

October 26, 2007

Firestorms Warn Us to Prepare for Getting Out Safely in a Disaster

Our hearts go out to the tens of thousands of families who evacuated due to the Southern California firestorms. We also share our gratitude and respect for the more than 10,000 emergency responders who've served on the fire lines.

The statistics have been tough to comprehend. At least a half- million people have been forced out of their homes by wildfires throughout the Los Angeles and San Diego regions, the largest evacuation in California history. It's a stark reminder that our state is constantly at risk for major wildfires in addition to catastrophic floods, earthquakes, and other natural and manmade disasters.

Numerous sources have described how the lessons learned after Hurricane Katrina have helped in dealing with Southern California's firestorms. At Citizen Voice, a rapidly growing non-profit, nonpartisan movement to involve citizens and protect the vulnerable, we too took the lessons learned first-hand from Hurricane Katrina and with technical assistance from the Sacramento region Red Cross chapter, developed a vital evacuation notification and information kit to help get people to safety during any natural or manmade disaster. Citizen Voice's SAFELY OUT™ Project was launched publicly last year on the first anniversary of Katrina. The effort has drawn attention nationwide.

The SAFELY OUT Project is a unique neighbor-helping-neighbor evacuation effort assisting all -- especially vulnerable populations like seniors, the disabled and those with young children -- in reaching safety and relieving a portion of the burden often shouldered alone by emergency responders. The SAFELY OUT Project is based on a very simple yet transformational idea that has been endorsed by leaders in emergency response -- "We all need to be first responders."

The American Red Cross Sacramento Sierra Chapter has told us there is currently nothing comparable to SAFELY OUT™ Kit deployed in the U.S. and has heartily endorsed the Project. Following completion of the pilot phase to distribute 100,000 SAFELY OUT Kits in the Sacramento region, the Project plans to deploy one million in California en route to ten million in the U.S. In just its first year, the SAFELY OUT Project has already received substantial interest from emergency responders and others around the nation and even internationally. Why? Because it can save lives -- potentially, many thousands of lives. Through the SAFELY OUT Project's pilot phase, the Sacramento region has the opportunity to set the bar nationally for widespread citizen involvement in dealing with disasters, particularly on behalf of our most vulnerable.

The SAFELY OUT Kit features its signature door hanger that lets emergency personnel know which homes have been safely evacuated and which still have residents that need help getting out. This easy-to-use and highly recognizable communication tool allows precious emergency resources to be used for their primary purpose -- fighting a wildfire, rescuing those trapped by a flood, and more. The Kit contains other valuable emergency evacuation components as well.

We trust the dramatic scenes from the Southern California firestorms of 2007 will again awaken all of us to the critical need to get prepared and make sure our most vulnerable are protected. The SAFELY OUT Project is deeply committed to this and the SAFELY OUT Kit is an easy tool to help get that done. If you'd like more information on the SAFELY OUT Project or want to get SAFELY OUT Kits for your family, friends neighbors, employees or others you care about, you can go to www.citizenvoice.org or call 916/503-3194. We're here to help.

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