

On Monday, October 26, a woman died and a man was seriously injured in a house fire in Sleepy Hollow. Our condolences go to the family and our best wishes and prayers that the injured man makes a good recovery. At the time of this writing, no further details about the cause of the fire were available.

The Ross Valley Fire Department did receive 911 calls from the public and the first fire engines were quickly on the scene. Due to extra on duty staffing during the Red Flag event, a large number of additional fire engines and firefighters arrived quickly to assist. As always, our fire department did an excellent job of making sure this major fire did not spread. It is worth noting that one of the Battalion Chiefs told Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District (SHFPD) board member Tom Finn that Sleepy Hollow is fortunate that our two largest landholders, Triple C Ranch and San Domenico School, with additional financial support from the SHFPD, have done an excellent job creating defensible space on their properties. This helped firefighters in preventing the fire from spreading into our adjacent open space areas and creating a potentially dangerous wildfire during an ongoing Red Flag event.

This fire has understandably caused a great deal of fear and alarm among Sleepy Hollow residents. The fire occurred during a Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) and, as usual during a PSPS, there was no local cell phone coverage. Residents saw and heard the many fire engines dispatched to the fire. Many also saw the towering column of smoke. Without power, without cell phones, with landline phones not functioning, and with major communications providers like Comcast not operating their services, residents had no source of information about the incident. More than a few families, including some of my neighbors, decided to grab their Go Bags and evacuate.

There is not much we can do about the PSPSs. Until PG&E is able to rebuild its infrastructure, there will continue to be a need to de-energize parts of the power grid during high wind events to reduce the risk of wildfire. The impact of these shutoffs is uneven. Residents on one side of Butterfield Road had power, though for many phone and internet service was not functioning. Those across the street had neither power nor communications. The electrical grid can only be shut down in large blocks making it hard to precisely target smaller areas. Solar power, large backup batteries, and portable generators (preferably propane) are currently the only option available for maintaining power.

Over the next couple of weeks, SHFPD Block Captains will be distributing National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radios to each home at no cost to District residents. The radios are pre-programmed to receive AlertMarin warnings for large-scale events. Please refer to last month's article in the *Bulletin* for a full description of how these specialized radios work. Your local Block Captain is also available to answer any questions you might have about the NOAA alerting system. Unfortunately these radios would not have provided information about the recent fire. The AlertMarin system is designed for larger events like major wildfires. However, the absence of a broadcast alert would have been some evidence that an evacuation order or warning had not been issued by the relevant authorities.

The recent fire is further proof that Sleepy Hollow needs robust cell phone coverage backed up by batteries capable of powering the system for several days in the event of a PSPS. The 911 Fire Dispatch Center did receive phone calls reporting the incident, possibly from outside of Sleepy Hollow due to the large amount of smoke, but it is not known whether the occupants of the residence tried to report the fire. In fact, without functioning phones it is not possible to report any kind of emergency to 911. The NOAA radios can receive alerts, but they are not capable of reporting medical and other emergencies. The SHFPD and the Sleepy Hollow Homes Association both strongly support installation of a robust cell phone system in the Hollow. Several meetings have been held with Verizon and it is

expected that an application to establish an effective cell infrastructure in the Hollow will be submitted by Verizon to the County, which has authority to consider such an application. The SHFPD strongly encourages all of our residents to support installation of such a cell phone system in the interests of public safety.