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Lost lives mourned, updates issued at CVHS meeting

*By Mary O'Keefe
Crescenta Valley Weekly*

Two Los Angeles County Fire Dept. personnel lost their lives on Sunday afternoon after their vehicle went over the side of the road at Mt. Gleason near Fire Camp 16. The announcement was made by Los Angeles County Fire Capt. Rick Dominguez to local residents gathered Sunday night at CV High School for an information meeting about the Station Fire.

Los Angeles County Fire Inspector Ed Osorio added that the roads in that area are narrow and winding and there was a lot of smoke at the time of the accident.

Both Osorio and Dominguez said that the investigation into the deaths is ongoing. The residents at the center all relayed their sympathy for the fallen heroes and their families.

"This has set us back," Dominguez said of the department's loss. But he added that the fight is still ongoing and aggressive against the fire that has claimed over 42,000 acres since it began on Wednesday.

"It is 5% contained and some people have asked why it is still only 5%," Osorio said. He explained that although fire fighters continue to make progress against the blaze, it continues to grow which equals to a low containment percentage.

In addition to relaying information about the status of the fire, both fire personnel stressed that the most important thing for residents to do now is to follow instructions when they are told to evacuate.

"This tragedy [near Fire Camp 16] is a prime example of what can happen. Even those of us who are experienced have problems [in this type of wild fire]," Osorio said.

A resident may notice the fire seems to be less threatening than earlier in the day and will think it is safe to return home, but there are many areas that have yet to burn out. Flames can flare up even in areas that have already burned, he said.

There are no new evacuations expected for Crescenta Valley or Glendale throughout the night though Dominguez said they were expecting erratic behavior from the fire due to winds overnight. "The fire appears to be going toward Acton at this point," he said adding that although the fire seems to be moving out of the area, it is still a danger.

"The entire foothill community is [still] a concern for us," Dominguez said.

The blaze continues to burn down the mountains where fire fighters have prepared to make a stand. Fighting the fire in place is difficult due to the thick vegetation and steep terrain. "We let it burn down to make a stand, usually in your backyard," Osorio said.

An estimated containment date of Sept. 8 was given to residents by the two firefighters at a meeting earlier in the day. "That is our best 'guesstament,'" Osorio said. That does not mean that is when evacuated residents will be allowed back into their homes, but it is a date of total containment of the fire. If the fire is deemed safe within their neighborhood earlier, residents may be let in, Osorio said. "That estimated Sept. 8 date is total containment," he reiterated.

The fire is now behind Jet Propulsion Laboratory but Osorio said the fire fighters are doing everything they can to protect the lab.

"Fire did reach Mt. Wilson," Osorio told the group. The area is a major hub for communication technology. The loss of the towers would not only affect television, radio and other communications but would be extremely costly to Los Angeles County.

Residents from Big Tujunga Canyon are still under mandatory evacuation and it is uncertain how many structures have been lost. Osorio said that fire personnel had not been able to go into the area to make assessments. As of now the official Los Angeles County Fire information is that 18 structures have been lost.

Dominguez said a town hall meeting is being scheduled for some time Monday and will most likely be at a Santa Clarita location. He explained that the meeting is scheduled for that location because the fire is heading in that direction.

Information for the meeting will be released tomorrow and can be found by calling (323) 881-2411 or visit the website www.fire.lacounty.gov.

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For information on the status of the City of La Canada, visit the website www.lacanadaflintridge.com

This report was provided by Crescenta Valley Weekly, a new advertising supported publication that will arrive in foothill driveways weekly beginning on Thursday, Sept. 3. Our official website, www.crescentavalleyweekly.com, will also be online at that time. For more information about Crescenta Valley Weekly, e-mail Robin Goldsworthy, publisher, at cvweekly@gmail.com.

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