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Water District Asks “Are We Prepared?”

In order to remain proactive in their preparations for a major fire, El Toro Water District recently coordinated a public safety collaborative to discuss capacity, communication strategies and infrastructure protection.

Lake Forest, CA – As fire season rapidly approaches, El Toro Water District (ETWD) is ramping up emergency preparedness efforts by reaching out to the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) and City of Laguna Woods.

The three entities recently met at the Water District for open discussions ranging from safety of water system infrastructure, capacity, service area assessment needs as well as the establishment of a unified command in the event of a major disaster.

“Ensuring that OCFA has the resources to do their job is a huge part of our job,” shares Dennis Cafferty, Director of Operations and Engineering for El Toro Water District. “In the event of a fire or natural disaster, we need to make certain we’re all prepared to work together with a plan already in place.”

The first step in fortifying ETWD’s current emergency plan is through a vulnerability assessment of all critical infrastructure sites. OCFA is tasked with performing a series of physical on-site inspections in order to make recommendations on possible safety improvements to these infrastructure sites.

Following the inspections and recommendations, ETWD will carry forward any necessary maintenance improvements such as brush clearances, setbacks and weed abatements around water pumps and storage units.

One of the primary areas of concern in El Toro Water District’s service region is the wild-land interface surrounding Laguna Woods. “The water pumps in this specific area are the most

important components in conveying large amounts of water in an emergency,” says Orange County Fire Authority Captain Paul Guns. “We need to make sure they are protected.”

In addition to increasing safety around water conveyance sites, ETWD generated a list of equipment that could potentially be used by OCFA. Although the District’s 275 million gallon reservoir is a great resource in providing mass amounts of water during an emergency, other alternatives may be necessary to carry the water from one part of the region to another.

ETWD has as many as_____ pieces of machinery and trucks that could be utilized for various purposes during a fire. “Just having that kind of knowledge ahead of time will create a more efficient plan of action if and when an emergency strikes,” shares Captain Guns.

The final topic of discussion was refining communication strategies between all entities. “We are updating our unified command list, which includes current contact information for key leaders from ETWD, OCFA and the City of Laguna Woods,” explains Cafferty. “As a result, we’ll know exactly whom we need to be in contact with, which will make us all that more prepared.”

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The mission of the El Toro Water District is to provide its customers a safe, adequate and reliable supply of water and wastewater service in an environmentally and economically responsible way. El Toro Water District supplies water to the city of Laguna Woods and portions of the cities of Lake Forest, Laguna Hills, Mission Viejo and Aliso Viejo.