized as command center. We started on evacuation and we organized the effort,” said Barna. “For me, I was in charge of the 911 resources, working hand-in-hand with the Sherrifs.”

“Not having the roads plowed was a challenge,” said Barna. “All of our snowcats were committed, and then our emergency calls went up 500% for needs ranging from low on food to running out of medicines. STR people were calling us because they were without food and wanted to get out of the mountains. At that time, many places were only accessible by snow cat.”

“We literally had a guy working with chain saw who accidentally cut his own leg and needed to get to the hospital,” shared Barna. “Then we were busy responding to calls related to gas leaks.”

“The first explosion/fire was with two people inside. When we got there, we didn’t have a hydrant engine, we had a snow car,” said Barna. “Shortly afterward, there was another house explosion. As we were working on that one, another exploded on Bear Springs Road. The power of the explosion on Bear Spring Road literally split the house in half. We suspected it was a gas explosion.”

Barna reported a total of 15 explosions/fires, in which all but one house was occupied. “We had 105 gas leak calls at one point,” said Barna. “At that time, the Gas Company only had two people working up here.”

Barna reported that over 1,000 homes were damaged between Rim communities and Wrightwood, and 125 homes were completely destroyed. He commented on how he witnessed neighbors helping neighbors and said, “I am proud of this community and how they help each other.” He is optimistic about the Rim communities’ recovery journey. “I have been in several disasters and from what I’ve seen, the recovery is going to be better than expected. The Village has been crowded and I foresee us having a great year.”

Barna complimented Rim superintendent Kimberley Freaker, stating, “She was a community hero. Between the three of us, we had a Red Cross shelter set up at Rim High. We actually had a place to take people to at the high school. I am proud of how we came together as a community.”

When responding about the house fires and explosions, Barna said, “I would hope that the gas company would address the gas explosion issue.” In terms of red tagging, he said the Fire Dept doesn’t red tag homes or businesses; that’s Building and Safety. Over 175 structures, residential and commercial, were red tagged.

“We had over 100 homes that we needed to assess,” said Barna. “We used Google Earth and Zillow to try to locate some of the gas meters.”

Broker Lynne Wilson said that it took a long time for the gas company to assess the property that collapsed next to her office in Blue Jay. Wilson asked for suggestions when locating the gas meter, but Barna said there is not a standard place for gas meters. Hence, when a house is surrounded by eight feet of snow, it became a challenge to locate the gas meter.

Publisher Harry Bradley asked how to find funding to get more equipment and snow cats if this weather pattern were to become the new norm.

Barra responded that the Federal government has declared an emergency, but has not released funding.

The third presenter was Bob Mattison, ALA Manager, who thanked the Fire chief and Sheriff Captain for their effort in saving lives and properties.

Mattison reported the storm impact as follows:

- 46 boats sunk
- 47 boats swamped
- 7 boats capsized
- 121 boats distressed
- 52 piers severely damaged
- 40 docks severely damaged

“We have a full lake this year,” said Mattison, who also reminded people to be cautious and watch out for debris when boating. He also stated that the ALA permitting process is being expedited for members who need repairs or replacements, and that ALA is not charging any permit fees related to the storm damage.

<https://mountain-news.com/news/42139/fire-sheriff-and-ala-on-storm-response-and-impact/>

Fire erupts at commercial building in San Bernardino on April 11

By Staff Writer, Fontana Herald News

April 12, 2023



Firefighters extinguish a fire which erupted in San Bernardino on April 11. (Contributed photo by San Bernardino County Fire Department)

A fire which erupted at a commercial building in San Bernardino was quickly extinguished on April 11, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department.

Crews were dispatched to the location near the intersection of West Baseline Avenue and North Mount Vernon Avenue at 3:41 p.m. and found smoke and fire showing from a medium sized commercial occupancy.

The fire was knocked down within 15 minutes of arriving on scene. All searches of the occupancy came up negative. No injuries to citizens or firefighters were reported.

The fire remains under investigation.

https://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/news/inland_empire_news/fire-erupts-at-commercial-building-in-san-bernardino-on-april-11/article_dd6eadf2-d968-11ed-b929-13a3891f967c.html