

# Despite rain, supervisor, experts talk fire safety — and a big crowd listens

By CHRIS COUNTS

DESPITE THE break in the fire season brought by all the wet weather, a standing room-only crowd packed the meeting room at Palo Corona Regional Park Jan. 31 to talk about wildfires — and how to make local communities safer from them.

Fifth District Supervisor Mary Adams called for the meeting after receiving a letter from a resident — which was signed by more than 100 of her neighbors — expressing concerns about the safety of the Robles del Rio

neighborhood in Carmel Valley.

Many in attendance also made reference to the Camp Fire, which killed 86 people and destroyed more than 18,000 buildings in the Paradise area in November.

“I’m absolutely overwhelmed and delighted by the numbers of people we have here tonight,” Adams told the audience. “It simply underscores the importance of the work we are doing here, and the feeling we have about where we live, what we need to do to protect it — and most importantly, what we need to do to protect ourselves.”

Among those who spoke at the meeting was Gerry Malais, who heads up the Monterey County Office of Emergency Services. Malais urged residents to plan for wildfires by being prepared to evacuate immediately when the time comes.

“When you have to leave, there’s no time to pack your stuff,” he said. “If the fire looks like it’s close, get out of there — everything in your house can be replaced except you.”

## ‘It’s going to be chaos’

Malais also suggested learning evacuation routes, assembling an emergency supply kit, stocking up on food, water and essential medicines, photographing important documents and deciding before you evacuate where you plan to meet family members in case you get separated.

The county official also urged residents to stay as calm as possible during an evacuation.

“It’s going to be chaos as it is,” he added. “It needs to be as organized as possible.”

After presentations by Malais and other officials, the public was invited to ask questions or make comments, and a number of residents did so, including Mike Caplin of

Big Sur. Caplin, who lost his home in the Soberanes Fire, suggested that California’s strict environmental laws make it costly and more time-consuming to remove the dense vegetation that surrounds so many homes down the coast and in Carmel Valley.

“Is there any hope for us to get relief from these absurd regulations?” Caplin asked Adams and others.

Other topics raised by residents included putting power lines underground, increasing water pressure in neighborhoods with a high fire risk, educating tourists about the fire risk, and acquiring the former Carmel Valley airfield to dedicate as open space and use as a staging area for firefighters.

Also discussed were lessons learned from the Camp Fire.

Adams said the turnout showed that the topic is very important.

“Over 300 people were there,” the supervisor added. “Even in this weather, people are genuinely worried about what’s happened with fire in California. The fire in Paradise sent a message that none of us are safe — we have to learn how to protect ourselves, and take responsibility.”