

Dear Santa Fe County residents,

I asked Martin Vigil, who is the County Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, about the issue of evacuation plans in the case of a wildland fire. I am including his response verbatim below. He makes some good points about each situation being unique. This makes it difficult to have a written evacuation plan for each area.

I think that it is a good idea for all communities (especially those that are particularly at risk) to make some plans of their own. Phone trees are a great idea. In some cases, the best thing to do will be to shelter in place. And, in others, evacuating immediately will be a better course of action.

I am always glad to set up community meetings if folks would like to learn more. Martin would also be delighted to attend and bring information, as would our Fire Department personnel.

I would also like to add a note of recognition for our Fire Department. They have fought several fires recently that were quite dangerous and could easily have gotten out of control. Their performance under difficult conditions was incredibly professional. We are very fortunate to have such a force. And, I would like to give special kudos to our Hondo Volunteer Department. They were on the front lines.

Sincerely,  
-Kathy

**From Martin Vigil:**

1. Wildfire literature has been provided throughout the County on literature racks and desks in various County Buildings. We collaborated with the City to produce a City/County Brochure that was mailed out three years ago. If I recall several thousand went out. I have conducted many community outreach tables over the years and bring an entire emergency management display which includes wildfire preparedness. El Dorado Preparedness Fair, SF County Fair, St. Vincent Safety Safari, Tesuque Pueblo Health Fair, and Santa Fe Place Mall Preparedness Fair were some of the larger events.
2. Santa Fe County has a Community Wildfire Protection Plan reviewed & accepted by the Governor's Taskforce on Fire Management. Both Apache Ridge & La Barbaria are addressed in this document. Community meetings are a requirement in developing this plan. Over two thousand individual fire risk assessments have been made. Our Wildland division has had significant activity in community outreach, fuels reduction, chipper days and this year we have stood up a 10 person Hand Crew with the Santa Fe County Fire Department. This crew played a significant response role at the Las Vegas Fire in Hondo's District on Mother's Day.
3. Just yesterday, I watched a program on the community access channel with our Fire Prevention Division and Kristine Mihelcic. Wildland Fire Prevention was the topic of discussion.

This program was followed by a 10 Step Wildland Fire Preparedness video.

4. The topic of Escape Routes will continue to come up from your constituents. We will not publish pre-event escape routes to follow for a very specific reason - fire behavior cannot be predicted. Example: If you lived off of Bishops Lodge Road and we published an escape route that advised residents in a given area to proceed down Bishops Lodge Road because it was the shortest distance out to Tesuque Village Road, and a wind driven fire breaks out down canyon, we have just sent these residents into the fire! We cannot predict where a fire will originate, what the fire behavior will be (due to a long list of variables), or how the weather will play into the scenario at that given moment. The Incident Commander will have to take all of this information and make the best decision for evacuation as each incident unfolds.

5. One of the most informative web sites is a program that is being piloted by the International Association of Fire Chief's. The Ready, Set, Go program. New Mexico is not one of the pilot states. If residents Google: " City of Prescott ready set go plan " they will obtain this information. They can find additional information on the County Fire Department's wildland division web site: [www.sfcfire-wildland.com](http://www.sfcfire-wildland.com)

6. As a closing note, I wish you could have witnessed the response Santa Fe County provided this past week. We fought three very large, fast moving wildland fires. We had no injuries and only one structure was lost. Upwards of twenty structures could have been lost. We deployed over fifty firefighters and thirty pieces of fire apparatus to the Las Vegas Fire which occurred on Mother's Day in Hondo. The City Fire Department, State Forestry, US Forest Service and the Sheriff's Department also responded. A Unified Command System was established. This fire broke out at 2:00pm and continued through the next day at sundown. Only one structure was lost, which had no defensible space around it. Our firefighters put themselves in harm's way and stopped the fire literally at door steps on several structures. Because the first priority was to protect lives and property, we didn't quite get the evacuation message out perfectly in the midst of this chaos. I wish you could have seen how many people refused to evacuate in the midst of a firestorm