

# Preparedness Corner

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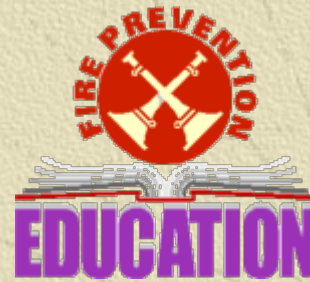


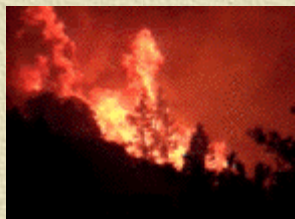
As an introduction to this area I would like to share my thoughts on why I write to you each month. During my career in the fire service I have always felt that the greatest way to thank those who have trained me in years past is to teach others what I have learned. The purpose of this column is to teach people in all areas of fire safety and safe living. Prevention is the primary area because it can help prevent a lot of unnecessary hard ship. What to do before, during, and after the fire is also important to teach so you can survive a fire whether it be home or wildland. Lastly, when I come across

information that I feel is relevant to the column's purpose I try to pass it along to you in the hope that it will somehow benefit your life and make living on the ranch easier. Enjoy them, take the information and put it to good use. Maybe some day you can pull something from them and can teach someone else who might need it.

[Paul Vircsik](#)

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# Preparedness Corner

June 2005

By [Paul Viresik](#)

## Special Edition

Hi Neighbors,

I have been reading about the interest in wildland interface training, fires, and exit worries on the web site. This prompted an edition of the Preparedness Corner. It is great to see interest in the safety and well being of our ranch. May I direct your attention to the left tool bar where older columns reside gathering moth balls from previous years. They still apply and I want to mention a few dates of columns that are especially poignant at this time of year. [February 2001](#), [July 2001](#), [June 2002](#), [March 2003](#), [April 2003](#), [June 2004](#) Feel free to read others as well. They all have something to educate the new additions to our ranch and may spark (fire pun) some of the older residents to dust off the knowledge bin. As I was reviewing this article I looked at the current weather for the ranch. 90 degrees and 6% humidity with 12 mph winds. Prime fire weather.



Cedar Fire 2003

Being prepared for an emergency evacuation is very important for us out here in the sticks and can be stressful while just thinking about the dos and don'ts. If there is ever an emergency and you have to evacuate your home quickly, there will only be a few minutes, if any time at all, to gather up a few necessities before heading to safety with your loved ones. More than likely, you won't have the time or mindset to evaluate what financial information and important documents you'll need after the emergency to get everything back in order. Evacuating in a panic situation is just that, a panic situation. Practicing from start to finish will help you retain what you need to know and what you need to take. We have a good ESC in place and our volunteer firefighters are very good at what they do, but remember that out here any fire department will not be able to cover the expanse of acreage that we have. So you need to be prepared.

It is essential to prepare not only a list of must dos before leaving but also a financial emergency evacuation kit that includes an after plan. First, check out the mentioned articles to give yourself a heads up for preparing your home and family, including pets, for leaving. Then buy a durable, fireproof container that you would be able to easily carry to your vehicle during an evacuation. When you begin putting items inside the container, store them in airtight plastic bags. Once complete, keep the lightweight kit near an emergency exit in your home so it can be grabbed easily as you leave. When you read the rest of this information put yourself in an evacuation frame of mind. After you come back home to whatever is left of the ranch picture your life without the items mentioned below and how you would function without them. The following are some items you need to include in your emergency kit:

## Home Inventory

I have been in many of my neighbors homes and we have not only valuables but life time memories as well. Create both a thorough written and video documentation of all your belongings. Record each item, its value, and any additional information such as serial numbers and warranties. Collect appraisals for appropriate valuables and gather copies of receipts. In addition to having a copy of your inventory in the evacuation kit, also store a copy in a safe-deposit box and with a distant friend or relative.

## Emergency Money

Have a 7 day supply if not more or cash that can be used after an emergency. Don't think you can rely on ATMs or banks because they may be affected by the same disaster. Funds may not be readily available for many days, if not weeks, after the situation has passed. Many of us use local banks that do not have ties to the outside world. Electricity and phone lines even in the city may not be working for a long time in a major emergency.

## Financial Documents

Social Security cards, your last three income tax returns, deeds, passports, birth certificates for the entire family, your marriage certificate, insurance policies, stock certificates and financial account numbers are only some of the information to store in your kit. You'll also need such things as keys to your safe deposit box and backups of your computer files. Sit down and make a list of all your important financial information, and then add that to your kit.

## After-plan

Think ahead and write a "to do" list for what you will do after a disaster. Figure out the people you would need to call and where you can possibly stay if it became necessary. Have their phone numbers in the kit. Also have information about shelters and government assistance programs. Good luck getting that locally. None of these are pleasant tasks, but any preparation you do beforehand will go a long way to help you when you need it most.

While writing this from notes from articles recently seen thought why someone would need to go to such extent. How much over kill is necessary to feel safe? Then I remembered some of the emergencies that we have had and have happened around us. The Southern California Cedar Fire in 2003 that put 2300 households without a home even in city areas. The Los Alamos fire of 2000. The current fires in Utah, New Mexico, Arizona. Many neighborhoods were evacuated not due to the threat of fire but because of the dangerous pollutants in the air. The floods and tornados that occur annually. The recent land slides that after needed rains from fire season caused unpredictable losses. I just recently bought a piece of property. As entailed as that is in a normal environment, can you imagine what it would be like if you didn't have any of your important documents?

People always say after a fire "We got out safe and no one got hurt, that's all that matters". This is true. Then real life snaps back and everyone you need help from will ask you for all the stuff mentioned above. It will be a wonder feeling to pop the trunk and pull out the kit and tell them "Exactly what do you need?"

Have a safe summer and I'll see you all soon,  
Paul

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# Preparedness Corner

August 2004

By Paul Viresik

## Special Edition

Hi Neighbors,

I have been watching the forum postings regarding forest conservation, fires and classes about fires and am pleased at the interest in fire safety within the ranch. As someone recently wrote; "The question is not WHETHER a fire will threaten the ranch and all of our investment. The questions will be HOW SOON will we be threatened, and will we be as PREPARED as we can reasonably expect to be".

While we can be prepared as well as anyone lest us not forget that fire is an incredibly dynamic event. The Cedar fire started in brush and trees as a small fire and like all major fires quickly developed into a monster. A small fire on our ranch will probably do the same with the right conditions. Even with the best plans and preparation, things can go wrong. It happens to the best of us, professionally and homeowner. There have been many fires throughout the nation already as the season takes its normal path (June 2002) and even though El Nino may bring rain to some parts of our nation, others will get the dry.

To prepare for another season if you have not already done so, re-read our Emergency Services Handbook, my columns, and watch the weather and the fire news. Please read the next portion of this with our ranch area in mind. Try to envision yourself in these predicaments whether you stay to fight and protect or while leaving to an evacuation point. Remember that fire in the forest can reach upwards of 1200 degrees and skin burns at 130.

*Chief Silva: This Safety Message was sent to me, I thought it was one of the better reminders for us all. Gary.*

*It is July 28, 2004. Today is the two year anniversary of the Stanza Fire and the LNF Engine 11 accident that killed 3 of our local firefighters. July 22nd, 2003 was the Cramer Fire, in which 2 firefighters died. This July 2nd marked the ten year anniversary of the South Canyon Fire that killed 14 firefighters.*

*Consider some events that have happened this year so far:*

- ✘ *On July 26th, 2004, on the Straylor Fire, a dozer tender was destroyed by fire and fire engines were scorched. At almost the same time a helicopter crashed on that incident and injured 2 CDF firefighters and the pilot.*
- ✘ *On July 14, 2004, on the Waterfall Fire in Carson City, NV, approximately 10 vehicles (including firefighting vehicles) were unable to evacuate an area being over run by fire. Some of these vehicles were destroyed. One fire fighter and a civilian news reporter received burn injuries. Their escape route was blocked by incoming traffic. No controls or road guards.*
- ✘ *On July 22, 2004, a San Bernardino National Forest engine was scorched while working a spot fire on the Citrus Fire in Southern California. Air hoses and electrical lines were burned, and the engine "locked up" while trying to drive it out of an area being over-run by the fire. The operator received first degree burns to his face, neck and back of both of his hands.*

- ✘ *On July 2, 2004, on the Nuttall Fire in Arizona, 12 firefighters (hot shots) deployed shelters when their position experienced heavy smoke and ember wash. This position was chosen as refuge when they determined they could not make their designated safety zone. No injuries.*
- ✘ *On July 13, 2004, a hand crew member received radiant heat burn injury to his face and elbows while attacking a fire in light flashy fuels on the Mataguay Fire in San Diego County.*

In all of these cases, LCES was followed. In many cases, fire behavior changed quickly, was erratic and with spotting.

These are only the incidents I have heard of, there are probably more. (This does not include the aviation accidents that we have had this fire season). To me, this seems like a lot of near misses, this early in the season.

The incidents/near misses described above serve as a heads up to all our employees engaged in firefighting operations. Fuel/fire conditions are severe in the western states. It is only July. We have several weeks of fire season remaining, and we do not want our people getting into situations that could cause injury or equipment damage.

### **Please Review Fireline Safety Daily With Your Crews**

- ✘ Take the time to review the basics: LCES, 10 Standard, 18 situations.
- ✘ Make sure you have a valid escape route and a back up.
- ✘ Constantly reassess the fire situation.
- ✘ Evaluate fuel and weather conditions constantly.
- ✘ Periodically reevaluate your escape routes.
- ✘ Ensure that communications are solid before engaging in any assignment.
- ✘ Ensure lookouts are posted, and have positive communication.
- ✘ Fight fire aggressively, **having provided for safety first.**
- ✘ Trees and brush will grow back, firefighters will not.

Fire line safety is appropriate for all of us even when just watching the smoke from a distant fire from the safety of the ranch.

Have a safe summer and I'll see you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

June 2004

By Paul Viresik

Hi Neighbors,

For over five years it has been my pleasure to write this column. To serve the community and to inform my neighbors how to live safely in the wide open spaces that we do. I have been reading the past articles in the archives and unless you feel otherwise, they seem to have dealt with every issue I feel pertinent. So this will be the last regularly scheduled monthly addition of the Preparedness Corner. From time to time I might produce an article of importance that is relevant to our ranch, and if anyone feels they need information, let me know and I will address the subject. It has been a pleasure seeing the results of some of the subject matter within the ranch and Marlene and I have been truly blessed with some wonderful friends and neighbors.

For this last column I thought it important to take some excerpts from the Incident Response Guide produced by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group and prepared by the Incident Operations Standards Working Team. The first part is the Structure Protection Checklist. Basically it states what we look for to assess whether a structure is protectable or not. This determines if we stay and try or pass it by and leave it to the fire. Put your self in our shoes, read the checklist, and decide if you could stop safely and try to protect your structure AND if it is protectable. I know in the past I have addressed this area but the season is here again and maybe just maybe an "official" list might spur some activity for those of you who choose to live dangerously. The second part is an Operational Leadership Guide and is aimed towards our Firefighters for their safety and growth. We all could learn from this list.

## Structure Assessment Checklist

### Address/Property Name

Numerical street address, ranch name, etc.

Residents on site?

### Road Access

Number of lanes, vegetation clearance

Road grade greater than 15%

Creek crossings, clearance problems, drivable surface

Turn outs, turn arounds

Bridges- adequate support structure for engine weight

### Building Construction

Roof- asphalt, fiberglass, tile, rock, metal OR wood shake, debris covered, other easily combustible material

Eaves- covered and little overhang OR exposed with large overhang

Other features- exposed wooden structural elements, overhangs slope, attached wood deck, lightweight flammable curtains, large windows facing heat source.

### Defensible Space

100' vegetation max 18" high and 30 foot complete vegetation clearance.

Flammable trees adjacent to structure  
Other combustibles adjacent to structure  
Structure located on narrow ridge, in a chimney, narrow canyon, or mid-slope and defensible space less than 200'

#### Hazardous Materials

Pesticides, herbicides, flammable material or other unknown storage.  
Power lines or transformers near apparatus placement areas  
LPG tanks near apparatus placement areas or structures

#### Available Water

Hydrant or standpipe, water storage tank with valve, swimming pool with access

#### Estimated Resources for Protection Plan

Number and type engines, water tenders, crews, dozers  
Evacuation needs

Also know that if your home meets some of the positive criteria and the next home meets more and there are limited resources (one engine) your home might be passed for the more protectable. Sorry but that's the reality in a large scale event. Remember, in any event, "OUR" fire department is going to respond to the first location and then possibly with sufficient resources fan out. If you are not in the immediate area of the initial call, you might not see fire protection for quite some time, if at all.

For our Firefighters and owners, here is a list to help you stay sharp in any event and if you read between the lines, how to be a better neighbor.

## Operational Leadership Guide

The most essential element of successful wildland firefighting is competent leadership. Leadership means providing purpose, direction and motivation for wildland firefighters working to accomplish difficult tasks under dangerous, stressful circumstances. In confusing and uncertain situations, a good operational leader will:

TAKE CHARGE of assigned resources.  
MOTIVATE firefighters with a "can do safely" attitude.  
DEMONSTRATE INITIATIVE by taking action in the absence of orders.  
COMMUNICATE by giving specific instructions and asking for feedback.  
SUPERVISE at the scene of action.

#### A Good Leader Must:

Be technically and tactically proficient

Take charge when in charge  
Adhere to professional standard operating procedures  
Develop a plan to accomplish given objectives

Be responsible for your actions

Accept responsibility for team performance  
Credit subordinates for good performance  
Take full responsibility for and correct poor performance

Know yourself and seek self improvement

Know the strengths/weaknesses in you character and skill level

- Ask questions of peers and superiors

- Actively listen to feedback from subordinates

- Know your firefighters and look out for their well being

- Put the safety of your subordinates above all other objectives

- Take care of you subordinates physical, mental, and spiritual needs

- Resolve conflicts between individuals on the team

- Set the example

- Share the hazards and hardships with your subordinates

- Don't show discouragement when facing setbacks

- Choose the difficult right over the easy wrong

- Make sound and timely decisions

- Maintain situation awareness in order to anticipate needed actions

- Develop contingencies and consider consequences

- Improvise within the commander's intent to handle a rapidly changing environment

- Keep your firefighters informed

- Provide accurate and timely briefings

- Give the reason for assignments and tasks

- Make yourself available to answer questions at appropriate times

- Ensure the task is understood, supervised and accomplished

- Issue clear instructions

- Observe and assess actions in progress without micromanaging

- Use positive feedback to modify duties, tasks, and assignments when appropriate

- Develop a sense of responsibility in your firefighters

- Clearly state expectations

- Delegate those tasks that you are not required to do personally

- Provide early warning to subordinates of tasks they will be responsible for

- Build the team

- Conduct frequent debriefings with the team to identify lessons learned

- Recognize individual and team accomplishments and reward them appropriately

- Apply disciplinary measures equally

- Employ your team in accordance with its capabilities

- Observe human behavior as well as fire behavior

- Consider team experience, conditioning, fatigue, and injury limitations when accepting assignments

- Consider individual skill levels and developmental needs when assigning tasks

I think all of us can benefit from these two guides and I hope everyone can learn something from this article as well as the archived articles.

Well that's it for me. Marlene and I will see you all on the ranch.

See you soon,

Paul





# Preparedness Corner

May 2004

By Paul Viresik

Hi Neighbors,

Whirlwinds. They come in many forms. Warm air mixing with cool, children causing mayhem, or the stressors of life itself. All dangerous in their own peculiar ways. Throwing caution to the wind so to speak will not make any of them go away, they must be dealt with on their own ground. Ah, those special children...

Someone from the ranch asked me when last I was there about embers and how large and how far they can travel in a fire. Well, let me relate two stories, one written about, the other self awe-ed. The latter, the awe was at my house. We finally moved into our home that has been under construction since October '03 and though the immediate neighborhood is single family homes the surrounding area is still wildland. Whilst giving the lawn a fresh haircut I heard a familiar sound usually only heard in a wildland fire. I turned to see a column of dust at least 300' high whirling towards the homes. Whirlwind, dust devil, tornadee. As it hit, the winds picked up all manner of construction debris: large pieces of plastic, cardboard, paper, and sheet metal. It sucked this stuff high into the funnel and kept it up very high as the whirlwind traveled into the homes. Hitting the homes knocked some of the stuffing out it and it started to deposit through out the neighborhood. A complete washer/dryer box landed on the home across the street from me and scared the bajeebers out of the children. Ah those special children... The light stuff, still large but light, stayed in the cloud of dust as it moved down the street. I lost sight of the cloud two blocks away even with the plastic and paper high in the sky.

The former whirlwind was witnessed by an air tanker on the Cedar fire and has been written about in several reports. While traversing the area after a drop the pilots reported seeing a full 4 x 8 sheet of plywood fully involved at 3000' and 10 miles from the main body of the fire. The last time I lifted a full sheet, it seemed to me to weigh maybe 30 pounds or so. Hot embers, ash, sticks and branches weigh a lot less and can travel much farther on the fire created winds. We had falling embers lighting landscape mulch far from any fire activity. So be aware of the possibilities of fire laden winds depositing burning materials on your home, under the porch, or blown into the eave or gable vents. Most of the homes lost were due to this cause. Proper screening and covers prepared in advance will prohibit this if placed before leaving. It was funny (not ha ha) to see so many evacuated homes whose owners had piled up all their stuff against the buildings so it wouldn't burn or be blown around. Completely the opposite of what should be done. Put it inside or far away, tie it down or put it in the garage.

Being prepared is a broad statement. It is the Boy Scout Motto. I had always thought it was an unattainable goal to be completely prepared, something just slightly out of reach. Until I met one of my neighbors. It is with a heavy heart that I write about the life whirlwinds. We lost a dear friend last month, someone who taught all of us life lessons and was one of the most prepared people I've ever met. He was also a great neighbor.

Everywhere I went with Paul, someone always knew him. He always had a kind word for them, and

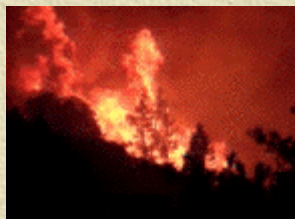
sincerely was interested in their lives. He and Francie have opened their home and volunteered their time for so many people, myself and Marlene included. My first visits to Trinidad were greeted with a smile as he asked why I arrived wearing shorts in 40 degree temps. My answer was that it was hot down in Phoenix. He started teaching me early. Paul taught and advised. He knew when to teach and when to let you learn the lesson yourself as he hovered nearby to straighten you up if you fell. He could fix or build anything and had the tools to loan if you thought you could do it yourself. His garages were filled with preparatory paraphernalia. He was a jack-of-all-trades and master of most, and his tools and property are spread all over this ranch as a testament that this man was prepared.

I have previewed property with Paul and Francie and have seen him pick wild nuts, grasses, and berries on hikes knowing which parts were edible and which not and eating as he walked. His eagle eyes have filled many hands with arrowheads from all over southern Colorado. I have been a passenger in his car and followed behind and watched as he has come to a sudden stop on our roads to retrieve a railroad spike and toss it to the side of the road so someone else's tire would not be punched.

A quite man who shot straight what ever the question. He had strong opinions on subjects because he was prepared and knew his subjects, but was willing to bend to new information. I have personally witnessed him help out a competitor who could not get a load up the hill on a job he lost to the very same person.

Paul was ready for everything, even in the end they were prepared though not wanting the result. I'm not. I'm not ready to let all the lessons I have learned from him just be part of my hard drive. I will always wear my shorts on my way to the ranch just to hear him in the background chide me about my goose bumps. But I did learn to be more prepared and now have the Levis packed on top ready to don as I arrive.

What a whirlwind,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

April 2004

By [Paul Vircsik](#)

Hi Neighbors,

This great nation of ours promises three things to anyone who lives here. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Death and taxes don't count. Death is inevitable and taxes were supposed to be temporary according to one of our past Presidents.

It is the pursuit of happiness that is only promised in the Constitution, happiness itself never was promised. How you pursue that last promise is the focus of this month's column. Whether with passion or pedantically your search for this final, sometimes hard to achieve, quest will affect you and those around you. Ah yes, those around you.

I always teach my new Firefighters to think about what you are doing before you do it. What you do has a reaction up line as well as down line and those reactions have permanent consequences. In a pinion nut shell, what you do affects others. Think before you act.

In our neck of the woods your neighbor may be the noisiest, nosiest, or the quietest you have ever had. That doesn't necessarily mean they are the best. And, that neighbor may be YOU. While questing your quest (yes it is correct) you may put yourself and those around you in danger from chemicals, noise, disease and the elusive dragon; fire. Being a good neighbor as always discussed in our early POA meetings continually had us pointing outward to those around us. But think, if I'm going to truly protect and preserve my relationship with those around me I need to protect and preserve the relationship I have with myself and the house that is around ME.

From walking the property before construction, to building and moving in, safety should be an issue. Out where we live? Safety should be a concern. The Cedar fire of 2004 in Southern California is now 6 months gone. I just sat on a county wide blue ribbon committee of fire, builders, and insurance personnel discussing how to change building codes so that a fire like that never again destroys so many homes. Even after all this time the committee has not come to any final decisions. That was an 800,000 acre 3000 home lost fire. We only have to worry about our 14,000 acres and 200+ homes. No, that's incorrect; we also have to worry about those around us and they should be worrying about their affect on us as well. See how it cycles around?

Reading the Emergency Services Handbook once in awhile is prudent and responsible. Add it to your upcoming spring "time change" duties (detector battery change out, preparation for summer, etc.). I have been watching the weather and notice that the temps are climbing. This would be a good time walk your property for new growth that shouldn't be there. Clear the gutters, check the eaves and eave vents. Did you ever make covers for the attic vents in case of fire? Re-establish a good EDITH plan (Escape Drills In The Home - [click here](#) for a related article) and practice it now that you won't be landing in the snow. I was surprised to only receive ONE response to my request in February's column. Check the pressure on your fire extinguishers. Better yet, go buy a new one and get the family together and practice with the old one. The women's group gave a good class on this. Find where the good stuff is in the house and how you are going

to round it all up in the special boxes you have labeled for the evacuation. Where is the ladder? The hose?

Good habits die young. We learn and retain by repetition. When is the last time you changed a tire? Do you know all the steps? Two nails in one drive. My hand is up. Past columns will help you with many of the details. Life and death, a given. Liberty, we fought and fight for. The Pursuit of happiness is up to you to achieve. Achieve it with regard to those around you and you will help to assure your happiness as well as neighbors.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

March 2004

By *Paul Viresik*

Hi Neighbors,

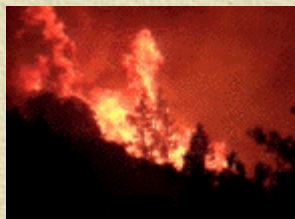
Since Pat is gone for this posting, I have a very short article.

Did you know that you will spend 80% of all the money spent on medical care in the last year of your life.

Insurance carriers love to "not renew" at the end of a year that claims are filed or due to a major disaster in your area ie; fire.

So, try to be fire safe, and be careful out there as we are far from speedy care.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

February 2004

By [Paul Viresik](#)

Hi Neighbors,

Would you rather have a convenient home or a safe home? Such a quandary! Could you not have both or is one the only way to be prepared for anything that comes your way? I don't have that answer but you do. Just how far you wish to push the envelope in the way you live on our ranch is your business. But I know my neighbors and I know that if I were to live too vicariously without regard to my own safety and the safety of others, they would suggest a better route. And if you want to live in an unsafe manner and find yourself in a precarious position, your neighbors would become involved as you scream for help. So, the way you live in our close knit society could really be viewed as everyone's business and the people who suggest otherwise might not be seeing the forest for the trees. I say close knit because living in a forest environment though your neighbors might never exchange a hello, they do watch what is going on around them for self preservation and their own property's protection. In a city, who cares, I'll watch it on the evening news, but out here you do care, you have to. If you disagree, then why are you reading this and how did you get to this web site? So let me review some of the facts of disaster and how you can live in a more prepared state.

The number one location for a house fire is the kitchen. The two top contenders for the cause is "food on the stove" and the toaster. "Martha, did you turn off the burner?" It's not funny but the site of the homeowner arriving back at their house with several pieces of fire apparatus parked in front and lots of men in yellow outfits running around is always the same. (O.O) Leaving your home with the burners or oven left on is just plain stupid. As far as appliances go, if it creates heat to operate, (toaster, curling iron, iron, etc.) unplug them when you are done using them. The electricity is always going down the cord to the device stopped only by the internal switch. Just how good do you think that switch is? Are you ready to bet your home on it? If you must leave all your appliances plugged in, have the plug operated on a wall switch and make sure the plug is GFied (ground fault interrupter).

Having portable extinguishers around the house and garage is a smart thing. Having an E.D.I.T.H. plan (escape drills in the home - [click here](#) for a related article) and practicing it is smarter. How many of you have one? Raise your hands. Better yet, email me if you do and if you practice. Best, email me if you do, practice, and learn from my words. Just a simple Hi, yes, yes, and whatever will do. I'd like to get a count of who I help and who heeds these words written in a drunken stupor. Just kidding. The stupor not the words.

Fire: The rapid oxidation of a fuel with an oxidizing agent with the evolution of heat, light and toxic gases. From rust being the slowest form of burning to an explosion which is the fastest, fire always needs four things to exist; fuel, heat, oxygen, and a chemical reaction. Without the chemical reaction you have the old fire triangle that produces smoldering material. To produce flame you need all four. If you remove ANY of the other three and you CAN NOT have fire. So it is easy to think of ways to extinguish fire and more important how to prevent fire. Take away the fuel, cool it, or smother it.

In the forest and wildland the most common way to extinguish small fires is to remove the heat. Water,

evening temperatures, and snow all slow or stop fire. Large fires which are over a few acres in bad conditions (hot dry windy days) are stopped by removing the fuel. Cutting down trees, brush and raking the ground down to bare earth and waiting until the fire runs out of fuel helps to slow the fire so crews can get in there and mop up the small stuff with tools or water if it is available.

The number one reason fire gets inside a building and the cause for burning homes in any forest/wildland fire is embers getting into the attic. Removal of fuel from around your home is still the best way to keep the fire outside. Preventing the ability for fire to get in is a close second. Screens over eave vents, moving combustible "stuff" (chairs, wood, toys, gas cans, etc) away from the buildings, removing vegetation that is too close to buildings, moving burnables away from the windows inside, etc.

Strong winds always accompany any good fire. Embers will be blown all over the place and from great distances. The main body of the fire could be miles from your home when the embers start falling and the air gets preheated from the wind moving the hot gases. Parts of Dorothy's house will start to burn the wicked witch's hair long before the house falls on her. This is why forest fires can grow so quickly and people die when they think they are safe miles from the fire. Areas preheat and light off long before the body of the fire arrives creating even more danger for the down wind areas because so much is burning at the same time instead of a narrow fire front. Why help the fire by leaving a pathway into your home or having trees and bushes close to your buildings. Not preparing for a fire while living in our forest community is, you guessed it, just plain stupid.

In your home dry chemical extinguishers work well for ABC fires and water works well on type A fires. The types of fire are:

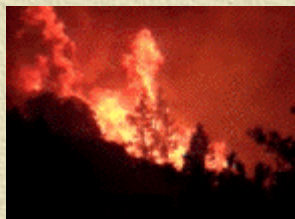
- A. Common combustibles, wood, plastic, paper, etc.
- B. Liquid fuel, gasoline, oil, etc.
- C. Energized electrical, lamps, wires, appliances, etc.
- D. Flammable metals.

Remember that after using a dry chem. Extinguisher, that the method used here is smothering and after the fire is out heat can still remain and fire can re-ignite when all four components re-unite. So cooling should be used or moving the fuel to a safer place. Living safer is the preferred method of prevention. Overloaded electric cords and cords under material cause heat to build. Add the other three and you get fire. Dust in the heater gets heated to the point of ignition. Not having smoke and CO detectors in every bedroom and in the kitchen while living where we do is again just plain stupid. Really look around your home and try to picture what could go wrong. Then make it safer.

Remove the fuel, cool the heat, smother the oxygen, and kill the fire. Remove the ability for fire to exist by preparing for and living smart and you may never be visited by a big red truck. Living safely protects you and your neighbors.

Since most disasters and emergencies occur without warning, next month I will discuss Response Ability or How To Prepare For The Arrival. For the rest of the year I want to hear from you my neighbors on what you think is important or what you would like to see addressed. Email me at [pvircsik@yahoo.com](mailto:pvircsik@yahoo.com)

Paul



# Preparedness Corner

January 2004

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

Hopefully everyone made it through the holidays with more happiness than strife. There were lots of lights on homes this year and the hustle and bustle of shoppers in the stores may mean a better economy is making a move. The Dow hit and stayed at ten thousand too, yippy. I do know of some whose days were not as joyous as they would have wanted and that unfortunately occurs every year to someone somewhere. There is always a fire on Christmas day that causes a family to be without a home and souls that lose their lives to illness or accident. Lets try to think of all of them in our daily lives and not just on Sundays.

This year do something for yourself that will benefit everyone in the home. I have a few ideas. Vials of life. An old idea that still is great for a home. They sell them at Wally World and other drug stores. A simple magnetic box the size of a post card and a half-inch thick, this vial holds all your medical and drug information. Kept current and placed where the emergency medical types will find it (side of the fridge, medicine cabinet, etc) a container of this sort will aid immensely in getting the correct information to the right people when you need them the most. And, and, if you are incapacitated and can't tell them what a special person you are, this will. Spear heading distribution sounds like a great mission for a small organization of loved ones to pick up and run with. Why, they could even work in concert with the fire/ambulance personnel to agree on a central location for placement in the home. And wait, there's more. They could sell them at a nominal fee and make some money for their organization. That in turn would benefit the whole ranch, which benefits...You.

While the sap isn't running is the perfect time to clear unwanted and dangerously placed vegetation. That time would be now. Remember that fire loves to move through areas that touch one another from the ground grasses to the crowns. It's the small stuff that drives the fire. The tall grass, brush and weeds. Clear this from around the trees and in the open areas and fires lose their ability to grow. Make islands of brush if you want to keep the "natural look" but bear in mind that it isn't "natural". Nature's fires remove these fuels and only we stop this process of clearing and thinning. So if we can't burn it, remove it. The animals will also thank you and you'll see more of them.

Also while doing the chain saw dance, clearing your wood, riddle me this. What has a flash point of minus 45 degrees Fahrenheit? Gasoline, right! This is a good thing to consider when its time to re-fuel those power tools with cold shivering paws. It might be cold out there but one splash on the exhaust and you won't be cold no more. Let the tool cool or use a funnel. Fill it away from the house and vegetation. Think, "If this catches fire, what else will". Whilst burning is not the time to wonder what if.

Flashlights are not toys. They are tools to be used only at certain times and for specific purposes. This should be taught to the youngens and when the "emergency lights" are put in there special places they are to be left alone unless a real need arises. I didn't think of this one, it was brought up at a disaster preparedness meeting after a tornado strike.



Now I know I have mentioned the 911 system, how it works and how to check its efficiency on our ranch. Here is some new info. Have you ever thought of what you would say and how you would say it if you needed to make the call? Frantically trying to get across to the person on the other end of the phone just how important what you are saying is and having it come out like a Chaplin movie. Here is a simple way to put it all in an easy package. Who, What, Where. This is the information that most dispatch centers in the nation give when dispatching a call. It is much easier to understand the information given if it is delivered in the manner that is easiest for them. "My name is Paul Vircsik and I want to report a fire in my home at 5834 Timber Ct, Santa Fe Trail Ranch. If they need more, they will ask. "This is Frank and I need an ambulance for a 52 year old unconscious female at exit six". Let them get the proper equipment started with the information you gave them. They can then ask questions and give instructions while units respond. Practice what to say in the same order, over and over. Change the details, practice. Try it when out of breath, practice. If the fire is too big to say more, leave the phone off the hook and get out. With the 911 system, your address should stay on the screen until you hang up. When stopped at a stoplight, look at a building and make something up, practice. "This is John Q Public and there are flames coming from the second floor window of the bank at Main and 1st. This is a technique taught to aspiring fire officers. Practice doing size-ups. Because that is exactly what you are doing when you make a 911 call. Telling a dispatcher who you are, what is going on, and where it is. We also say what the potential is, what we are going to do and what we need. That way the incoming units know what to expect when they arrive. But that's another story. Practice. "I've fallen and I can't get up" really doesn't tell them very much.

Keep safe this winter, and memorize the sound of your boots crunching the snow so you can tell me all about its delectable sound when I visit.

Paul



# Preparedness Corner

December 2003

By [Paul Vircsik](#)

Hi Neighbors,

It is December. More pressing news control the airwaves and newsprint, but some of the old news still goes on. The Santa Fe Trail Ranch fire, I mean the Cedar fire is not yet controlled. It is contained, but not yet out, extinguished, controlled. Hot spots causing flare-ups that then burn an acre or ten occur daily. There are spotters working around the clock who then dispatch units to mop up yet another fire within the total burn area. This will last until mid December. In some areas the residents are still not able to go back to their property due to the fire danger. In any forest/wildland fire pockets of unburned fuel exist because of the topography and weather that is present when a fire passes through an area. They will burn later or be burned to stop the danger of future fire starts. During the fire air quality was 275 microns over the entire county. The healthy limit is around 120 depending on temperature and elevation. In most areas it is back to normal limits unless the winds blow which picks up the light ash and the skies become brown again for the day. Then the process of sweeping and washing is repeated. The pictures are shocking so you probably didn't notice while watching the news and viewing the fire damage on web sites that defensible space wasn't useful. It helped the firefighters protect homes they sat on but in the big picture the fire was too intense and homes were lost that had wonderful clearance. Mother Nature was pissed off that week and we paid dearly. So ends another major fire that could happen any where in the nation as the fire season passes. Or is it really over.

Take a person, any person, filled with dreams for a new home. A loan is secured and a standard insurance policy is purchased. Closing papers are signed until there is no more ink in the pen and the papers are read with glossy eyes. Moving day and the whole encyclopedia of documents is put in a drawer. Does anyone really read them cover to cover and moreover understand everything within? There are than 2000 people looking for that information right now. Looking because it was lost to the fire and they must take the word of the people on the other end of the phone or table as to what their coverage truly covered. After I moved I took some items to an antique store. The owner was on the phone so I waited. She was talking to a fire victim about antiques and insurance companies. Since she didn't have receipts or pictures for the pieces the policy would not cover them for their worth. They became part of the pile that becomes "personal property". They are now covered for whatever the policy says it will pay. Articles in the paper daily report this scene as fire victims tell their tales of loss and reality check. The firefighter that I work with who lost his home got his picture taken in front of his chimney. The house was covered but he had cancelled the personal property part due to cost. He was also selling one of his cars so that was not covered since he no longer drove it. Another victim had just paid off their home and had cancelled all insurance while looking for new coverage due to the policy date and increase in fees. All gone. Hind site is biting a lot of victims over these normal day-to-day decisions.

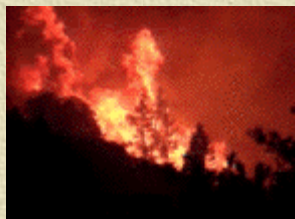
Preparedness also encompasses the record keeping, placement of them and the thought of what if. "What if", the little common sense light bulb that turns on when you think of doing something that maybe should not. Oh, you can what if yourself to death over the most mundane matters and they will rattle around in

your brain at night while trying to get to sleep. Pick your important ones like you pick your battles. For those of us who aren't good at picking the right battles, ask those who are. Don't know if you are a good battle chooser? Look around you at the outcome of your choices. If there is a lot of head shaking or laughter, start asking. The people who can't pick, and don't ask become the neighbors you must watch out for, or watch out for. You pick.

I know this was a "someone else's" fire. I also know that if any major event isn't thought of as a "what if it happened here" event, and it ever does, you could be the one sitting on the other side of the table with the burned out bulb.

I know I say this each month and I truly mean it, even with all the distractions and catastrophes of daily life.  
See you all soon,  
Paul

PS Remember to be careful with your fireplace, candles and heaters this month. Baby its cold outside.



# Preparedness Corner

November 2003

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

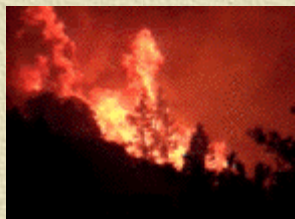
The temps are starting to lower at night and with the occasional rain we could get some ice on the roads. The first snow should be on time, right after Halloween. Colder weather always brings a change of cloths and a change of habits. Here are two for your morning coffee.

The fireplace or wood stove gets used more often now and the smell of burning wood wafts through the air around the ranch. If you have been on the ranch for 5 years or more and have never cleaned the flue of your chimney at least check it. Chimney fires cause higher temperatures than normal to be around the structural members of your home. Why? Because you have a fire where it shouldn't be. What causes this? Burning soft woods and paper. That thick smoke you see coming out where Santa goes in is unburned fuel or in my world a "dirty burn". Soft woods do not generate sufficient heat to totally consume itself and the resulting smoke is filled with unburned particles of said wood. What you want to see coming out of that hole are heat waves. The cleaner the better. Hard woods help and having a catalytic wafer in the flue also helps to burn the residual particles as they pass the super heated screen. Additionally it's a good idea to remove all the summer stuff from around the firebox that accumulated from warm weather decorating. Side note: "I swear if I had the money I would hire someone to decorate for each season and holiday. And then build another garage to hold all the off-season fare." Stacking the wood nearer the house sounds like cheating the wet sock patrol, but only stack a couple of days worth. No use inviting the bugs in and moving the dried flammable forest next to the house during the dry windy days. Remember embers are embers after all.

Arriving with the wet, possibly icy and always muddy, roads are the designer skid patterns. The tell tale extra wide tracks that do not follow the normal rear paws laid down in the front paw tracks means two things. Excessive speed or driving too fast for conditions. I have also heard some of my neighbors say they like to lower their tire pressure during the dry road seasons to absorb the sharpness of the rocks. While this may work for dry roads, doing so in the wet is like wearing tennis shoes and playing ice hockey. You float. Air up those babies to get down into the mud and onto the hard pack for traction. Or stay home toss another log onto the fire, roast a few marshmallows and wait until the roads dry up. In Colorado, oh around noon ought to do it. For my faithful readers this next sentence will sound familiar. When the roads just start getting wet and icy, try out your sea legs. Wait until you are motoring down a nice flat patch with no drop offs on either side and wiggle the wheel. See how it feels to slightly skid. Steer into the skid to control the outofcontrolness (new word). Now try it again. Like I tell my firefighters, practice, practice, practice. Now don't that feel like an E ticket ride. Better to get the feeling now under a controlled environment than to remember the practice word at 40 mph sliding down Cottonwood. Snow banks feel so much better when you are making angels than when becoming one.

So, that's it for this month. For those of you wanting more inspiration, go to the archived articles and read the previous year's columns for this time period. That should saturate your brain cells for a while.

See you all soon, Paul



# Preparedness Corner

October 2003

By [Paul Viresik](#)

Hi Neighbors,

Over the years I have written about fires, fire safety, planning a new home, its placement and just plain how to live safely in a fire rich environment. However, I can't think of any months that have addressed what to do after a fire. Inside or out, any fire can be devastating both physically and mentally. Sometimes more mentally due to the fact that emotions are running so high. Adrenalin supplies are depleted, nothing looks the same as it did before it burned, feelings of incredible sorrow or anger, and the exhaustion that usually sets in. So here are some of the more salient points on the subject.

Preparing for a fire can help relieve some of the anxiety of exactly what was lost. Filming or pictures of the outside and inside including descriptions of what is on the film will document your belongings for future use. Centrally locating items of value and papers that are not on display by coordinates (so many feet from this corner and that corner of the house) will aid in location after a fire. Placing them in a fire resistant container or room will also help their survivability. I have seen a few homes on the ranch that have solid cement walled rooms for mechanical purposes. They might also be looked at for valuable possession storage. These rooms can take a lot of heat and weight should the house come down on top of it. Store the original film in a different location and always have a copy placed elsewhere. Let someone you trust know where you hid it in case you cannot be found. In that location, have contact numbers of places you go or people you might be staying with. If you can't be found or your location verified, searches may be needlessly started for your safety.

Okay, fire's over. First make sure everyone in your party is safe, animals included. Does someone know where you are? Let them know your status, location and plans. Help is going to come at a snails pace in your mind. Take a deep breathe and realize that time is going by slower than you think. Take account of what you have in your possession and make a plan for getting back to normalcy. Plans like this should be thought of ahead of time, its called preparedness. There are web sites that have fire information and after fire information. Check some of them out and use what you feel worthy. Then practice what you've learned to engrain the brain.

Gaining entry to your home after a fire may be delayed in a forest fire because the fire though already passed in intensity may still be active in the area. Letting civilians into that area places fire service personnel at great risk accounting for everyone's whereabouts so it is normally forbidden. Allow for a few days before going back to your property. Being truthful in what you write or say to the authorities will help them determine your trustworthiness. Telling stories that don't add up will banish you from the area, as you will never be believable again. So don't fib about your home, people or pets left behind to get into the area. You could cause numerous resources to be wasted chasing your story when they could be used for other efforts.

Before I go further let me say that you can, and most likely will, be held accountable for what you say and do in a fire situation. You may be billed for resources used on a fire if fault is determined. You can also be billed or arrested for your conduct.

Insurance. Boy, I hate those yearly payments, but after a fire is not the time to realize you are under insured. If you have changed your financial status or placed more kit in your home you might want to review your policy. There is only two times when you become conscious of how much stuff you own. When you move or when it is lost. Make contact early before everyone else does and find out who your contact is, when to expect them (remember a deep breath here as many will need their services) and what they want from you on arrival. Ask before the fire for the company's pamphlet on fire losses.

Luckily we are not in town or a major city with easy access to scanner people. I have witnessed the onslaught of insurance men, repairmen, salvage men, and all the other vultures that descend upon the homeowner in their most delicate time to persuade them to "sign here and we will take care of everything". We try to subtly steer them away and tell them to only talk "their" agent. So beware, they are out there and will show up if they can.

There are many quality companies that can overhaul your home after a fire. Again, call and find some ahead of time so the victim factor doesn't come into play when you need them. A good company will remove the burned products, water and smoke damaged material and make it all better again. Even with a small room and contents fire, these companies can do a good job in a hurry. Just be prepared for the place to look worse before it gets better as they ply their trade.

If you want to help or do it yourself, remember that almost everything that is burned is now toxic. Don the proper precautionary protection, i.e. gloves, mask, snorkel and fins. Okay, only the first two, and use soap when you're done.

Losing ones home and irreplaceable valuables to fire is probably number two on the list of most traumatizing experiences you can ever have. Planning for it ahead of time produces two beneficial items. A list of what you could lose in a disaster and peace of mind by preparing not to lose them.

See you all soon,  
Paul

Ps: Don't forget, this month is time change and that means its time to change the batteries in all your smoke/co detectors!



# Preparedness Corner

September 2003

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

I know this subject has been written about and talked about around many a campfire. While on the ranch in August I noticed several of my neighbors had very recently cut down pine trees and limbs during bug season. Where bugs eat, an ensuing fire will be much more volatile. So I think that this subject should be revisited if only from a fire hazard standpoint. Here is an excerpt from the August California Fire Service magazine. Does it sound familiar? I think it does and in some cases we are doing it to ourselves.

## **Southern California's bark beetle infestation**

Every wildland firefighter knows that standing dead trees will burn hotter, and faster than green ones. Some describe them as "Roman candles" when they catch fire. Fighting fire among thousands of dead trees is extraordinarily dangerous. And that is exactly what firefighters are facing this year in San Diego, San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

Four years of drought have weakened the trees. That left them vulnerable to attack by bark beetles. More than 500,000 acres (we have 14,000) that were once green and beautiful now have standing dead or dying trees everywhere. This drought combined with fire, disease, and man made stress, allow the beetles to kill the tree in a matter of days to weeks. And of course, scattered among those dry trees are hundreds of houses. Combine all of that with narrow, winding roads and thousands of people trying to escape from a wildfire, and you have the nightmare that haunts those who plan fire response in this area.

Mean while, CDF has taken immediate steps to ensure the safety of the public by clearing evacuation routes, establishing fire safe evacuation centers, removing infested trees in the three counties and providing forest stewardship assistance to local communities. The Governor's office is projecting the possibility of 125 million dollars spent in this effort that threatens mountain and rural communities.

These brutal conditions normally last several years and are stopped when the cycle is broken by sufficient moisture, natural predators, sanitation control measures and lesser tree density. These elements all serve to increase the forest's health.

As we all should know from information already published, under normal conditions the beetle population's damage is held in check with healthy trees defending themselves by pushing them out with sap. Cut trees and limbs on the ground can't do this. They only send out scent to the bugs like driving by a good restaurant when they light off the grill. Then we encourage them further by leaving the bleeding wood on the ground. Why not leave out plates, knives and forks. "Oh Garcon, forest for thousands, no waiting." Then next year we wonder why the trees around us look like kindling.

Many of us moved here without the skills to take care of our land. Then we bought chain saws and tractors

and “had at it”. Maybe a better approach would be to learn about the forest we live in, its habits, strengths and weaknesses first. The information is out there, most of it within our web site. Then with that knowledge in hand, go out and hit the hillsides.

If you can't wait because your home and the approach to it are not fire safe, go ahead and cut the oak brush and the weeds. Wait until the freezing temps arrive before touching anything “pine like”. I was told that the cedar is also ok to cut all year, but check with those in the know first. Carol, CK, and the local forestry service are all excellent sources. If there isn't any under story to burn as a fire passes through, you won't have to worry about limbing the trees. Remove the ladder fuels (grass to bush to tree) underneath the trees now and island out around them. But leave the pines alone!!! Wait till winter.

If you have cut your pines, or know a neighbor who has, sign off the pc and pick up the phone. In a polite way, offer to help remove the downed bait. Then follow the recommended methods for protecting your live trees. I cannot express to you how disheartened I feel when I see trees felled this time of year when owners know about the beetles. You can see the dead patches all over the ranch and neighboring developments when owners cut at the wrong time. We do not need the standing kindling that just adds to our already volatile forest conditions. If you aren't preparing your 35 acres for an upcoming fire, and to keep it healthy don't worry. The coming fire will do it for you. And prepare the whole piece, don't stop at just the house. Good forest management is your responsibility because this is private land. Your forest, your fire. Small or huge, you make the decision.

Lastly, if you are, or hear about one of your neighbors, planning to build, talk to them and persuade them to prepare for the pad in the cold months. Contact the Emergency Services Committee or call, write, or email me and talk to us about your location choice so you can understand the possible dangers of where you are building. You can build at anytime, but clear the trees when the bugs aren't driving the bulldozers.

See you all soon,  
Paul





# Preparedness Corner

August 2003

By Paul Viresik

Hi Neighbors,

I am writing this as I try to get on the road for the ranch. This last week has been a hectic one at work and preparing the house for departure. I had something else in mind this month but because of recent events this is more appropriate.

You never really realize how important someone is in your life until they are not there anymore. My last shift on the engine was brutal. Nine calls, all but one a true emergency. And in one day I witnessed two people die due to smoking. One was a CPR call that did not survive though she fought for life for 45 minutes. The other as we delivered him to the hospital. Due to latest "HIPA" laws, I will leave out the details and complications that brought on their last day on earth. They left grieving relatives and huge holes in their families.

If you do it, stop. Don't encourage it. For the younger people, show them what happens when you do.

Someone else in all our lives is going through a rough time right now. My heart goes out to him and his family. He is a tough old bird and I am sure that all of us wish him well. May this be just a bump in a long road still to travel.

CPR, First Aid, First Responder, and other classes are available in every town in America. Everyone should know basic first aid, how to deal with emergency situations and CPR. If you have children... It should be a crime if you don't! One piece of food down the wrong pipe or a fall from a ladder is not worth the final price. Especially living in our rural community.

Learning and practicing the skills from these classes will help you prepare. They will help you identify what is and what isn't a true emergency and how to properly deal with them. Realizing what happens or could happen when illness or trauma occurs might make you change your mind before you perform that unsafe act. At the very least you will know what a dummy you were after you did it.

Stay safe and play smart.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

July 2003

By [Paul Viresik](#)

Hi Neighbors,

I would like to thank my neighbors who have made reference to and thanked me for the Preparedness Column in the recent months. It is nice to know that the message is effective and reaching you. Again, thank you. And if you read the [special edition](#), I hope you practiced.

Now, regarding the season upon us. I have seen notices posted in Arizona (Hi Mom) and in California recommending a 300-foot defensible space. Use at least this much if you are on a slope of 10 degrees or more. As you are well aware the fire conditions are nasty. This is due in from a lack of long slow rain that gets deep into the earth to nourish the brush and trees. The rain we have received is just enough to grow a nice crop of grasses. Now it is dead along with last year's growth. Nice hot flashy fuel that burns like gasoline. True, a 10' long fire front of grass burns as hot as a gallon of gas. Though in a normal rain fall season a 30' clearance is recommended on level ground without a canopy of trees, 100 to 300 is a lot better to keep the radiant and convective heat around your buildings down to a minimum. Oh, you are going to take some heat, but if you follow all the precautions from my previous columns, you stand a better chance of coming home to a place you can still reside.

This does not mean moonscape. Remembering that fire can burn three times through the same forest (duff and surface fuels, brush, crown timber) separate the fuels. Don't allow them to act as a ladder to the next higher fuel. Make islands of trees or brush with enough separation distance so that if one island lights off, its neighbor doesn't. Take into account that a wind will push the flames further and hotter. And there will be wind. If not brought by the weather, the fire will create it. Twenty to sixty miles per hour. Stick your head out the window on the way to Wally World if you have forgotten what sixty miles per hour feels like. Of course a safer way would be to hitch a ride from your friendly biker cruising down the highway. Okay, maybe the car would be safer.

So how much acreage are you willing to lose. Lets try a test. How far can you see into your forest? Do you as well as the animals have difficulty walking into your forest? If you can't walk around your buildings and the immediate forest freely, neither can the Firefighters trying to save your house. But the fire can. In fact, the smoke eaters will probably write off your home and move to one they can save. No firefighter I know would jeopardize themselves or their crew to save a home that puts them in dire trouble when the fire and heat blasts through the brush like a train. Look at this photo. Get real close to the screen. If this is the view from your window, you are going to lose your home. ([Click Here](#) to see photo. Use your browser's **BACK** button to return.)

New subjects. Went to two fires yesterday. How ironic. Both were caused by human error. The first home loss was because a bare light bulb was used in a bedroom closet with clothing within heating distance of the bulb. Left the light on too long, oops, no more home. The second was even more careless. A nice married couple, one of them smoked but was banished to the garage for the nasty habit. We found numerous butts in the debris between all the stored boxes. The spouse wore a very sheepish look when the cause was

discovered. The dog was the hero here. This was an early morning fire and if it weren't for the pooch's barking the fire would have probably been called in by a neighbor. The fire having now burned through the roof. Fatalities would have been for sure in this case.

Lastly, I hate bugs. I use bug bombs. But unlike a recent event in another part of town, I follow the directions on the can. Using too many bombs produce an explosive mist. The result verifies their name, bug "bomb". Explosion followed by fire with the home lifted from its foundation.

In closing this month, please remember that defensible space is not an underarm deodorant slogan, make islands so you can visit the islands, and only bomb the bugs.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

Special Edition

June 20, 2003

By *Paul Vircsik*

Hi Neighbors,

Cause and Affect. A special edition of the "PC" is warranted considering the events happening right now to our neighbors to the south.

Arizona is burning.

For those of you who know residents on the ranch without computers, tell them about this. The national and local news is exploding with the current fire season. Over 250 homes lost in under 1 hour. Sixty mile per hour winds drove the fire across the mountain consuming more than 3200 acres. The area was ripe for the picking due to drought and an infestation of bark consuming beetles.

The area burned was a mountain community with high plains desert on both sides. Hmmmm. The winds are coming. Our area is also ripe for the picking. We are a mountain community. We have high plains on both sides. The fire should be contained in 2-3 weeks. That is a lot of acreage still yet to burn. The cause is still under investigation.

But who cares what the cause is, their homes and landscapes are burning. There is no time to wonder about the cause, it doesn't matter with flames coming your way. People interviewed said a man came to their door, told them to leave and the home owners had maybe 30 minutes to get out, leave. They know that what they will return to is ashes. Homes, memories, dreams, gone.

Now the big question. ARE YOU READY? Have you prepared the outside, inside and personal items for an evacuation? Have you located your vital documents and put them in a ready place? Have you ever been ready? Practiced the evacuation? Put the goods in the car with the pets and left. Even to the end of the driveway? How long will it take to get everything ready that I have harped on everyone for over 5 years now? Have you approached your neighbor for help if the worst happens? Offered any? With all the emergency and fire personnel on the ranch, we should have the greatest percentage of helpers per capita anywhere.

I think now would be a good time to practice. Right now. I will repeat it.

RIGHT NOW! Daddy's day is over, the 4th is next month. Do something this weekend to hopefully save your homestead. It might help slow the fire so my place isn't taken.

Cause and Affect. What you do or don't do affects you and me.

And for you Firefighters out there, an excerpt from a recent article that can be read on [firehouse.com](http://firehouse.com):

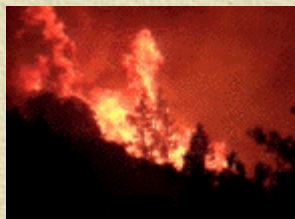
The firefighter passed away Thursday due to severe injuries he suffered while working on a controlled burn on Sawtooth Mountain on May 14.

He was working alone when he was overtaken by flames. The accident is still under investigation, Palmer said. However, "With his passing it may remain a mystery," she said.

Investigators know that he did deploy his fire shelter, but they don't know whether he was able to use it or if the wind and fire blew it away. After the fire burned over him, he walked half a mile to the location where a helicopter picked him up and transported him to the hospital.

How many rules were broken just in this passage? Be careful this year.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

June 2003

By Paul Viresik

Hi Neighbors,

Thunder and lightning. I love it. We even named our property after it, "Thunder Run". At first glance there's nothing all that flashy about lightning. Except blinding light and a kaboom to follow. Who hasn't seen it and on the ranch as it is quite common. But when it strikes, it can rip apart a roof, explode a solid brick wall or start a fire in the forest or your home. Lightning surging through electrical lines can damage or even destroy valuable electronic equipment. More importantly, it can kill you. Even though your chances of being struck are like winning the lotto, it is the second most common weather related cause of death and injury in the United States.

If you are outside when a thunder bumper comes over seek shelter now. Here are some suggestions from the Lightning Protection Institute:

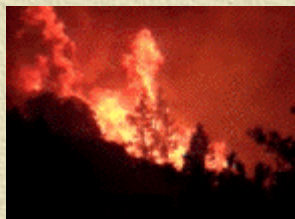
- ✘ Get in a hard topped vehicle
- ✘ Never use a tree as a shelter
- ✘ Avoid high areas and tall objects
- ✘ Keep away from metal objects and don't touch the metal in the vehicle
- ✘ Stay away from bodies of water
- ✘ Spread out-don't stand in a crowd
- ✘ If you feel a tingling sensation, lightning may be about to strike, immediately crouch down, cover your ears, and keep your feet slightly apart
- ✘ Do not lie down or place your hands on the ground
- ✘ Stay indoors away from windows, doors and electrical appliances
- ✘ Unplug the stuff you value as a surge can ruin it even if switched off
- ✘ Do not use the telephone if hard wired, use a cordless

Lighting generates temperatures up to 90,000 degrees Fahrenheit. It can travel as far as 40 miles. The cloud does not have to be overhead for lightning to strike around your position. Lightning often strikes twice in the same place. Twice, thrice, etc. In fact, right before it strikes, everything, you, the grass, trees, put up what is called step leaders of positive energy. If the negative energy in the air picks your step leader, the connection is made and the energy drains from you up into the sky over and over until gone. Sometimes 5 or 6 times. That's why lightning appears to flicker. The noise is the sudden separation and contraction of the air around the strike and the smell, if it isn't you burning up, is nitrous oxide, which then falls to earth in the rain and fertilizes the earth with nitrogen.

Though dangerous, it is beautiful to watch Mother Nature. I will still tempt fate each time the storm approaches, but will stay mindful of what is going on around me and will make a fast dash back inside if the

storm comes close or my hair stands on end. Stupid maybe, but I sure love the stuff.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

May 2003

By [Paul Viresik](#)

Hi Neighbors,

It's 11 pm and our new neighbor is just pulling into the driveway that was recently dug out of the forest. It's dark. Out here on our ranch, dark is reeaaally dark. They make camp and settle in for a long needed night's rest after a thirteen-hour drive from the city. Around two someone needs to use the facilities. What facilities? Sneak out of the camper to visit a tree. Hey, something else is using the facilities. Big, smelly, welcome to the ranch, neighbor. It's just me your friendly bear/skunk/mountain lion/elk/deer. Jeeze, they sure are bigger than the ones in the zoo.

Morning breaks and after coffee, or what ever your poison is to get you going, the contractor arrives to show the stakes marking off their new home. The ones that the dog brought into the camper last night. Good doggy. The dirt becomes a house and the moving truck leaves. You are not in the city any more Dorothy. Keep clicking your heals for cable. The neighbors arrive to welcome you to the ranch and tell you all their secrets and trials and tribulations on mountain life. The phone is hooked up and the information highway is reattached at a slower speed. The learning has begun. We are lucky enough to have many experts within the ranch: in business, construction, fire, health, etc.

This is the story of many new arrivals to our ranch. It is evident from the hand out the driver's window as you pass because they can't find the bridge to the questions at board meetings and forum postings. Life on the ranch is changing and the new arrivals bring new vitality. They are in search of quality information that will assist in their new life style transition. It is up to us as good neighbors to give or guide them to that information.

Fire safety is the noticeably major concern. Search out the [previous columns](#) produced by this author in the same month you are in now from previous years. I have tried to keep them relevant to the season. I try to confirm everything written from fellow experts that realize the need for continued education. Our reward is giving to those who follow. For the old hats, now is the time to prepare for another season of dry. Keep doing the things you have learned and don't do the things that threaten your property. Or the rest of the ranch. Check your defensible space, which encompasses the whole outside of the house, not just clearing vegetation. Read the articles, look on web sites. Like Francie wrote "think of it as spring cleaning". I go to approximately 90 business inspections annually and it is amazing how much owners change their businesses that place them in violation of some safety code. If they would just clean up and not change things. But the same happens with us. The cut wood, winds up next to the building, the brush grows, the new gas grill placed to close, or the brush pile that never gets chipped.

For the new comers, search out the experts in their fields. You wouldn't ask a plumber how to shingle a roof. Try to weed through the half information that always seems to accompany an add, for the "all inclusive gadget", and apply it your need and ability. Remember, you are not in the city any more. 911 services are not 6 minutes away. Plan for the unexpected. That means carry the cordless or cell phone with you when working in the yard. Yelling for help when the tree you felled, "felled" on you, probably won't be



heard. A spark from the mower or chain saw could grow quickly into a major fire in our dry flora. Carrying a bucket of water and throwing the whole thing at once could apply enough fire extinguishment to do the job. If it doesn't, make the call (911 & your area leader) and continue the fight with the shovel you brought with the bucket. Practice, these skills before you need them. If the fire gets too large for your effort, leave. You will not make a difference unless you have the tools, equipment, and know how. Most folks NEVER get to witness a fire growing out of control like it can in our conditions. And believe it or not, cigarettes do not cause as many fires as the press would like you to think. This half-truth is fed to the public because no cause is found and because smoking outside in the forest is not safe, but precise conditions have to exist to light the forest with a smoke. Just practice safety in the forest. Besides it's healthier for your lungs and the smell of the trees is one of the reasons you moved here.

We spend most of the fire season fighting small grass fires (10-20 acres) to prevent them from becoming conflagrations. By "we" I mean the fire department. And then each summer some of us go to the big ones. Please read the archived columns to find out what we look for when picking homes that are "defendable". Don't think that every home is, because when the acreage is burning, we pick the ones where the owners did the work to make it defendable before we got there. This "we" meaning the fire departments that will be arriving from afar. Your local department will only be a small contingent of the massive invasion force hopefully coming to assist and can only go to one area of the fire. Please remember though, with numerous fires, comes stretched resources and an engine in every drive way will not happen. And once we get there, we won't have time to finish applying your protective agents. There is just too much to do with the limited amount of time to defend your home or fight the oncoming fire. Sorry, but that's the brutal truth. We apply our own if we have time. We know what it will do, have trained with it, and can apply it at 100 times the rate you can. Prepare your house completely before and leave when asked by the methods directed. Confused? Read the articles and ask your ESC members for help or direction to the best information.

Remember that in our world fires can strike at anytime, in any weather condition. Most of the real nasties have burned during winter when the weather is surprisingly calm. It's the fuel that is at it's driest and with the dry air can turn a benign fire into a tragedy. Put some wind on it that the fire produces and major fires get named. House fires in the winter pose a greater problem due to access. But wait, so can the summer with the wet roads. 15-ton fire engines do best on pavement, and our ranch doesn't provide that luxury. Starting to get the picture?

Read, no, study so as a new member of the ranch, your stay becomes safe and carefree. Your new home will grow to be the happiest place on earth. That's what you have been saving all the spare doubloons for. Hot dogs and cotton candy will cost extra.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

April 2003

By Paul Viresik

Hi Neighbors,

“FIRE, I MEAN SNOW, GET OUT”. Could you? Can you? “Where did I leave that %\$&\*# shovel”. Well, as we all know and having read Mary Jo’s article, the ranch got dumped on. So the question still holds. Could you get out of your home and get to help in the snow. If not, maybe you should think about how you would (you can use many of the same ideas for other emergencies) and prepare. What would happen if the ESC held a mock evacuation last week? What, you mean evacuate the ranch under snow conditions? But, there’s 6 feet of snow on the ground. Oh, I get it, in case one of those big trucks loses its load on the highway and the poisonous gas cloud comes this way. But in the snow? I just cleaned the car. What about your neighbor’s chimney fire. Zero clearance, installed wrong will take on a whole new meaning. How is that fire engine ever going to get your house? NO engine carries that much hose. Familiarize yourself with all the types of disasters that can occur in your area and develop a plan of action to deal with each type. As you heard the south end got much more snow than the northern end. This time. And be flexible, no plan is set in stone but having the principles down will get you going. You won’t be a deer in the headlights while the predicament dances around you. Oh what a feeling. No, sorry that’s a car commercial. How about, oh what a vision.

Change of subject. Lets talk pets. Love ‘em. Mine is my kidlet. I am going to make damn sure that mine is ready for the worst. When I move onto the ranch, and that will be in the summer of 2000 and not soon enough, I will get a puppy. I will have the new member of my family clipped, dipped and chipped. Yes chipped, or ID tags, tattooed, etc. ‘Cause when the first thunder bumpers of summer come, I don’t want to lose him to an open door. Of course the bears will need to know how to read the tag. I will keep current records of his health, meds, special feeding instructions, and his vet’s name and number in the same place I keep my important stuff. In the files that can be hurriedly moved into the car.

He will get a new carrier/kennel that will become the “toy box”. This will make him familiar with it and like it, so putting him in it when the preverbal pooh hits the fan won’t become \$10,000 on Funniest Home Videos.

A new box of some kind will be reserved for a supply of at least 3 days with:

- ✘ A spare water and food bowl,
- ✘ Water and food (rotate the rations, world war II C rats don’t taste that good),
- ✘ Leash and collar,
- ✘ Animal first aid kit, and know how to use it especially the muzzle, for hurt animals don’t understand “hold still” very well
- ✘ Blanket or towel

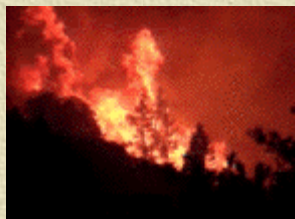
You can purchase a prepared pet emergency kit from CVMA 916-649-0599 in California ([www.cvma.net](http://www.cvma.net))  
But try your local vet. There should be a CVMA for Colorado. You can also call 1-800-655-2862 for

instructions for pet emergencies.

After any disaster my little buddy will not be left outside unattended in unfamiliar territory. Animals freak just like people who don't speak human and can't understand why their world just got turned upside down. Recognizable scents and landmarks may be altered so he could become confused. Especially if the place where he is now is wet. I also won't let him be with other unknown animals that may become territorial for self-preservation due to the disaster. If we find an animal that seems lost, I will let the lost soul come to me, use extreme caution and try to ID. Not the kind, the name and owner. Sheesh. I'll try to protect it in place, isolate it from my guy (injury, disease, freaked), and notify CVMA, a vet, or the proper authority for the area. Most disaster Incident Commands call for some sort of animal rescue unit to handle the evacuation of animals and keep them in a recovery area for the owners to pick up. Don't do nothing. Put your own little buddy in his place and use the golden rule.

If you do lose your pet in a disaster be prepared to show some sort of ID to prove ownership when you go to claim your pet. Those sad little booboo eyes will glare back at you if have to go get the records. When you get them back love them up good because they don't understand why they wound up in the shelter. I will now jump off the soapbox and go play with the cat. She needs me.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

March 2003

By Paul Viresik

Hi Neighbors,

"FIRE, GET OUT". Could you? Can you? Like most of you, I watch the evening news and last night was brought in living color to the largest loss of life due to a fire since Waco. Cause? Many contributing factors, but the two biggest were the flammable ceiling covering lit by the pyrotechnics on stage and everyone trying to get out the same way they went in, the front door. Earlier that week, twenty-one died from being trampled trying to get out of a feared gas attack. Many inside thought they heard someone yelling fire, others heard terrorist attack. Cause? Again many but the two biggest were a security guard who sprayed a fight with pepper spray in an enclosed area and again everyone trying to get out the same way they went in. This time many of the other exit doors were barred, chained, or locked.

So, if there was a fire or any other emergency, could you get out? Or could you get away. Well first of all let me say this as clearly as I can. EVERY EMERGENCY IS DIFFERENT. Different causes, different locations, inside, outside, different conditions, all causing the stuff that is going to hurt you to move and kill differently. It isn't multiplication where anyway, every way,  $2 \times 3 \times 4$  equals 24. If you don't believe me, click on start, programs, accessories, calculator and try it. Go ahead, I'll wait.....

Okay, flame, smoke, heat, and poisonous gases pretty much cover anything that will hurt you in an emergency other than crushing, electrical, and water. Yes I know there are more, but this is only a one-page event. Weather having the largest affect on the prior, with geography and fuel second and third. Think outside the box. A two-story theatre has geography and fuel and weather just like a hillside does in its special way. Yes there are more considerations and I direct you to the fire safety manual that I gave out at a seminar several years ago. If you don't have one, can't find one from your neighbors and I get enough response, it might go back to press. So with all this information, how are you to handle yourself.

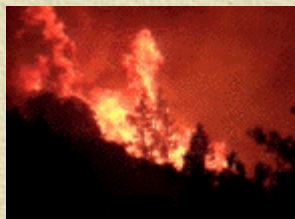
First, education. And I don't mean formal book stuff for everything you do. Come on, use some common sense. The next time you go to a store, look for another exit. Check it out if you have the time. Put the knowledge in the back of your head. Ever been to the dance hall in Trinidad? This should be a yes since a famous dual party was recently held there. How many exits? I stayed near the front, not because of the crowd but that's where the only exit direction was. Close your eyes and tell me how many doors exit from the meeting hall we visit at every annual meeting. See the idea. Have you ever been somewhere and it just doesn't feel right? There may be a reason. LOOK AROUND. It may not be just the doors. Where are the fire extinguishers? Your exit might be created with their use. Practice this kind of safety always.

If you still feel like you're in the dark, ask the people who are trained to respond to emergencies. Ask them what to do and trust what they know. They aren't there for the money, they enjoy what they do and believe me safety comes first. Mr. Murphy will come a callen if that third eye isn't open. Unfortunately the third eye doesn't see everything, because conditions change constantly in emergencies and sometimes they bite. They bite hard.

Inside or outside, the conditions caused by an emergency are not 100% predictable, they are dynamic so plans can only be fundamental. Adaptations to the conditions present and forecasted are put into effect so that the effect is least damaging. To life and property. A quick for instance. A chlorine spill has certain characteristics. Put a burning truck in the mix and the gases produced cannot and I must stress, not, be identified. Fire brings the same problems. Different products combine differently when burned producing who knows what in the smoke. Put a wind on it and it influences a larger area quickly. And to what concentration makes it lethal. I don't know, I'm asking. The authorities on scene might just say close all your windows and stay inside for an hour. Then again they might say leave and follow these directions. You don't have to take my word. Educate yourself. I will warn you though, don't go off half-cocked and do something before you do, you might wind up as one of the statistics. And the smoke in the distance might be the dust of those who did.

Last words, education, prevention, active listening. The answer may be as simple as paying attention.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

February 2003

By [Paul Viresik](#)

Hi Neighbors,

Sweater, check. Heavy coat, check. Earmuffs, check. Gloves, check. All in the closet and ready to go. Waiting. Now in mid winter, I wonder where the snow and the cold are. With temperatures higher than normal and few snowstorms, we again are looking at a long dry summer. Enjoy the winter while it is still here. And while the winter is mild, how about "checking" the gear for the house.

Now is a good time to see if your home is ready for winter, if it ever gets bitter. Inside and out. For example the biggest reason that colds flu spread so easily in the winter is because of the lack of fresh air moving around. So open it up once in a while and clean house. Everyone spring cleans, but why live in a closed up house breathing all the dust and dead bugs that have collected in your HVAC system all summer long. Try doing your spring-cleaning in the fall. If you didn't, try doing it now while the winter is mild.

Performing some routine maintenance and winterizing your home can help protect it and keep your family safe during the winter months. Start with the inside systems and work your way outside. Check your carbon monoxide detector for batteries and proper working order. Yes, smoke detector also. Try all the windows to ensure proper seating and operation. Doors too. There is no use giving all your money to the power company. If we ever get really cold temps, you can crack the cabinet doors under the sinks to allow heated air from the house to keep the pipes warmer. Same for the sink, let em drip a little to keep the flow going if you have problems with freezing pipes. Look at your insulation in the attic and see that it goes all the way to the end of the walls. This is something easily overlooked by the builder and can cause ice dams when too much heat escapes your living space into the attic, melting the snow quicker than normal. This can overwhelm your gutter system causing damage. Clean out the gutters too. It's a yucky job but somebody has to do it. Caulk the places where any water could enter. Make sure the chimney flues are clean and the damper works.

Lets not forget the garage and other outbuildings. We tend not to insulate these as well as the house and if there is water in these buildings, they are more susceptible to freezing. Try looking up also. People tend to look down when walking, driving, or checking for broken items. They are closer and therefore more noticeable. Stand back, look up, and get the big picture on the condition of your home.

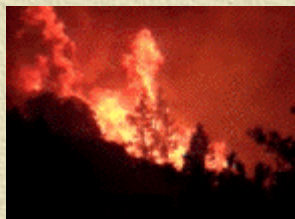
Most of the permanent residents have now been in their homes for almost five years. I am jealous. I would rather be wrapped in a blanket reading this by the fire than writing it from a distant state. Anyway, when was the last time you checked the hoses on the washing machine? Or as some put it, "the warsher". A long, long time ago, I recommended a water pump shut off switch near the door so you didn't come home to find a dry cistern and a soaked home. Bears are not the only things that cause flooding. I was reminded of this because of a flooding call I just went on due to the hot water hose breaking loose. When we got there, the hose was doing the 'water wiggle" dance. The poor homeowner didn't even know how to shut off the water or where the main shut off was. And since I mentioned it, have you ever exercised that valve? An emergency is not the time to find out the main water valve is stuck. Last time I checked, we have pretty hard

water.

Lastly, place the non-skid boots next to the door ready for a quick dash for more wood. Falling on your bum is not fun when it's cold. Just like in a fire, the proper equipment and having that equipment in good working order makes for an easier job. Even if it is working fine, at least you have seen it, worked it and know its condition.

See you all soon,  
Paul

PS: Goodbye to my neighbors leaving for new adventures. Thank you for what you have shared with me. Your friendship will be sorely missed.



# Preparedness Corner

January 2003

By *Paul Vircsik*

Hi Neighbors,

Now that the holiday cheer has leveled off, I wish to impart some words of wisdom. Or to put it another way; since my diet is back to normal after all the huge feasts of turkey, ham, prime rib, cookies, candy and, oh my gosh the chocolate, I have some ideas to help make you a happier, healthier, and more socially responsible ranch dweller.

I remember that not long ago Wally World used to offer dry ice to customers with a long distance destination to protect the ice cream and milk products. I remember the media flooded with human-interest stories regarding the dangers of eating and driving and the lawsuits that followed. Why do fast food restaurants serve such hot food anyway? Because cold coffee and hamburgers don't sell as well. Nor do they slide down the gullet as well as hot does. I think I have found some solutions to the problems that purchases for consumption needs can cause.

I know that as soon as I mentioned the word chocolate, some of you read no further with a full tank of gas. Your eyes glazed over and the rest of this column went blah blah blah.

Well, lets go with the theme. Chocolate is derived from the cacao bean. If you have never been exposed to this bean's elixir you are not alive. I have seen many women crying at the movies holding onto a 1-pound bar and realized that the hunk sitting next to them was not going to be the equal emotional pillar for her. I know this from the same feelings of calm from eating my own bar. Side note: from your earliest days in school a dedicated teach probably tried to give you a fighting chance of surviving in today's world by educating you about food groups and balanced diets. Fruits, veggies, nuts, twigs. You know, Euel Gibbons. Who am I kidding. It is physically and emotionally impossible to get through life without chocolate. Now for the help.

The cacao bean comes from the vegetable family. Sugar is made from either sugar cane or sugar beats. All three plants, all three veggies. Ergo chocolate is a vegetable. I can also prove that it is health food. It contains milk, which is dairy. Cover raisins, cherries which are fruit, with milk and vegetables and you get health food. Your teacher would be proud. This health food is best enjoyed melting in your mouth and not on your hands. Well, not always... Sorry I digressed. If it is melting on your hands while driving there are two problems. One is safety and the other is you are eating too slowly.

More help. I ask this; how do you get large amounts of chocolate home from the store in sweltering heat? The answer is obvious. Eat it before leaving the parking lot. This eliminates the danger of chocolate covered digits, smudged car parts that leave evidence, and unsafe driving conditions. Also the bears won't be able to follow the smell to your house if it never gets there. Now you can leave the windows open for ventilation. Your spouse will think you both insightful and caring for her well being. An added bonus is the extra energy from the mass consumption of sugar. And you will need it to help in completing more projects around the ranch late into the night since due to the caffeine your eyelids will not close. For those who are



retired, you now have the energy to skip the early bird dinners and eat with the rest of us.

You may be asking yourself “Self, what about my well toned body from 30 years of over eating and drinking”. Gather round, I have the answer. Mom always said don’t eat before dinner because you will ruin it. The less the hunger pangs, the less you will eat. The body stays in the shape you left it. But I’m worried about calories. Are you aware that a chocolate covered Dove bar is 300 calories? They come three to a box. If they should make it to the freezer, you failed the parking lot test. But should they and you eat the whole box at one sitting, that’s 900 calories. Bad for the thighs. Now here is the ingenious and somewhat scientific part. Eat one bar, 300 consumed. Place the other two back in the freezer. That’s a negative 600. Subtract the 300 you ate from the 600 you didn’t and you get a negative 300 calories. I have to run for an hour to burn that kind of count. I think I’ll write a book. The shear genius of this philosophy is astounding.

Now for a balanced diet because such negative calorie intake can lead to anorexia. Eat equal parts of white and dark chocolate. This will provide equilibrium so to speak and for politicians, prove that you have the global picture in mind. Chocolate also has many preservatives. Preservatives have long been noted to help you look younger. The people who look old for their age just aren’t eating enough... chocolate.

I eat chocolate daily as it gives me a sense of accomplishment. At the same time I have consumed a day’s worth of calories. I see that as productive and a very good use of time management. This month’s column touched on diet, living with bears, dealing with heat emergencies, driver safety and math. I hope these pearls have helped in some manner to give you a wonderful outlook for the year to come.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

December 2002

By *Paul Vircsik*

Hi Neighbors,

Oh...My...Gosh...is it cold. I heard that I-25 was closed due to ice from the New Mexico border all the way up to Colorado Springs just before Turkey day. That doesn't mean you couldn't get on the highway at our exit and travel illegally. You just couldn't get back on to come home because they lock the exits. So there you are, after spinning and sliding stuck in the barrow ditch, car all covered in snow, trying to pry your white knuckles from the steering wheel. Maybe you enjoyed the E ticket ride, maybe you didn't. I always try a little Mario on a freshly covered snowy road at low speeds before I venture out on the highway for the first time at "high speed cruise" just to try out my sea legs. After my annual EVOC class on the skidpan at work I feel invincible. But let me tell you, once the back end of the car comes around past 15 degrees, it's going all the way and there is no amount of corrective steering that will stop it. At that point it is better to hold on, get off the brake and wait for the spinning to stop. Any gas or brake applying will only add to your fun.

Back to the story... It is still light out, dark would be worse, the car is permanently stuck until help arrives and that could be awhile since no one else is on the road to witness your antics. What do you do? Sounds like a Camel cigarette joke; stuck in the desert where do I spend the night? Under the camel, next to the trees or next to the pyramids? Why, I'd turn the corner and stay at the hotel (which is on the back of the pack). In your case, you would get out your trusty winter kit that was tucked away with love after you read last month's column. Now you get ready to spend the night in your car.

Even if you aren't stuck but traveling and decide that enough is enough and you are unable to continue, outdoor survival needn't be a life threatening situation. A little preparation will help keep you safe and sound. The kit prepared should be with the geographical location you are traveling through. Going through the desert in summer presents a whole different kit list.

In addition to the kit, you should evaluate the effectiveness of the clothing you are wearing. Most people dress for their destination, or in my case, from their departure climate. Shorts and tee shirts must be changed as the outside temp falls or grinning and laughter will ensue on arrival at you friends house. Right Pablo?

Never start your trip without a full tank of fuel, a good battery, proper tires, and an engine in good working order. Getting stuck due to bad equipment is just dumb. And trying to dig yourself out in winter conditions could be fatal. Let the rescuers find you, let them dig.

While sheltering in your vehicle, use your resources sparingly. You don't know how long you will be out there. You will need to keep the inside warm. Your body heat will NOT be sufficient to heat the interior. You will become cold quickly, especially your feet. Put on your extra clothing BEFORE you get cold, cover your head and ears. If more than one body is in the car, cuddling for warmth is a must. 98 degrees plus 98 degrees is 198 degrees. That's hot. If you use the engine's heater to warm the car, make sure the exhaust pipe is clear. Warm bodies that die from carbon monoxide are still dead. Sit with your feet up on the

cushioned seat. It is warmer than a steel floor covered with thin carpet and remember heat rises. In the worst situation, you could rip up the other seat and use the foam for insulation. Use the space blanket around your coat for keeping the heat in. Newspaper is also an excellent heat and wind keeper outer. Just ask the homeless. You can also try to seal off the rear of the car from the front with the space blanket and duct tape. Smaller space to heat, less body heat is lost.

You can run the engine for short periods of time, say 10 minutes each hour to use the heater. Listen to the radio during these periods for information. Ventilate the car by opening the window about ½ inch for fresh air. CO is a deadly killer. This poisonous gas from your exhaust is colorless, odorless, and tasteless. It will sneak up on you without warning. You will go to sleep, maybe with a headache and never wake up. Again, dead is dead.

If you must leave the vehicle, tie the cord to the door and to yourself. In a blizzard, you may only be able to see 12 inches. Once away from the car, you may never find your way back. (Insert laughter here.) It does happen.

Eat and drink water. You will be burning more calories while trying to keep warm. Hey, a new way to lose those extra holiday pounds and inches. Don't drink alcohol (a diuretic; makes you lose water from your cells, affects your judgment) and don't smoke even if you are a 10 packer (it causes reduces blood flow to the skin and extremities which helps frostbite to occur). Don't eat snow, it takes more energy to bring it to a digestible temp than the good it does. Use the warmth of the car to melt and warm it. Start early, it takes time.

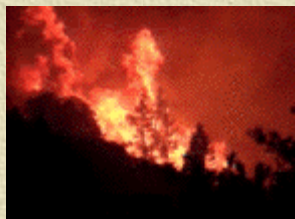
Use your cell phone or CB radio if you have them. Try them occasionally as weather conditions affect their quality. If you reach someone right away, set a time to re-contact them if they will be long in arriving. Better to save the batteries to direct them to you since you are buried in snow than to lose your voice yelling into a dead mic. Tie a colored cloth to the car, tree near you, or whatever to assist the rescuers in finding you.

When you are found, drinking warm liquids is much better than heating the hands and feet to re-warm yourself. Warming the extremities first can be life threatening by diverting the blood to those areas and shunting it to the vital organs that are near the center of your body.

Prepare early and enjoy the winter. You may only need to laugh away the experience of getting stuck with your loved ones. And you will have all ten fingers and toes to re-count the process.

See you all soon,  
Paul

Ps: For those of you under 30, ask your elders about the "E" tickets. And if you find one, they are worth a lot of money.



# Preparedness Corner

November 2002

By [Paul Vircsik](#)

Hi Neighbors,

Just got back from the ranch after the 20-minute meeting and a week of chain saw madness. Getting the place ready for the chipper extravaganza in the spring. I just can't wait for that set of blisters. Hey, what was the white stuff flying around in the wind as I left? My little brother said it might be snow. Naaaa, not before Halloween, that wouldn't be normal. Not that this last year's weather was normal, just look at Walt's stats.

Well, the days get darker earlier now that standard time is back. Did we remember to switch the batteries in all the detectors? Electric? They still have battery back up. Lets have a quick class and question. What is the lowest form of burning? It is probably happening somewhere on your car as we speak. Well, as I write. Rust, that's right rust. By definition fire is the reduction of a substance by rapid oxidation with the evolution of heat, light, and smoke. Rust, if you get close enough does all three. I just don't recommend you get that close. I do recommend though that you address those little rust spots before they become large ones and your car starts to look like it came from New York City.

While on the subject of cars, do you carry a fire extinguisher in your car? You should. With fire service on the back roads and highways up to an hour away it might behoove you to take that step to protect your ride. Or, you could practice sticking out your thumb to beg for the ride you will need standing next to the burned out hulk that a 2A10BC would have protected. And, if you do carry one, every time you change your oil, try to remember to shake that puppy up, back and forth, up and down. Loosen up the powder so it doesn't cake up and become solid. Just air coming out of the nozzle as a result of a caked extinguisher results in the thumb coming out.

Lastly on the subject of cars. If you do have an engine compartment fire, as soon as you come to a stop, pull the hood release even if you do not plan to fight the fire. With the lightweight materials used in the wire and plastic hood release, it could melt through and render it useless. On the engines arrival, a small compartment fire could be a total loss due to access problems. I can't tell you how many car fires I have been too that we spend more time trying to get access to the fire than we do putting it out. We sure have fun bending, tearing, and cutting the metal up though. Thanks for the practice. Firemen do like to ply their trade.

Since the snow hasn't fallen in mass yet, I will wait for next month to talk about sheltering in your vehicle if you get caught in the snow. I found a list of items you might consider getting together for the foul weather to protect yourself and your passengers. Also a web site <http://outdoorsafe.com> that deals with outdoor safety. REI also sells two emergency kits, one with snow in mind;

[www.rei.com/online/store/ProductDisplay?](http://www.rei.com/online/store/ProductDisplay?productId=11374197&storeId=8000&catalogId=40000008000&langId=-1)

[productId=11374197&storeId=8000&catalogId=40000008000&langId=-1](http://www.rei.com/online/store/ProductDisplay?productId=11374197&storeId=8000&catalogId=40000008000&langId=-1) and one without;

[www.rei.com/online/store/ProductDisplay?](http://www.rei.com/online/store/ProductDisplay?productId=11374197&storeId=8000&catalogId=40000008000&langId=-1)

[productId=11374197&storeId=8000&catalogId=40000008000&langId=-1](http://www.rei.com/online/store/ProductDisplay?productId=11374197&storeId=8000&catalogId=40000008000&langId=-1). They also have a list of the "10

Essentials" to have with you when out in the boonies. People who hike and camp and Scouters have heard of this famous must have list. This link; [www.rei.com/rei/learn/detail.jsp?URL=%2Frei%2Flearn%2Fcamp%2Fclessentialsf.jsp&ls=Camping](http://www.rei.com/rei/learn/detail.jsp?URL=%2Frei%2Flearn%2Fcamp%2Fclessentialsf.jsp&ls=Camping) also explains why each of the ten is important. Carry what you want, add anything else you might think of, because what you forget will always be what you need. Just like the left handed adjustable wrench left in the garage while under the sink fixing the faucet. First, get a box, then...

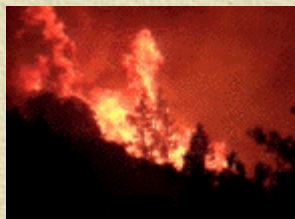
### Emergency Car Equipment

Cell phone w/ charger	4 qt bottles of water	Toilet paper
3 dehydrated meals	Other carb based foods	Space Blankets
Windshield scraper	Wipes	Spare personal medication
Flashlight and spare batteries	Portable radio	Tools (jack, etc.)
Booster cables, tow strap, flares	Folding shovel	Ski goggles and gloves
Chemical hand heater packets	Waterproof and windproof matches	Book to read
Metal cup	25-50 feet nylon cord	Basic first aid kit
Flagging tape	Knife	Whistle
Two empty cans (one for melting snow one for sanitary purposes)	Emergency candles or small stove	

Till the pink tights come out for the Christmas play,  
See you all soon,  
Paul

PS: Yesterday (11-2) we responded to a car accident. While enroute, dispatch upgraded the call to a two-car accident with fire. On arrival one of the cars was actually on fire. This is a very rare occurrence. Both cars were still in gear with the keys in the on position and no brakes set. So, before we could fight the fire I had to safe the cars. Why? Because while on fire the electrical system could short, engage the starter and if left in gear could move the car on its own. Oh boy, chasing a burning car down the street. Dear Chief...

Please, if involved in an accident, put the vehicle in park, set the brake, turn off the ignition and pull the hood release. The final step insures that rescue units can enter the engine compartment to disable the battery, or fight the fire without tearing up the car any more than it is.



# Preparedness Corner

October 2002

By [Paul Vircsik](#)

Hi Neighbors,

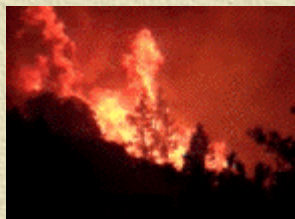
Finally, its nice to have some fall weather. A little rain, lower temps. The little people are coming to visit for the holidays. Halloween on the ranch, the wind blowing, it is dark as pitch at night. Sounds like a howling good time. From reading some of the questions in the web forum, I see many of you are preparing your homes for fires. This is nice to see. I was wondering if you have explained all the preparations to the people who visit or live with you? Is evore one on the sam pag? Dos evoreon understand yur plans? Is this hard to read? I understand it. But I wrote it. Let me explain it to you.

Remember that emergencies are severe situations happening right now that require immediate attention to mitigate or they could worsen. But an emergency could also pass without any attention leaving only minor aftermath. I had a nightmare that all the property owners were running blindly through the woods in their pajamas yelling "Exit two, we must use exit two". Brrr, tooo many cookies before bedtime. This would lead only to a false sense of security. It is not the panacea to every "Lets get in the car and skedadle" issue. The dream not the cookies. Cookies are good. Buttermilk pies are better except I only get them when I visit. What if there wasn't a POA or an emergency services committee to spur debate and provide principle information? What would you do? What WOULD you do?

So I will ask you to ask yourself "What have I done on my own to prepare for any type of emergency." Did you write it down? Have you practiced what you decided to do if? More importantly, did you sit down with your loved ones and explain it to them? Sure, you know what to do, but what if YOU are the one that gets hurt, succumbs to the smoke, panics because it just isn't supposed to be like this. Worse yet, you aren't home when the unforeseen occurs. Only the relatives from Maine out for a week of bear watching. Have them in mind when you plan your Escape Drills In The Home. Remember their unfamiliarity in your home and how certain mechanical gizmos work. You could have a small booklet of information in a place known. "Hey Bob, if anything happens and I'm not around, there is a booklet in the closet, top shelf." And make them a part of the decision process. Sure, you can climb out of the second story window, but can your little ones. Ok, I realize that most residents on the ranch do not have small children anymore... of their own. How about the grand kids? I know it would be a royal pain to sit down with every person that visits your home and go over the "disaster plan for doom". But a little pep talk wouldn't hurt. "Hey Johnny, remember to close your door when you sleep tonight and if anything happens this is how we are going to get out of the house. We will meet you at the ..." Let them have the same sense of security that you have living in your own home.

In my previous years columns around this time of year I have mentioned safety matters that pertain to the season that approaches us. The battery issue, candles, etc. So I encourage you to peruse them and catch up on items forgotten. I do that so I don't repeat myself too many times. Review your E.D.I.T.H. ([click here](#) for a related article) with all the members of your family and extended families. An old adage that will date many of us learned long ago while dressed in green still holds true. Be prepared and ...keep myself physically fit, mentally alert, and morally straight. Eek, I feel so old.

Ce u al sun,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

September 2002

By Paul Viresik

Hi Neighbors,

Here is something to charge your thought process. While watching Marlene shut down her computer I noticed that the little red light under her optical mouse was still lit. I already know that when an electrical item's switch is turned off the electricity is still flowing from the wall to the item through the cord. But the item does not receive juice past the switch. I thought. After further investigation I found that the electricity was actually going through the computer, around the off switch and to the mouse. Huh! This poses yet another conundrum for those of us trying to conserve on utility bills and prevent short circuits should the wires be compromised. Now without an amp meter I can't check how much current is going through the cord but a short's a short. Do I want to flip the switch on the surge protector, or pull the plug from the wall every time I shut down? No, I do not. But I am now aware of the voltage use and although slight, the hazard. How many other electricity robbers are in our homes spinning the meter when in the off position? I am on the hunt. Radios, TV memories for clocks and settings, etc, etc. Then I saw the article in "Colorado" from San Isabel. 5% of your consumption is from these little goblins. Thirty dollars a year average and \$1 billion annually from all consumers. That's a lot of juice!

During a wildland or any fire, more than just the land or property can be effected. Think of all the utilities below and above ground that can be disrupted. Gas, propane, electricity, and water. Electrical wires above ground are my biggest concern. As the lines heat up, they sag, coming closer to the ground and your head. When they break the lines don't always go dead. They short to the ground causing a huge electrical discharge to whatever it sparks to. Pretty but dangerous. Then, a signal is sent to the substation that the electricity is not passing through. The substation does not know why or where, and after a small period of time (set by the utility company) the electricity is automatically turned back on re-energizing the broken line, which again shorts to ground. This process will continue until a real person shuts down the service to that particular pole. Then, electricity will be re-routed from the other direction automatically, which again re-energizes the broken line until a real person shuts down the opposite direction. The moral of the story is do not go near downed power lines. An area of conductivity on the ground as wide as 50 feet can be energized each time the line sparks. The area can be greater if the ground is wet. The fire department knows this and will let the area around the pole burn out and protect or scratch a control line outside the area of conductivity until the wire has been shut off. Each pole has a number stamped on a label nailed to the pole. You can call the utility company and let them know the next pole down's number so they can get started towards the problem area. You also stay safe this way by reporting pole away from the conductivity area.

Also during a fire the smoke can become an electrical hazard. If the fire is burning near the power lines, smoke in and around the wires can build static electricity and spark through the smoke to the ground. Hopefully you are not walking under the wires when this happens. It could definitely cause a bad hair day.

Lastly, as the Missionary Ridge fire raged east of Durango this year an experiment was taking place. Employees of a fire safety company were sent to homes that had known defensible space around them. During the severe fire storms the homes were untouched by the fire even though the surrounding forest



burned. The employees staying at the homes found refuge inside, coming out to remove embers that fell on decks but otherwise there was no damage to the homes. This proves what many preach all the time, that defensible space works.

See you all soon,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

August 2002

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

132 fires were reported today with 30 active large fires currently burning over 597,000 acres throughout the nation.

The Whispering Pines fire headed by Team 7 is burning up the San Diego Julian Mountains. In twenty minutes it grew to 300 acres. The weather is mild but due to the dry fuel conditions it is burning with intensity that hasn't been seen in 30 years. Homes and buildings have been lost because they were not defensible. In one day it is over 10,000 acres and is being slowed down from over 1800 firefighters on the line and more than 20 aircraft. Because of the conditions everything in the state is being thrown at this fire. It has the potential of growing larger than the Laguna fire in 1970. That could all change if other fires start and resources are diverted.

Two months ago I was watching a documentary on the health of our nation's forests on The Learning Channel. I thought now that the current fires around the ranch have gone out it would be a good time to mention some of the more poignant points. To be blunt our forests are not as healthy as they could be and our ranch falls into that category. In 1910 there was a huge fire called the Great fire. Maybe some of you have heard of it. I hadn't. Of all the major fires in the United States, this was one of the largest burning over 3 million acres. Some of the firefighters became famous with this event, one saving his entire crew by keeping them in a cave under gun point until the fire passed for fear that they might bolt and burn. His name was Edward Pulaski and anyone who fights fire knows what a Pulaski tool is. Long story short, after this fire the US government decided to change the rules. The US Forestry Service was born and hence all wild fires were extinguished instead of letting them burn as in the past. Because of this our forests are in the condition they are today. Too many trees per acre, too much ladder fuel and ground litter. This is not new information to most of you.

A healthy forest should have around 40 trees per acre, and the under growth should be cleared. An acre is 208 feet by 208 feet. March that off and count your trees. More than 40? Pretty though isn't it? If a fire comes through with these conditions two things happen. Many of you have already seen it. First the fire can jump from tree to tree much easier and with the help of ladder fuels spreads from ground to crown and back with nothing to stop it. Secondly, under these conditions the fire burns with such intensity that the nutrients in the earth are scorched. Most of our pines count on fire to open the cones and spread their seed. It's kind of like Planned Parenthood. No fire, no kids. But if the parent dies in a fire the youngsters are there to carry on the forest. Not so with extreme heat fires. Since the ground can no longer sustain life the forest floor stays barren until the animals and birds can return the nutrients and that can take a long time.

We still fight fires to control major conflagrations and at times fight fires with fire. The forestry service has controlled burns in the winter to improve the health of the wild land but occasionally one will get away from them and another major fire needs to be put out.

Remember that fire fighting begins in your back yard. Dry brush and hot summer weather. It's a combination that creates frightening conditions on an almost daily basis. But fire-fighting pros want you to

know you shouldn't rely on them alone to protect your home and family. It's critical you do your part by clearing dry brush within 100 feet of your home. We can't protect what we can't get close too.

Also remember that over 800 fires last year had a human cause; cigarette butts carelessly tossed from cars, children playing with matches, or the kind of dangerous outdoor burning of trash or vegetation that still goes on both legally and illegally.

Every one of us must realize we all have a part to play in reducing the chance of more destructive fires here. So clear away dry brush around your home today, then remind the guy next door to do the same. Count your trees, look at the undergrowth and plan for winter. Then it should be safe to start making your part of the ranch safer thus protecting the entire ranch.

See you all soon,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

July 2002

By [Paul Vircsik](#)

Hi Neighbors,

I just returned from our fair ranch accomplishing more than expected. I got to visit with many of you at several meetings and made new friends as well. We missed the fires as rain fell the day before we arrived. The air was only filled with drift smoke on our last day but on the drive back through New Mexico and Arizona, the skies were full of the orangy brown stuff. While here, we saw that the animals were out, the males in velvet if equipped, and none seemed bothered by the events that befell the ranch earlier in June. I have seen forest fires in real life and on television where the animals don't panic and run as long as they can move ahead or to the side at their own pace. All the while still munching on grasses as they go. This brings me to this month's subject, planning with out panic.

There is a sense of panic with some about our ability to get off the ranch during an emergency evacuation. This panic includes exit 2 since it is normally locked and other ways down the "hill". This sense does not need to exist. Mostly due to planning and also due to preparedness. I think I have heard that word before, hmmm.

At the last [Emergency Services meeting](#) we discussed exit 2, other means of egress and I have had discussions with neighbors regarding our southern border. There are plans in place for getting everyone off the ranch during an evacuation. However, here is the rub. You have to follow directions. In the emergency plan, everyone reports to someone. There are systems in place. If the ranch is under attack from fire, flood, or mad cow diseased car jackers, there are procedures that everyone on the ranch should follow. Calling or being called by your area leader, following the directions from the emergency services committee or the Incident Command System in place at the time of the event helps get the information assimilated down to everyone.

Remember, emergencies are dynamic, especially fire. A set plan with no contingencies does not work in dynamic events. That is why on huge fires the entire Incident Action Plan is redone every 12 hours. So, plans change and until the need arises, an open plan is in place. To call on the board and demand a set in stone plan will only cause problems when the fire heads for your departure gate. In a true emergency, evacuating the ranch to the highway may not happen. You may be asked to move to a large meadow, the north or south end, or just be protected in place.

Now for the preparedness part. Yes defensible space works, and yes we have had horrendous winds with the recent fires that makes defensible space less effective. I said less, not useless. It still is better than nothing and less heat that can be taken by structures giving you protection is always better than nothing. Preparing your home and yourself for any eminent disaster and practicing the "preparing to leave part" is important for ingraining information into your noggin. When the time comes to doing, at least you will have a base to work from. That is why they call it planning. It combats panic.

Listen to your area leaders, check with them during surrounding emergencies to remain updated, prepare for the worst, and practice what the people in the know want you to do. Have a safe summer and I will see you in the fall. If you have questions, you know how to reach me.

See you all soon,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

June 2002

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

Although the monsoon season from Mexico is starting and their first hurricane "Alma" is making its way north, we still suffer under a drought. Like you didn't know. Just look across any vista and see the dry fuel or smoke from distant fires. The normal fire patterns that usually start in Florida, work their way across the northern states, then down to our neck of the woods, out to the northwest and finally California have disappeared. They started in Florida and then everywhere else exploded at the same time.

Last month I told you about the extremely low fuel moistures. This causes extreme fire behavior. Flame lengths to 200 feet, with the front of the fire moving at 15 to 30 miles an hour. For us that means more than 35 acres an hour. For this season it is doubly important to prepare the outside and inside for anything coming. Get those flammables away from your home. The USFS is recommending 100 feet of fuel separation or defensible space instead of 30 feet. Know what you are going to take with you in case you need to leave in a hurry and know how you are going to take it. I have spoken many times on this subject so this should not be new. Here is a quick re-cap:

- ✘ Close all windows and open all window coverings
- ✘ Move flammable furniture away from windows
- ✘ Turn on inside and outside lights to aid in finding the home in smoke
- ✘ Cover the vents with your pre-cut plywood panels
- ✘ Point the car facing out, keys ready
- ✘ Valuables/papers to be taken in boxes or in car
- ✘ Animals with leashes on or in car carriers, not running free, you will never catch them when its time
- ✘ Ladder outside and against roof
- ✘ Hose connected to water faucet
- ✘ Leave the doors unlocked (I know, I hate that too)
- ✘ Know two ways to get off the ranch
- ✘ Call someone to tell them you are ready
- ✘ Call them as you leave
- ✘ Know where you are going
- ✘ Wear layered cotton cloths, eye protection, dry bandana over mouth/nose
- ✘ Flashlight with new batteries even in daylight, smoke makes night
- ✘ Drive carefully with your lights on and expect the unexpected, you aren't the only ones leaving

A recent fire in February caused the latest loss of two fire engines due to embers sucked into the engine air filters. Their first clue was the motor died. Then smoke in the cabin. One crew was able to remove the burning filter but the other vehicle was completely destroyed. In either case, the vehicle had to be

abandoned during a firestorm of embers. In one case, there were no trees around, just the wind blowing the embers from the fire across the fields and roads. Being outside during a firestorm with blowing embers is dangerous and without the protective clothing, these guys would have perished while attempting to get into other vehicles.

Be ready for your own car to quit. Stay in the car where the air is clean. The storm should not last very long and inside is better than out. If the car starts to burn and you can't stand it, then look for a place to go, leave, stay together and keep your eyes and air passages covered. The blanket you keep in the car will help. Soak it with the gallon of water you always carry. Cell phones don't work very well in smoke but try it anyway. Know where you are at all times while you drive out so you can tell someone where you are.

All my neighbors have been wonderful preparing their properties for fire and in doing so may never see it at their homes. I have seen this as I drive the ranch and it makes for a healthier forest. Being ready is always better than being burnt. Be careful this season.

See you all in June,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

May 2002

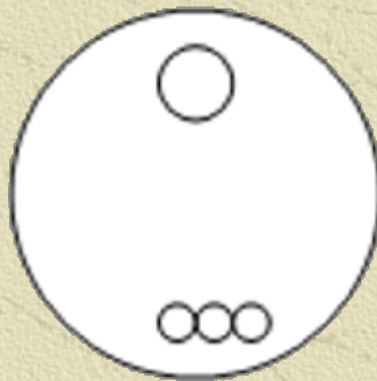
By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

That crackling you here isn't static from the phone or the TV. It's the dry vegetation. Fire season is here and here early. Witnessed by watching the news throughout the Colorado/New Mexico region. I know that California is 1000 miles away but our local USFS says that the fuel moisture in all of our brush is the lowest he has seen in his career. For us on the ranch, it is not going to get any better until the rains come and with the rain comes lightning. Oh boy.

During the spring, yard work is the dirty word as the weather warms and the whine of chain saws and mowers can be heard all over the ranch. This year it is doubly important to mind what you are doing with power tools and take the precautions recommended by the US Forestry for spot fires while sawyering. A bucket of water, shovel and phone are the gospel according to USFS and anyone scoffing at any of the three shouldn't be running the saw. Mowing the brush now is also a reason to have the three out there next to the work. With all the rocks on the ranch, sparks from the mower blade, or sparks from any power tool into our brush can quickly result in a major blaze. Sure, laugh, but every year in the same canyon my fire department responds to a brush fire started by a mower contacting a rock and the operator never sees it until minutes later. Every year and the lesson is never learned. Every year. I can see the hillside in my mind and I know we will be there this year too.

Now how to use the tools. The shovel is for tamping out and throwing dirt. Dig a small pile before you start work because I know how hard our dirt is to dig in. If you need instruction, ask one of our fire personnel. The phone is for 911. Check it to make sure you can get out where you are working or find a place that can and make a mental note. Call and get the help responding. Now the water bucket. We have practiced with this. Get a bucket with a lid. A 5 gal dry wall mud bucket works great and I think there are a few contractors on the ranch with supply or buy one. Drill about 4 to 6- 1/2 inch holes in one side of the lid grouped together and one 2-inch hole on the other side. The 2" hole is for filing and the others are for pouring out like a heavy sprinkler. In addition, you can add a quick squirt of dish soap into the water as a surfactant to help soak into the burning material better.



This diagram should help in fabrication. You want the water to be a heavy shower, not just pour out, as this will waste valuable water. Throw the dirt, use the water, and make the call. This will help prevent a small fire from devastating our ranch.



For the firefighters, its time to make sure your gear is ready, your tools are sharp and you are in good shape. Start training again, aerobically and procedurally. Also, help your neighbor when you see things that are not fire safe. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. Is your personnel protection equipment ready; rips, tears, dirty, does it fit.
2. Boots; leather in good shape, mink oiled, laces ready.
3. Goggles; got some, fit right.
4. Shrouds; for your helmet, does it fit, clean.
5. Bandana; clean, used dry not wet.
6. Fire shelter; no cracks, practised at deploying, do not leave without it.
7. Web gear; buckles and straps in good working order and adjusted.
8. Water; canteens cleaned out, fresh water in. (The hillside is not the place for bad water if you get my drift).
9. Radios; got em, good, check the batteries, spares, radio freqs.
10. Headlamps; bulbs, batteries, spares.
11. Tools; clean, sharp.
12. Pace yourself; don't race the person next you, know your limitations.
13. First aid kit; know what you need.
14. Food; take enough for 12 hours, aspirin, prescription drugs too.

Be careful this spring and I'll see you all soon,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

April 2002

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

First, let me say, congratulations to our fire department and especially to my firefighter neighbors who live on the ranch. No fatalities or injuries and the fire went out like it's supposed to do. Well done!

I realize how cold it is on the ranch, but fire danger is still, ever present. With the cold comes fire inside homes, recreational and occasionally accidental. I know everyone checks the fire place flue before lighting, the chimney for buildup before each season, and the furnace for lint and proper flame production. But do you check them mid-season? We burn all winter and just like a car, they need to be checked as you use it. Cold also breeds complacency because it is "just so cold". Check your flame and heat producing fixtures anyway and make sure that the area around each fixture is clear of debris from any cloth, paper, or burnable material. If it can burn, move it away. I will tell you what I tell every one about defensible space. Stand in front of the fireplace until you have to move out of the way or burn. Objects can't move as you just did so move what cannot move on it's own.

This is different



From this



Preparing for and fighting both should always be on our minds as residents of this ranch. While living with the ever-present danger of the latter, you should be thinking about the former, for that season is quickly coming upon us. Training for either is different and both should be trained for, from a firefighter's standpoint as well as a resident's. Look at the time line Mary Jo displays before each paragraph. How much

property do you think was consumed by fire from detection until the units arrived? How much time until Mike and Mary Jo got down to the gate? Add it up and you will understand what I have been preaching for years about response times. ([Click Here](#) to read Mary Jo's article.)

For defensible space outside, now is the time while the sap is still quiet, for limbing and clearing dead vegetation from around the house. Defensible space changes over the year with new growth and the amount of space you need should be checked each year. Clearing the growth now is also easier because you can see the individual plants so clumping and clearing can be established. Moreover, no snakes, bugs, or hot sun to hamper your progress.

Lastly, remember what she said. We are your fire department. Remember us. We remember you.

See you all soon,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

March 2002

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

Sorry, no fire stuff this month. However, I do have a couple of items to pass along. Anybody who has recently renewed his or her driver's license might have noticed the change in the recommended hand placement on the steering wheel. The new thinking is 3 and 9 o'clock on the wheel. Why the change from the old 10 and 2 and who cares? I asked someone and this is what I was told. One of the reasons and the best one I can come up with are air bags. If you hit or are hit in the front of your car causing a rapid deceleration of forward movement, or while stationary and struck from the front, a sensor detects this and BAM, out comes the big pillow at over 200 miles per hour to gently slow your head and upper torso from becoming part of the car. Then the bag deflates (almost as instantly as it inflated) and voila, hopefully no injuries. Now if one of your hands was near the twelve o'clock position, which is one of my favorites due to comfort, imagine the same scenario. Impact, sensor detection, air bag starting to deploy pushing your hand and arm in front of it with incredible speed, and BAM, this time you win the boxing match. You have just knocked yourself out with your own hand. As stupid as it sounds, I have seen it happen and the bloody face isn't very pretty. I think of this often as I drive trusting that I am at 3 and 9 just before impact.

One more. A friend from work recently returned from his property in Oregon. While there, he did some earthwork with his tractor. Then he drove the tractor to a friend's to hose off the mud from the tires that was slowing progress. When he returned and went back to work he instantly became stuck. Down into the mud, up to the axles. Any ideas? Well when he left the site he took the tractor out of 4 wheel drive and unlocked the anti slip rear end. Then he forgot to engage it before going back to work. After two hours of digging and preparing, out came the tractor under its own power. Remember this story while driving around this spring. When you return from town and cross the bridge put your vehicle in the right mode to get back to your property.

See you all soon,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

February, 2002

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

Many of the themes for this column come from real events that I have witnessed or read. I feel, as a good neighbor, some should be shared. Hopefully you will learn and grow from them. Sometimes the event that spurs this information is tragic, but if you look around our neighborhood, most of the information meant for assistance in our daily lives is because of an unfortunate incident. Stop signs, speed limits, stop lights, "check before opening", and "follow directions". Think about these, and why they are in place, and I am sure you will be able to come up with many more. This month's article is just that, tragic, and avoidable. Happy new Year.

At 9pm a woman picks up the phone in the home she has lived in for 30 years and dials the seven digit emergency number for the fire department that is on the refrigerator because she is having trouble breathing. The dispatcher had to ask her address because she dialed the seven-digit number instead of 911 which has automatic address display. She is confused due to her panic but manages to get the number and street correct. Three minutes have passed. The first arriving fire engine finds the street and the house number on a mailbox, which is with several others at a convenient place for the postman. While looking for the driveway, the ambulance arrives and both are now searching. Ten minutes. The driveways are long and most have name signs but not addressed. They ask at one residence and are directed to the correct house. Lucky they were home. The engine and ambulance proceed but must stop due to the trees that have canopied the driveway and now must walk. Fifteen minutes. The door is locked so entry is made and the woman is found on the floor, unconscious, pulseless and apneic. CPR and drug therapy is administered. She died.

Moral? Following current proven methods will prevent numerous little developments that can lead to tragic, avoidable conclusions. Question: Does 911 have your address stored? Is your address number on the driveway leading to your home? Can a large wide long and tall vehicle make it all the way to your door? Will you turn on some lights, unlock the door and if possible leave it open? Are your loved pets in a secure room so emergency personnel are not threatened or the animals traumatized and run away? It happens a lot. If any of these questions are no, I suggest making changes for you and your family.

See you all soon,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

January 1, 2002

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

Ahh, December on the ranch, snow falling, wood burning in the fire place, getting up at 4 a.m. to reload the wood stove and freezing my rear end off going outside to get more wood because pine burns so fast. Clean fresh air and nice people even in the winter. We had a great time saw some friends we hadn't seen in a while. You who live on the ranch are indeed lucky. We also discovered what happens when it is 25 outside and 75 inside. Does anyone know where we can buy those pretty window sill thingies that absorb moisture formed by condensation? I also have to purchase a small metal trashcan for the fire place ashes. I have seen too many house fires from ashes, thought to be cold the next day, tossed into a plastic trash can in the garage. Later that day those ashes now toasty warm in their trash covered blanket re-ignite and the new fire not discovered until the whole garage is going. I'm not going down that road.

The un-high light of the trip was driving over Gallup's black ice on the way home. You have not lived until you see the snow blow across asphalt like ball bearings and then watch the vehicle in front of you, for no reason at all, go sideways and head for the borrow ditch. That will make you reach for the 4-wheel drive switch in a hurry. "Coast, coast, no brake, release the death grip on the steering wheel, wipe the sweat off the brow even though its 17 degrees outside, and un-pucker the factor". Why doesn't the new car manual have this chapter in it?

After arriving home, I remembered an old method to light a fire while investigating a fire in a laundry room. Lint. Better than paper and lighter to pack if camping. However, lint accumulation under a dryer can sometimes lead to fires where you don't want them. Ever open the door at the bottom of your gas dryer and watch the flame production? Wow and when you think that it isn't in a protected environment. All those little dust bunnies adding up over time and with a little draft of wind to move them around just right... when that burner kicks in the first time... well you get the picture. Brrrr, standing outside warming yourself over a burned up laundry room is just not the same as a fireplace. Try some to light your next fire. It lights easier and burns long enough to catch the kindling. Collect it from under the dryer first. That way you won't have two fires burning at the same time and I will have a place to dry my gloves and coat when I come to visit.

Happy new Year.

See you all soon,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

December 2001

By *Paul Vircsik*

Hi Neighbors,

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house,  
Not a creature was stirring not even a field mouse.

Lights were hung by the chimney with care,  
Santa was careful when stapling so the wires weren't bare.

The candles were out their wicks nice and cold,  
For a fire while sleeping ruins more than a household.

New batteries in the detectors one for CO and one for smoke,  
These will wake you to get out instead of one last choke.

Puppies and kittens all snug and inside,  
A warm wet day, frozen nights turns pets to carbide.

The air was foggy the roads slick with ice,  
An extra blanket in the car for break downs now that is just nice.

Snow bunnies working outside gathering wood,  
All layered with clothing for warm bodies are good.

This year has come and gone the sun sets now at noon,  
Have and wonderful holiday and like I always say, see you all soon.

Paul

# Preparedness Corner

November 2001

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

Just a few quick items this month since most of our minds are on either Thanksgiving or NYC. And let's face it the World Series or football is better than reading this stuff though not as helpful.

Say you are alone in your home and you fall ill. You can't get yourself to the docs but you can call 911. When help arrives, your mental or physical condition now prevents you from talking to the responders. How will they know your history, name, medications, allergies to meds, etc? Simple, they go to your refrigerator, look on the front or side and there is your medical box. You know the little white plastic 3x5x1/2" high container with the magnet on the back. The one you can get at the pharmacy or senior center. It has a preprinted form with room for extra information. How do I know? As a Captain, if we have a patient that can not for any reason converse with us, it is the first thing I look for before rummaging through the rest of the house for info, and that takes valuable time. My medic cannot treat for what he does not know about. There is a big difference between heart, overdose or head injury. Besides, how far is your closest neighbor and would they know the information anyway.

Now you are upstairs and a fire starts down stairs blocking your exit down and out. Another simple scenario. Open the closet; take out the roll up ladder you purchased at Wally World and out the window you go. If no ladder, get the fire extinguisher that is on the second floor and fight your way down the stairs with it and put the fire out.

However, before you do that, think about this. At a recent Chief's drill, a prop had been made to prove a point about investigation. The prop was an 8' x 8' x 8' high room, two-by-four construction with drywall but one wall removed so we could watch. Just a couch and a chair, carpet on the floor and a small waste can. One piece of newspaper in the can and when lit the fire spread quickly to the couch and even with one wall gone, the whole room was fully involved with flame in just 5 minutes. Maybe an extra smoke detector and the ladder is a better idea than fighting the fire.

So, a little information box, an extra fire extinguisher on every level, an escape drill for the entire house and a roll up ladder. Good start for an early Christmas present for you and the loved ones.

Have a safe season and see you all soon,

Paul



# Preparedness Corner

October 2001

By Paul Vircsik

Hi Neighbors,

It is wonderful to see this nation responding in such a kind way toward one another. The outpouring of monies and heartfelt thanks to the people who gave their lives to help others in this tragedy is tremendous. Let us not forget those who also died while trying to escape, in the air or on the ground. They should equally be on our minds. Many dinner table discussions in station houses and homes around the nation have taken place regarding this topic.

It is also wonderful to see this nation responding in a neighborly fashion toward one another. People, who would normally never speak to each other, speak. People, who would normally turn a blind eye to a person in need, turn. This is a good time to renew friendships and acquaintances in our neighborhood as well. The weather is turning and it would be good to know who your neighbors are and how to contact them in an emergency, any emergency. Remember, we are not that far from Colorado Springs and its installations.

As the weather turns colder the windows get shut and the fireplace now becomes the focal point of our evenings, take the precautions to ensure a safe winter. Check that the flue is open and clean. Check with a local chimney sweep for the number of fires between cleaning per your wood that is burned. I certainly don't know. Chimney fires burn hotter than a normal fire and are a bear to detect. Due to the close proximity of the walls and roof members, conductive heat is an issue with these fires. There are chemical extinguishers specifically designed for this type of fire. Don't burn a lot of paper or light combustibles as these also produce a higher heat. That thin wall tubing though triple walled is not designed to take these temperatures or extended periods. Candles once again come out and seasonal decorations placed near them should be taken into consideration. Enjoy this grand season but do so with safety in mind. Just like with Wildland firefighting, there are rules to follow that came about due to a death. They are constantly broken, but broken with the safety factors in place. Check your roof and gutters for leaves and needles. The cold dry wind that blows until the arrival of snow will drive embers, from a late season fire, miles from their origin. Besides its good to get the nose red while inspecting the roof. It makes you look festive.

Lastly, renew your driving skills as the roads get slippery. Practicing how to get out of a skid when you are heading towards the cliff is not a timely training session. Almost forgot, the end of the month brings out the tricksters and treaters. The day before this is "turn back the clock day" and you all remember what also is done this day, right. Good for you, stop by Wally World and pick up new batteries for the smoke detectors.

See you all soon,

Paul

# Preparedness Corner

September 2001

*By Paul Vircsik*

Hi Neighbors,

I had a great column for you regarding change and our rebellion against it, but then I received the August issue of "Colorado" from San Isabel Electric and well, it will have to wait for another time. The article title is "Surviving to fight another day". I recommend it for everyone.

Right now, I am listening to KSPK on the web instead of turning on the local stations, good game tonight. I did not know that we live in a "Red Zone", did you? Ooooh sounds scary. From Trinidad to Fort Collins, all along the front range, 5,263 square miles. Guess you will have to ask one of your volunteer firefighter neighbors what that means. Get involved, find out and someone let me know please. It is a good article about much of what you should already know about the state of our forest and how Mother Nature doesn't get a chance to naturally comb herself out by fire. That is due to you and me moving into the area and because of fire suppression policies.

I remember what the ranch used to look like when I first bought six years ago. Fallen trees along the roads, freshly cut and old dead ones. Owners having open campfires with not a care in the world for what would happen if. Trash from non-caring contractors and crappy (sorry, my french) roads. No water, no phone, and NO fire protection.

Well, the trees are mostly gone, open camp fires are a thing of the past (if you know what's good for you or unless you have oodles of cash to pay for the out come), and the trash and roads are kept after. People on the ranch are trying to adapt to the country life, just look around. Read the articles on the web site, look around you when you go to town, go to the functions of the POA. A lot of my neighbors have joined the Fisher Peak Fire Department and most everyone on the ranch now realizes the time delay factor of responding help if they didn't already know. Having these folks on the ranch is a very instructional asset indeed. I have witnessed the shift myself. Now instead of what is fire, I am asked about fire protection systems that the asker knows a lot about.

Change. Change is good...sometimes. People instinctively dislike change. So far, our changes have been good. Now we have thistle. I am sure that will be gone soon too. Keep up the good work...and the change.

See you all soon,

Paul

# Preparedness Corner

## August 2001

*By Paul Vircsik*

Hi Neighbors,

For August, I have only these words. Watch the news and heed the warnings. Every year fire season comes and goes in the same pattern. It starts in the southeast, works its way northwest and then south through California. Every year, same pattern. It is our time in August. Check your EDITH plans (Escape Drills In The Home, [click here](#) for a related article) , your property for defensible space, and keep an eye out.

I will be on the ranch from August 8th through the 15th. Take advantage of my time.

See you all soon,

Paul



# Preparedness Corner

## July 2001

*By Paul Vircsik*

Hello Neighbors,

Nothing is as strong as a volunteer's heart. Fire season is here and I know fires have been fought. Your homes and property has been guarded and at times defended. You may not have seen them performing this voluntary duty often times thankless, but always with a passion to protect. Nothing is as strong as a volunteer's heart.

To my fellow Firefighters. Be careful in your endeavor. If the 10 and 18 are too hard to remember out on the fire line use this: LCES.

Lookouts, always have them to watch where it is and where it's going.

Communications, within your group, with command, with someone who knows where the fire is and what it is doing.

Escape routes, everyone and I mean everyone knows where they are and plan for them.

Safety zones, where they are along the way and how to get there. Timber fires are extremely hard to be careful in once you leave the road.

Stay out of chimneys and saddles and don't park on inside curves. Remember LCES and watch out for each other. Don't get offended if your fellow firefighter asks if you are OK.

Wish I could be there with all of you,

Paul



# Preparedness Corner

## June 2001

*By Paul Vircsik*

Hi neighbors,

I know that this column is mostly for fire safety. I know that most of the property owners may never see it. I know that not all the ranch residents read it. I also know from experience that those who do may not agree nor follow what is advised. What I do know is that all the information offered is valid, reliable and saves lives and property. Including not necessarily the ones who practice it. Maybe your neighbor benefits from what you do or don't do. I also know that my station in life is to bring knowledge to you, my neighbors, to provide a safer environment for you and me.

I just received a flyer about our 25-mph speed limit. It got me thinking. I know, dangerous encounter. Let me present some facts to hopefully make you realize that anything faster really is counter productive to your existence.

My little place in the world is 6.25 miles from the bridge. From Currant Ct., off of Owen Baldwin Prkwy. either route I take "off the hill", Cottonwood or Gallinas, it takes 15 minutes at our suggested speed limit. I say suggested because this is private property and we do not enlist cops to enforce our bylaws.

Doing some math, I came up with the following:

25-mph 15 minutes

35-mph 11 minutes

40-mph 9.5 minutes

Hmmm a 5 1/2-minute difference. Probably shorter than the time it took to read this article. 40-mph is a teeth jolter, I know, I tried it once.

Further more, as you are by now well aware, emergency services are not as timely as living in a city. Consider that while waiting for the rescue/ambulance unit. That's if someone found you. When fire strikes you can remove yourself and only "things" are destroyed. Can you honestly say that when you have a wreck or cause someone else to? Can you? Did your blatant disregard to drive faster than our roads can accommodate cause your neighbor to unavoidably have an accident. Forget about the roads, how much extra wear and tear are you causing to your own vehicle?

One more thought. I know that in the great state of Colorado, if you destroy public highway property, you're liable, you pay. If you are the cause of someone else's accident, you are liable, you pay. Does it really have to get to that point at Sante Fe Trail Ranch? See you all soon...or maybe not.

Paul

# Preparedness Corner

## May 2001

*By Paul Vircsik*

Hi neighbors,

Missed you last month, as I usually make a trek each April to start the season of relaxation on the ranch. Of course the visits are always filled with pounding nails, pulling weeds, killing bugs and oh yeah, enjoying the property. But as most of you are aware, I moved and the pc was on the qt, so to speak.

Ok, now that I have your attention, I wanted to talk about communication. Once again, a recent fire call spawns a thought. We responded to a fire in my immediate area and was given only the address. No cross street, no map number, no area. When I asked our dispatch if there was any other info, I was informed that the address did not show in there data banks. Well we found it, just had to follow the smoke, but it took much longer than I would have liked and the fire did considerably more damage than had we arrived in due time.

New address, in a new development, not on the map, not in dispatches files. Sound familiar? Lucky for them, our state has the 911 phone number recognition system. The next day, we went back to gather the new addresses (132) and drew them into our map and forwarded the info to the appropriate agencies. Also lucky for them, the first crew on scene was the regular duty crew, knew the area and could direct the remaining response in to the development.

Are you that lucky? Have you done everything within your power to let the proper agencies know the who's and what's? Remember, your local fire department is volunteer, so they won't be out the next day to put you into their system. Here's a short list:

**1. Ensure the 911 system has:**

Your address

Your Name

Where the access is, and on what road.

**2. Your sector leader**

Same as No. 1

Visiting dates if non resident

Vacation dates if leaving and a resident

**3. Your neighbor**

Hey, I'm not a burglar

Hey, that's only my fireplace

I'm going away for a while

**4. Your friend**

Same as above

I know that we moved out here to get away from pesky intrusions from those around us in the city. But I have noticed a strong bond that we have with our ranch friends. So these steps shouldn't bother even the most stoic hermit. Maybe it's because we have so much space and not so protective of it like in the cities. I

think, no I know that these little measures will protect you from miss information, and misfortune.

See you all soon,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

## February 2001

*By Paul Vircsik*

Hi neighbors,

Brrrrr it's cold. Time to snuggle in front of the fireplace with all the wood you cut during the Ips beetle season. With the house shut up tight and the furnace and fireplace going, its time to think about family safety and I mean the whole family, pets included.

Since family safety is most important, an evacuation plan should be the top priority of any disaster-preparedness plan, whether for fire, flood, or earthquake (yep, Colorado gets lots of them). Design a family plan or EDITH (escape drills in the home) and go over it at the dinner table with everyone. If the unthinkable happens, how do we get out of here and how do we get in touch again if we're separated? Where do we meet?

Sketch the floor plan of your home, including windows, doors and stairways and make sure every family member is familiar with the layout. Design two escape routes for each room, and designate a meeting place outside for everyone to gather. Then practice the drill during the day AND during the night. Now's a good time to think about hiding a key to the house and the car outside. Wouldn't want to get stuck out there without a way back in.

Next come the pets and other animals. They should be included in your plan! Here are some recommendations from the American Humane Association.

- ✘ Make sure pets have collars and tags so they can be identified if separated during or after an emergency.
- ✘ Know your pets' favorite hiding and sleeping places. They are likely to hide there when frightened.
- ✘ Have animals that have survived a fire or flood checked immediately by your vet. Animals can be severely affected, more so than us.
- ✘ Create an emergency kit for them with leashes, food, a pillowcase for carrying cats (claws) and vet records. It may be some time until you can come home and their records are just as important as yours (and of course, YOUR kit is already prepared, right).
- ✘ Know where you are going to take your animals. Pets can go into the car before you do. It's a good holding area and they usually are fine with your scent around.
- ✘ Owners of large animals should have access to trailers or know someone who does and have worked out the arrangement ahead of time.

I can think of many of my neighbors on my side of the ranch alone who have dogs, cats, birds and horses. Those loved ones are just as precious as people in many cases and they're "prepared for safety" will make your safety that much easier.

See you all soon,  
Paul



# Preparedness Corner

## December 11, 2000

*By Paul Vircsik*

Hi neighbors. The clouds are again upon us and the weather is getting colder. Much colder. It might be a good idea to put a blanket and some cold weather gear in the car in case you get stuck somewhere. And don't forget water. Eating snow chills the body as it tries to warm the snow to digest it.

A lot of the natural decorations and vegetation we put in our homes is poisonous for us, especially for small children and pets. Tinsel...bad, egg nog...good, mistletoe...bad. On the other hand, the old myth about poinsettias is false, though they can give you an upset stomach. Remember the old scout poem about "leaves of three let it be, berries white poisonous site"? So give your significant other a kiss under the mistletoe, but don't eat it.

A sad note, we had a fire death here in California. A 5-year-old boy was playing with his friends putting objects on top of a quartz work light to watch them melt. Something caught fire and burned the home. So a reminder. With the Christmas season, candles, lights, pine boughs and paper decorations adorn our homes giving an opportunity for heat to dry out and ignite them at lower temperatures than normal (pyroforic carbonization). Please be careful and enjoy the season. The summer party is only seven months away, for those of you who dislike the snow.

See you all soon,  
Paul

# Preparedness Corner

## December 1, 2000

*By Paul Vircsik*

I'm back. It was nice to visit with many of my neighbors while out for the POA meeting. It felt like being home.

Our fire protection on the ranch has been enhanced by two things; a new fire engine and some awesome big-hearted souls, the latter being the largest boost to our community. Why? It's because you will not find a more attentive group than when the people who protect your home are familiar with the area and its citizens. They have a vested interest as well. I had the opportunity to talk with several of them at the fire open house and they are a proud bunch, eager to learn their new craft and protect all of us. I commend all of you and applaud you for taking on such a noble profession. "Aw" you say. "But I'm not being paid for this." Monetarily true, but your reward is the smile on the kid's face as your drive by a hero, and the tear in the homeowner's eye for saving their house. Good luck to all of you.

Two other quick items. When we all changed our clocks back to standard time, did you also remember to change the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors? Hope so.

Secondly, I talked to my mom last week. She wanted to thank me for teaching her to unplug the toaster after each use. Her good friend came home to find the house full of smoke from a toaster that was still plugged in which shorted out. The elements heated up the underside of her cabinets and charred them. The fire department said 30 minutes more, the kitchen would have erupted, and the whole house would have been toast (so to speak). It is the number one cause of fires in the kitchen by appliances. I don't think you want to come home to find our new fire engine in your front yard, do you?

See you all soon,  
Paul

## The Preparedness Corner - July, 2000

Hi neighbors.

I hope the rains come soon, my relatives in the Sedona area say that the monsoon season is just now starting. So it is heading our way. Fire season is here in Colorado and devastatingly early. I know that you have all looked at your own property and made sure that you are ready if wildfire comes your way, no matter where you live. Defensible space, a list of items to take, and a list of what to do and how to do it. All the stuff needed to prepare for, in case of an emergency. If not, why not? Not sure of what to do? Ask your neighbor who does or call me, I will be glad to answer any questions.

I recently found something to ponder. Fire is a natural rejuvenator, but since man has intervened with fire suppression and preservation, he has affected the health of our wildland. Right now, there are 20 times more trees than should be in a natural "no-man" forest. That means that the forest, our forest, is 20 times denser than is natural or healthy. This is why the United States Forest Service has controlled burns, why they recommend thinning and removing ladder fuels. Grasses that touch brush, which touches the lower limbs of trees, and trees that touch trees. Unfortunately, sometimes those fires get away from them and catastrophes like New Mexico occur. Fact: A forest fire in a dense cluttered wildland takes up to one hundred years to return to that condition.

Also fact: A healthy thinned forest that suffers a fire will (1) not burn completely and (2) recover much quicker, sometimes in one year. The moral of the story. I realize most of us, love the canopied tree feeling, but is that really the healthy and safe thing to do? Better to thin around the house becoming denser and denser the farther away you go, than to unnaturally preserve and burn completely.

See you all soon,

Paul

**April, 2000**

**Preparedness Corner,**

Hi, neighbors. I just finished changing the batteries in my smoke detectors. Day light savings time is finally here, yea. My German shepherd hates the chirping sound and tries to climb into my pocket every time. Big baby. Wait until he visits in June for the thunderstorms. Better sew on bigger pockets.

Before each big meeting on the ranch, I receive lots of mail. While reading all that came my way, I began pondering the whys behind the content.

Concerns or complaints, they are all special because they involve someone's feelings. People speak out for four basic reasons: to bring about change, release pressure, get attention, or confront personality conflicts. It is important to listen to the whole subject and try to determine what the individual perceives is the problem, who is involved and what they see as the solution. Only then can you the listener, determine what kind of concern or complaint is before you. Also, remember Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" from civics or business class? (man has it been a long time). The pyramid with basic physiological needs on the bottom and working up through safety, social belonging, self-esteem and finally self-actualization. Only after achieving each level, starting at the bottom, does the next need get our full focus.

I have witnessed a tremendous transformation in the ranch over the last five years. As I am a "thrice a year, quasi" resident, the changes I've seen have been bold, verses a full time resident who may view them gradually and not see the impact as they have lived through them. The transition from raw nature to a thriving community while still preserving the wilderness feeling has been astounding and successful. The concerns or complaints have also changed emphasis while this has taken place and followed the "Needs" theory up the pyramid. Addressing them now allows me to drive home with eggs on the seat next to me, turn on the lights, sit in a warm chair and have a drink of clear water from the tap. What's next, a phone in every home and two turkeys in every pot?

Soon. A lot of us have come from the city where everything was already complete and included in the price of admission. What you have done to our ranch since signing on that dotted line has already become legendary and is spoken of in widening circles. I think of these things sometimes while looking across my property from the warmth of the indoors and I welcome the concerns and complaints from my neighbors. They help make my world a better place in the long run. Without them, I'd still be staying with Francie and Paul or paying for a room at the Holiday Inn.

**See you all soon,**

**Paul**

# Paul Vircsik

Paul Vircsik is a 19-year veteran of emergency service work and is presently a professional with a San Diego County fire district. He has a degree in Fire Science, certificates in Supervision, Management, and Training. Paul is also a Certified Fire Officer, Apparatus Driver/Operator, and Emergency Medical Technician-D/C.

During his career, Paul has provided service to the community as a Fire Captain, Engineer, Firefighter, and Shift Fire Investigator. He is also a trusted fire preparedness consultant for the community.

Paul operates **FIRESCAPE**, a service-based business that inspects the home and/or land for all aspects of fire safety. These services include, but are not limited to, planned and existing property safety checks for electrical, plumbing and egress situations. Defensible space, ladder fuel, and slope checks will be inspected and recommendations made for correction. Firescape also addresses what to do before, during and after a fire. Paul is available for formal and informal lectures. He will also do training for Wildland and Structure firefighting or "Train the Trainer" education. Please feel free to contact him or give his name, phone number, and e-mail address to your neighbors regarding any of these services.

## **Paul Vircsik**

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