

# LA Fires: Lessons for Marin

During our Wildfire Watch special, [LA Fires: Lessons for Marin](#) which aired on February 10, 2025, fire professionals and emergency managers came together to discuss how Marin is preparing for wildfire. We received an extensive number of questions from the public, many of which were similar or already addressed during the program. We carefully grouped related questions and did our best to provide thorough responses to each one. If you believe your question was not answered, email us at [info@firesafemarin.org](mailto:info@firesafemarin.org).

## Category: Evacuation & Traffic Gridlock

### **1. What strategies are in place to assure safe & speedy exits for people and cars out of neighborhoods struck by wildfire that have narrow streets with single lanes and particularly have only ONE WAY OUT?**

Early warning systems and alerts are the best defense at ensuring safe and efficient response from residents in neighborhoods with one way out. First responders will be available to assist with traffic, but for communities in areas with limited egress, early evacuation is highly recommended. Emergency services coordinate traffic control through law enforcement, fire agencies, and public works. Evacuation routes are planned based on real-time fire behavior, and traffic engineers assess flow capacity to reduce congestion. Marin County is investing in enhanced evacuation software and traffic modeling to improve egress efficiency. Residents must prepare by knowing multiple routes and leaving early when possible.

While potential "gridlock" can cause anxiety, emergency managers recognize that it is sometimes inevitable since road infrastructure was never designed to support an entire community moving at once. That said, gridlock is not necessarily dangerous. Data from the last decade of California wildfires shows that every resident who evacuated in a vehicle and stayed on a paved road survived. Fatalities occurred only when vehicles left paved roads, drove into burning vegetation, or were involved in accidents. The safest place to be is inside a vehicle on a paved road at the valley floor, even if traffic is slow or stopped.

## Category: Evacuation & Traffic Gridlock

### 2. How will people in remote areas receive alerts when landlines are discontinued in 2029?

Marin County uses multiple redundant alert systems, including AlertMarin, Nixle, NOAA weather radios, LRADs and in-person contacts from fire or police responders. Residents in remote areas should consider investing in battery-operated radios, satellite messaging devices, or neighborhood alert systems.

### 3. Are there plans to open up fire roads or develop alternative egress routes for high-risk communities with limited exits?

Marin is actively working on improving paved evacuation routes and assessing traffic flow strategies. Some communities are working with local fire departments to enhance road infrastructure and improve vegetation clearance along major evacuation routes. **Fire roads should never be used for public evacuation—they are strictly for firefighter access during an emergency.** Fire roads are not maintained for public use, may have unstable terrain, and can become hazardous during a fire due to falling debris and poor visibility. Additionally, these roads are critical for firefighter ingress, and civilian use could interfere with suppression efforts.

### 4. Will law enforcement and fire agencies direct traffic during evacuations?

Yes. Fire and law enforcement agencies will deploy personnel to manage key intersections and reroute traffic as needed. However, residents should not rely solely on officials and must be familiar with their own evacuation plan.

### 5. How will communication and alert systems function if cell towers are down?

Redundancy, pre-planning, and situational awareness are key. Marin County uses multiple redundant alert systems, including AlertMarin (text, calls, email), Nixle, local news radio, NOAA weather radios, and in some communities, Long-Range Acoustic Devices (LRADs) for outdoor warnings. While both landlines and cellular networks have vulnerabilities, landlines are no longer a reliable option for emergency communications, as the majority of Marin residents rely on VOIP and cellular.

## Category: Evacuation & Traffic Gridlock

### **6. Can Marin Fire and other agencies be more proactive in removing large trees along major evacuation routes?**

Across Marin County, evacuation clearance is being addressed. Please visit [Marin Wildfire](#) to view maps of vegetation management projects taking place along evacuation routes.

### **7. Please speak to the critical need for a safe refuge zone within the San Geronimo Valley, if evacuation routes are unsafe, blocked, or too congested for quick movement of traffic.**

Sir Francis Drake Boulevard is your primary refuge area, regardless of traffic speed. Multiple refuge areas are available in the San Geronimo Valley, including parking lots at the community center, golf course, fire facility, Woodacre Improvement Club, Lagunitas School, and other wide areas near the valley floor. These locations provide 30 to 100 feet of clearance from vegetation taller than 18 inches.

## Category: Water Supply & Firefighting Resources

### **8. How do you specifically address the LA scenario? (running out of water) How does Marin's water storage compare to other regions (e.g., Los Angeles)?**

First, it's important to realize that Los Angeles did not run out of water in its storage system. Marin's water system is smaller than some metropolitan regions but has been improved to ensure fire flow reliability. Marin has a diversified supply strategy, including storage reservoirs, system redundancy and upgrades, and emergency response planning. Fire managers in Marin understand that water system disruptions, and in some cases failures, are likely during major urban conflagrations and have developed firefighting tactics and strategies that compensate for this eventuality. Every large-scale urban conflagration has resulted in depleted water supply. Fire departments address this through careful training to conserve available water. The best way to address this is by investing in communities that are hardened to ember ignitions so that firefighters stand a better chance of helping fight the fire.

## Category: Water Supply & Firefighting Resources

### **9. What is the panel's opinion on private residential fire hydrants as a supplement to public hydrants?**

If the hydrant is using a stand alone source of water and does not draw from municipal water supply, the panel does not have an opinion on private hydrants. While private water storage can be beneficial in some cases, Marin fire agencies do not rely on these resources for primary firefighting. Large storage tanks should meet fire department specifications and be properly maintained.

### **10. What else is being done to ensure Marin's water resources are sufficient for fire protection?**

Marin's current resources are sufficient for many of the day to day threats to our community. If Marin were to experience a large scale conflagration like the one we have witnessed in LA, firefighters would not rely on water to suppress the fire, but would turn attention to evacuation response and saving homes or structures that are more defensible, i.e. hardened to ember ignitions, or with sufficient defensible space.

### **11. Many residents who are far from fire hydrants have pools with 10000 gallon, much more than any fire truck. How do they communicate with fire stations (or signal with signs beside their evacuated property) that there is lots of water available within, say, 30 ft of a road or driveway?**

Firefighters can use pools as an emergency water source if necessary. However, residents do not need to notify fire agencies of their pool's availability—firefighters have aerial imagery and mapping that show pool locations.

### **12. How much air support is available for wildfire suppression in Marin?**

Marin operates a Type-1 Blackhawk helicopter (6PG) in cooperation with PG&E during wildfire season, available from Gness Field in Novato. Additionally, California has the most robust state-run wildfire air force in the world, with access to federal and even Canadian air assets when demand is greatest. Marin has immediate access to CAL Fire's air resources when needed, and aircraft are dispatched to all reported vegetation fires in Marin when conditions warrant.

## Category: Home Hardening & Defensible Space

### **13. Is there any way to make a large redwood deck fire-resistant?**

To make a redwood deck more fire-resistant, focus on reducing potential fuel sources and maintaining proper upkeep. While hardwoods like redwood have some natural fire resistance, it's essential to regularly remove fine fuels like leaves, pine needles, and other debris from the deck surface and gaps. Avoid storing combustible items such as patio cushions, jute mats, or flammable furniture, and keep the area beneath the deck clear of dry vegetation and clutter. Consider using non-combustible accessories like metal or ceramic furniture can further reduce fire risk. By prioritizing regular maintenance and smart material choices, you can enhance your deck's fire resilience.

### **14. What about under decks? Should you cover it with mesh?**

Covering the area beneath a deck with 1/8-inch mesh can help prevent fine fuels and embers from accumulating, reducing fire risk. This is especially recommended for first-story decks that are only a few feet off the ground.

For decks that are higher off the ground, enclosing them with mesh is less critical. Instead, focus on removing ignition sources, such as debris or vegetation near support beams or siding, to minimize fire risk.

### **15. Are there any recommended plants that tend to be more fire-resistant?**

Moisture rich, broad, waxy leaves, are typically more ignition resistant. Avoid needles, dry twiggy debris, or species that dry out quickie like seasonal grasses. For more information [see our website](#).

### **16. What are the best vents to install for fire safety that also allow flood drainage?**

It depends on the location of the vent. Intumescent coated vents protect against embers and radiant heat or flames, and may be a wise investment for foundation vents that are close to other structures, vegetation, etc. 1/8 mesh are sufficient for embers, and provide great protection if radiation or flames are not a direct threat. Both options can support flood drainage depending on their design and placement.

## Category: Home Hardening & Defensible Space

### **17. What is the best way to mitigate risk for homes with wood siding or redwood decks in the Zero Zone?**

Remove vegetation, and any combustible storage materials, patio furniture, tools, garbage and recycling bins etc. Clean gutters, beneath the deck, from the base of deck and siding regularly.

### **18. What is the priority order for home hardening improvements if cost isn't a concern?**

- 5-foot entirely noncombustible, ember-resistant "Zone 0" around the home
- Ember-resistant vents
- Class A fire-rated roofing
- Non-combustible siding
- Replace wooden fences with noncombustible options, starting where they attach to the house.
- Replace wooden decks with fire-resistant materials
- Install tempered glass windows

### **19. If we have wood siding on our home, is there any type of paint that we can use to decrease the fire risk? Also the same for any special types of roofing materials that can help.**

While some fire retardant gels are commercially available, their effectiveness is limited, and they must be applied immediately before a fire. They are not a long-term solution for home hardening.

### **20. Do you have a system to work with HOA's to proactively address homeowners with hazardous fire spreading landscapes/trees/features?**

While HOAs can set rules, fire agencies encourage voluntary compliance through education and incentives. Some HOAs are more active than others, and they can be an effective strategy to reduce wildfire risk at the community level.

### **21. Must people remove dead/dying trees on property in addition to other vegetation close to the home?**

Yes. Hazardous vegetation, including dead, or dying trees and must be removed to comply with defensible space regulations.

## Category: Policy & Enforcement

### **22. What policies exist to require fire-resistant building materials in new developments?**

State and local codes mandate fire-resistant materials in high-risk zones. Chapter 7A of the California Building Code is the strictest and best developed of its kind in the nation. It applies to all new buildings in the WUI since 2008, and most remodels. Check Cal Fire's WUI Building Codes for details.

### **23. How can we get state Senators, Assembly Members, the Governor, and the Association of Bay Area Governments to take the fire evacuation risks into account when mandating additional housing units in urban/wildland interface areas?**

Wildfire preparedness and evacuation safety are key considerations for many elected officials across the state, including those in Marin County. Land use planning and development in the wildland-urban interface require a balanced approach that prioritizes both housing needs and community safety. Ongoing collaboration between local governments, fire agencies, and policymakers helps ensure that evacuation risks are carefully evaluated as part of future development efforts.

### **24. Are there actions that can be taken to ensure that homeowners with hazardous vegetation clear their properties?**

In certain cases, fire departments can use enforcement or abatement to address homes with hazardous vegetation.

### **25. Is defensible space legally required? If so, how is it enforced?**

Yes. California Public Resources Code (PRC) 4291 and local ordinances require defensible space around structures in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).. Enforcement is managed through inspections by Marin fire agencies, and fines or forced abatement are possible for noncompliance. However, these processes are often costly and time-consuming for local agencies, making strict enforcement challenging. Because of this, voluntary compliance and education are the preferred strategies. Incentivization through insurance retention and peer pressure has proven to be more effective in most cases than direct enforcement. That said, several Marin agencies are considering enhancements in enforcement, and a more aggressive approach is likely in the future if communities support it.

## Category: Policy & Enforcement

### **26. Are there any signs that insurance companies will use differential pricing to offer discounts for homes with defensible space?**

Yes, there is already evidence that this is taking place.

### **27. What can be done to encourage cities/towns in Marin to ban highly flammable plants such as juniper, cypress, and bamboo?**

Encourage your city or town to ban highly flammable plants by contacting local representatives and government officials to express support for ordinances requiring their removal. Widespread community advocacy strengthens the case for policy change, giving officials the backing needed to take action.

### **28. Are there any regulations preventing homeowners from removing hazardous trees?**

Tree removal regulations vary by jurisdiction. Some protected species require permits, but hazardous trees can often be removed if they pose a clear fire risk.

### **29. Is the SRFD required to approve new residential construction in the WUI, especially in extra dangerous fire areas with steep cul de sacs?**

The San Rafael Fire Department, like all fire agencies in Marin, reviews building plans to ensure compliance with fire codes. If a proposed home does not meet these requirements, it will not be approved until necessary changes are made. Homes built in the WUI must adhere to Chapter 7A of the California Building Code, which mandates ignition-resistant construction materials, fire-hardened design elements, and the creation and maintenance of defensible space. These modern standards have proven highly effective, with homes built to this code surviving wildfires in areas like Paradise, Pacific Palisades and others.

## Category: Communication & Emergency Alerts

### **30. Can you demonstrate the hi-low siren for evacuation alerts?**

Please see this video for an example of the high low siren: [\[Link to video\]](#)



## Category: Communication & Emergency Alerts

### **31. Where can residents find a list of all emergency alert agencies and their sign-up information?**

Alert Marin is the preeminent system being used across the county.

### **32. What AM channels are being use to transmit advice and information during an emergency?**

Central, South, North Marin and Bay Area: AM 740, AM 810, FM 106.9, FM 88.5 West Marin: FM 90.5 (Point Reyes), FM 89.9 (Bollinas)

## Category: Vegetation Management

### **33. Is there an updated timeline for PG&E's undergrounding of power lines in high-risk areas of Marin?**

PG&E and Marin agencies are prioritizing undergrounding power lines in specific high-risk zones, but full implementation remains a long-term process. More updates will be provided as projects advance.

### **34. What is being done to enforce vegetation clearance around power lines more aggressively?**

PG&E and Marin fire agencies conduct regular inspections and mandated vegetation clearance around power lines. However, enforcement varies, and public reporting can help identify high-risk areas needing attention.

### **35. How is Marin working with the National Park Service and GGNRA to reduce wildfire risk on federally managed lands?**

Collaboration is ongoing to balance wildfire mitigation with environmental protections. Fuel reduction projects and prescribed burns are considered in consultation with federal land managers. Jurisdictional challenges exist as federally managed lands like GGNRA and NPS fall outside this panel's scope and face hurdles from the CA Coastal Commission. These sensitive ecosystems cannot accommodate aggressive vegetation management used in residential areas. Residents facing these challenges are encouraged to submit public comments at [regulation.gov](https://www.regulation.gov).

## Category: Vegetation Management

### **36. What about the fuel load on Mt. Tam overlooking Mill Valley?**

Fuel loads in publicly owned land like our State Parks require considerable resources to effectively and safely manage. Prescribed burns, pile burns, are currently being used to help address these fuels, but most resources are reserved to protect roadsides, and areas adjacent to communities. For a list of current vegetation management projects in Marin visit: [\[Link to Marin Wildfire website\]](#)

## Category: Miscellaneous

### **37. Concerns about specific road conditions:**

These should be directed to local transportation or public works departments, or local fire authorities.

### **38. Defunct hot tub as a water resource for fire?**

Probably not necessary.

### **39. Concerns over neighbors cooking outside near open space:**

A local code enforcement issue, not directly a wildfire prevention question.

### **40. Have there been insurance denials for homes in a trust?**

Best answered by legal or insurance professionals. See United Policyholders ([www.uphelp.org](http://www.uphelp.org)) for legal advice pertaining to homeowners insurance.

# Additional questions?

Email us: [info@firesafemarin.org](mailto:info@firesafemarin.org)