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Firefighters: County needs more controlled burns

By CHRIS COUNTS

WHILE THE danger that one might get out of control has made some people wary of using controlled burns in plac-



PHOTO/COURTESY JOE RAWITZER

During a demonstration how fire can be used to fight fire, a patch of grass is set aflame at a Monterey County training seminar in April.

es that are prone to wildfires, two local nonprofits — along with California's governor — are embracing them.

Created seven years ago by retired firefighters, a nonprofit called the Central Coast Rx Fire Council is pushing the idea that using fire to fight fire makes good sense.

"We are advocating for 20,000 acres of prescribed burning a year in Monterey County," the fire council's Joe Rawitzer told The Pine Cone.

Intentionally burning vegetation when there is high humidity and/or little wind can significantly reduce the risk of a devastating event like the 2016 Soberanes Fire in Big Sur, Rawitzer said. The Soberanes Fire burned 132,000 acres, destroyed 57 homes and resulted in the death of a firefighter.

Rawitzer said many Carmel Valley neighborhoods are at risk, and he suggested using controlled burns to minimize the threat they face.

"Carmel Valley is going to have a high intensity fire," he predicted. "We have an opportunity to do something about that if we act now. The vegetation is only going to get heavier."

According to Rawitzer, the thick brush that surrounds many communities "is the result of 100 years of fire suppression," and he says it's important "to burn

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MoCo faces penalties for failing to disclose employees' salaries

By KELLY NIX

MONTEREY COUNTY did not file its 2017 public employee payroll data with the State Controller's Office — the only county in California that didn't — and faces possible fines and a state investigation for the lapse, the controller's office told The Pine Cone this week.

On Tuesday, State Controller Betty T. Yee released a list of 473 cities and 54 counties that filed employee compensation data with the state. However, Monterey County was listed as having "failed to file" its worker payroll report.

"This annual payroll data filing is required by law, and the state government can penalize counties that fail to file complete data," state controller's office spokesman Jason P. Dumont said Tuesday.

Monterey County, Dumont also said, will "soon" receive a letter from the controller's office directing it to "take corrective action" by providing its employee pay records within 20 days.

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ROBBERS SMASH DOOR TO ESCAPE WITH \$28K IN APPLE PRODUCTS

By MARY SCHLEY

IN ANOTHER brazen robbery of the Apple Store at Del Monte Center, a trio of criminals escaped with nearly \$30,000 worth of electronics June 15 after smashing through the glass doors when a customer tried to stop them from escaping by closing it, according to Monterey P.D. Lt. Ethan Andrews.

"We received a report of three suspects described as black males in their late teens or 20s who were in the store stealing merchandise," he said. "And when they attempted to leave, some patrons attempted to close the doors to prevent them from leaving. The suspects ended up hitting the door and breaking it, and managed to escape."

One bystander was cut by the shattering glass, but not badly, according to Andrews. In a robbery that took little time at all, the men grabbed phones and laptops with an estimated combined value of more than \$28,000.

"My experience with these is they're pretty quick — they're in and out," he said. "It's seconds to minutes. They're not in there for a very long time."

Fortunately, the store's surveillance system provided some useful images, and Monterey P.D. is working with other law enforcement agencies to try to identify the culprits, he said.

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Neighbors sue each other over property line, fence

By MARY SCHLEY

AFTER WINNING a lawsuit against his neighbors over the property line between their houses, Robert Freeman tore down a fence on the old line and built a new one where Monterey County Superior Court Judge Susan Matcham said he could.

But the new fence is just 18 inches from his neighbors' house — something the neighbors, Charles and Evelyn McMillan, don't like one bit. In an extensive legal document attorney Jennifer Pavlet filed last week, they've asked the judge to reconsider her ruling.

"My mother will not be able to walk around the side of her own home that has been there since 1931," the McMillans' daughter, April, said. And because city codes put the minimum setback between the side of a residence and the property line at 3 feet, "my parents' home which has been in compliance for 87 years is no longer compliant."

In the old days, no neighbors

The McMillans' home was built by April's great aunt, Emily Louise Turner, at a time when there were no neighbors. A drawing for the original house shows a 3-foot gap between the house and the property line — in conformance with the city setback ordinance that was enacted two years before. When she died in the 1980s, Turner left the house to April's mother.

Their neighbor purchased the property next door and in 2016 applied to the city for permission to tear the old home down and replace it with

an 1,800-square-foot two-story residence designed by Claudio Ortiz. No one objected to Freeman's plans at the time, and after a preliminary review in August of that year, the planning commission approved his application the following month.

The fight over the property line didn't arise until the home was under construction last year.

"It wasn't until the machinery showed up to go to work, and that's when the neighbors said, 'Your survey is not correct,'" Freeman said.

Detailed survey

When the dispute came to light, the city suspended Freeman's building permit in January 2017 and required him to file a full "record of survey," which isn't typically needed for a single-family home, planning director Marc Wiener told The Pine Cone. Mike Stanton of MBS Land Surveys had his survey recorded in late March 2017 after a county official kicked it back with some questions about his calculations and methods, and the city released Freeman's building permit the following month.

The McMillans opposed Stanton's survey, which put his property line 9 inches onto what they believe is their property, and hired their own surveyor, who used a different method of

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Pipeline meeting fails to draw much interest

By MARY SCHLEY

IF THE attendance numbers are any indication, PG&E's plans to install nearly a mile of new 6-inch gas main in town aren't much cause for concern, after all. The work would entail closing some of the town's busiest streets over the course of the four-month construction project.

At a rather testy council meeting in March, city officials balked at the initial proposal presented by PG&E and suggested the utility company make more of an effort to educate the public on the plans before returning to them with a request for permits. This week, the gas and electric company held a community meeting at Sunset Center to provide information and answer questions, but just a handful of residents showed up, according to city administrator Chip Rerig.

While five members of the city's staff and an equal number of PG&E representatives attended, Rerig said "no more than 10 or 12" residents went.

He said he was also disappointed that company officials just answered questions and listened to comments, rather than delivering a formal presentation about their plans to lay 4,900 feet of pipeline along Camino Del Monte, San Carlos Street, Fourth Avenue, San Antonio Avenue and Carmel Way, starting in mid-August and going block by block until the work is completed sometime in December.

"They also should have had an enlarged copy of the proposed alignment," Rerig said.

Includes new connections

The gas main will increase capacity in the system and will also have new connections to residences and businesses along the route, according to PG&E. The original plans called for simply running a new line through the city to carry gas to other parts of the Peninsula, but those were changed to include new connec-

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The riders get the attention, but volunteers deserve it, too



PHOTO/MICHAEL TROUTMAN, DMT IMAGING

Last weekend 64,425 race fans from around the world enjoyed the action under a sparkling sun at WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca. But the stars of the event are the local volunteers that make it happen. See page 13A.