Tahoe agencies close to failing in their job to implement change post-Angora Fire

By Kathryn Reed

Five years later and people are still wondering how they will evacuate safely from the Lake Tahoe Basin in an emergency, if a reverse 911 system has been installed, and how to get their neighbors to get rid of that shake roof.

While a panel of agency officials sat on the stage of the theater at South Tahoe High School on Monday talking about what they have done in the five years since the Angora Fire, it was more personal information the audience sought.

But answers for them were few or limited.

The June 25 forum was hosted by state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville. Speakers were Gareth Harris of Lake Valley Fire Protection District, Kelly Keenan with CalFire, Patty Kouyoumdjian of Lahontan water board, Joanne Marchetta-TRPA, and Mike LeFevre-USFS.

North Shore real estate agent Sue Daniels asked why the Caltrans signs can't alert people about red flag warning days and what the state's $150 rural fire tax will be spent on.

Gaines said he would look into the sign question. As for the tax, he calls it double dipping. The money collected from homeowners won't help CalFire or any firefighting efforts.

Keenan explained the tax means $89 million for CalFire, but in reality the department's budget from the state has been

reduced by that same amount so the tax is not a net gain to the state fire agency. What people are paying for is unknown. The tax really goes to the general fund to be spent however the governor and Legislature want.

A resident in the Lake Valley area asked what to do about a neighbor who believes doing nothing to their fire prone-shake roof is fine.

Harris said his district received a $5 million grant from FEMA to deal with just that issue. The money is available to assist homeowners in Lake Valley, Meek's Bay and Fallen Leaf Lake fire districts.

But Harris also encouraged residents to call their local fire department about any defensible space issue and have the firefighters be the bad guys and the court be the enforcer if it were to get to that point.

Angora burn area resident Susan Ward told the audience of more than 100 how she never received a reverse 911 call five years ago. No one told her Monday night the reason there was no call is because the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department thought the governor had to make that decision. Not so. The county has the capability to use this system without Sacramento's OK – so do other jurisdictions.

While El Dorado County Sheriff John D'Agostini and South Lake Tahoe Police-Fire Chief Brian Uhler attended the forum, neither spoke and neither stayed until the end. They would be the ones to answer how the 911 system works.

The other issue Uhler and D'Agostini could have addressed is the evacuation plan because that is the job of law enforcement. None of the speakers could give any details about how people will be evacuated in the event of an emergency.

It was total chaos five years ago that proved whatever system might have been in place did not work. This proved true the

Sunday the fire started and then the Tuesday when the Tahoe Keys area was evacuated when the fire jumped Highway 89.

Grading the work done post-Angora



State Sen. Ted Gaines reveals the agencies in the Lake Tahoe Basin barely received a passing grade based on the lack of implementation of recommendations post-Angora. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Gaines had asked the non-partisan Senate Office of Research to examine how the 90 recommendations issued by the bi-state Blue Ribbon Fire Commission that was convened by then Govs. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jim Gibbons had been implemented.

Sixty have been completed and 10 are in the process. To this, Gaines gave the effort a C-minus grade – barely passing by most standards.

One recommendation of the bi-state commission was to, “Adopt the priority of life, property, and the environment, in that order, with respect to fire safety and fire prevention.” The action taken, according to the report released Monday, was, “Implemented.”

Firefighters have those priorities, but those who control the basin have a different agenda. Water quality is one. Spending grant money to keep their jobs is another. Planning and more planning without implementation appear to be other priorities.

“It’s not an important issue, it’s an urgent issue,” Gaines said of needing to make Lake Tahoe fire safe.

He doesn’t understand when people talk about the importance of Lake Tahoe how protecting it from a devastating fire isn’t at the top of the list. He pointed to the Democrats in the state Legislature not wanting to fund projects that would help Tahoe.

One of the recommendations was to create an 800 number for people to call for information about defensible space guidelines. But the number provided in the report went to a personal residence when *Lake Tahoe News* called it Monday night.

An “undetermined” was the action for the recommendation, “To avoid continued confusion regarding interagency communications during wildland fire occurrences, all dispatch centers and responding resources in the Tahoe basin will adhere to the existing agreements.”

Considered “implemented” was the recommendation to, “Work with their respective congressional delegation to establish an annual sustainable fund for forest health for the Lake Tahoe Basin.”

But the people speaking on the stage Monday said money is an issue and there is no “sustainable fund” for fuel reduction or firefighting. Congress has not reauthorized the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act that supplied the initial money for environmental projects that included fire related activities. SNPLMA funds are about exhausted. And some entities in the basin would like the remaining Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act dollars be spent on a loop road on the South

Shore instead of fire related issues.

One of the recommendations that was found to be “undermined” was, “Find more stable, long-term funding to replace the stopgap funding provided by the states, likely through the collection of a parcel fee or similar special assessments on property owners.”

Everyone in at the forum would likely have categorized that as “not implemented”.

Going into the burn

Before the evening meeting, Gaines went on a tour of the Angora burn, witnessing the forest as it looks today, talking to homeowners who have rebuilt and seeing a community garden that has sprouted from the ashes.

“We all move to Tahoe because it’s beautiful. We stay because of the people,” Marsha Hudson told Gaines. She said having an evacuation to-do list on the inside of a cupboard helped her family retrieve more belongings than they would have otherwise remembered in such a stressful situation.

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Mama bear rescues cub from South Tahoe garage

By CBS-13

A South Lake Tahoe homeowner captured incredible video of a bear cub trapped inside her garage and the momma bear doing whatever it took to rescue her baby.

It’s impossible to stop watching the video as the baby bear hangs on to garage door tracks, flings its legs around trying to find solid ground, sees the ladder, probably the same one it used to get up there.

One try. Two tries. And it sticks. Down the ladder goes baby into mama’s massive yet loving arms.

All of it was captured by Judy Coover.

“I had one foot in the door here, so I had an easy exit plan,” she told CBS13 on Monday. “I was tempted to go and pick him up, but I thought ‘No, where there’s a baby bear there’s a mama bear.”

Yes, a 500- to 600-pound mama just a few feet away trying to open the garage.

“It lifted a foot off the ground, then slammed back shut, lifted up, slammed back shut,” Judy said.

Read the whole story

Evening event all about the good bats do

Learn what bats eat, where they live, and why they are important. Bat sounds will be presented along with photos of bats from around the world at Washoe Lake State Park.

Bats: Truth or Tales is June 30 from 8:30-9:30pm.

Washoe Lake State Park is 18 miles south of Reno and five miles north of Carson City. From Highway 395, take the Eastlake Boulevard Exit (exit 44). The park entrance is on the left.

Local bat expert Brian Buttazoni will present the program.

There is no charge for the program, but there is a $7 per vehicle entry fee. Nevada residents receive a $2 discount.

Bring a blanket or lawn chair for the program.

Study: Location of home a key indicator to risk of wildfire

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

The expression “location, location, location” doesn’t apply just to buying real estate; it can also determine whether a

house burns down in a wildfire.

Researchers who studied data on more than 5,500 buildings damaged or destroyed in Southern California fires during the last decade found the most vulnerable structures were in certain places and certain arrangements.

The results, recently published in the online journal PlosOne.org, have important implications for wildfire protection policies in the Southland, which focus on brush clearance and fireproof construction. That is not enough, say the authors, who argue there are some places where homes simply shouldn't be built.

"We're finding that geography is most important—where is the house located and where are [houses] placed on the landscape," said the paper's lead author, research scientist Alexandra Syphard of the Conservation Biology Institute.

Syphard and her coauthors from the U.S. Geological Survey and the University of Wisconsin gathered data on 700,000 addresses in the Santa Monica Mountains and part of San Diego County. They then mapped the structures that had burned in those areas between 2001 and 2010, a time of devastating wildfires in the region.

Buildings on steep slopes, in Santa Ana wind corridors and in low-density developments intermingled with wild lands were the most likely to have burned. Nearby vegetation was not a big factor in home destruction.

"If you want to predict whether or not a home will be lost in a fire, going out and looking at the surrounding fuels is not going to tell you nearly as much as looking at the location and the frequency of fires in that location in the past," said coauthor Jon Keeley, a USGS research scientist and chaparral expert.

Comparing the state's fire hazard maps with their own results,

the researchers also concluded that on a local community scale, the state maps were not very good at identifying the most vulnerable areas.

The state maps estimate fire risk based on wild land fuel distribution, assuming that the denser and older the brush, the greater the threat. Because most of the Santa Monicas are covered with coastal scrub and chaparral, the state maps put most of the range in the medium- or high-risk category.

But during the study period, home loss was concentrated in only a portion of the Santa Monicas: in the Malibu area, which sits in the path of hot, dry Santa Ana winds that carry embers for miles.

Looking at vegetation growing within roughly half a mile of structures, the authors concluded that the exotic grasses that often sprout in areas cleared of brush could be more of a fire hazard than the brush. “We ironically found that homes that were surrounded mostly by grass actually ended up burning more than homes with higher fuel volumes like shrubs,” Syphard said.

Read the whole story

Small fire burning near Truckee

By KCRA-TV

Fire crews are battling a fire just east of Truckee, between Truckee and Glenshire.

The fire was reported as an acre in size, with the potential

to grow, due to gusting winds.

Multiple agencies are helping fight this fire and are making good progress, according to fire authorities. CalFire said the blaze is about 50 percent contained.

CalFire also said no homes are being evacuated at this time.

Santa Cruz man drowns in Lake Tahoe

By Cathy Kelly, Santa Cruz Sentinel

The president of Granite Rock Co., Bruce W. Woolpert, died Sunday afternoon while boating in Lake Tahoe, company officials said.

Woolpert, 61, was operating a power boat he owns when he fell and died from injuries suffered in the fall, said Keith Severson, the company's marketing services manager.

The Coast Guard is investigating, Severson said.

Woolpert also served as Graniterock's chairman and chief executive officer and was the grandson of company founder A.R. Wilson. The company split from the larger Granite Construction in 1936. Both are based in Watsonville. Graniterock includes six locations in the Bay Area and two Santa Cruz County sand plants. Company operations are based largely on high-quality aggregate extracted from a quarry in Aromas, Severson said.

Woolpert had a strong work ethic and was a stalwart supporter of local schools and charities, including the United Way, he said. His wife, son and daughter also worked at the company

part-time, Severson said.

The Woolpert family and the company’s board of directors have appointed Mark Kaminski as chairman of the board and acting CEO, Severson said.

Placer County Sheriff’s Office Capt. Jeff Ausnow said Woolpert’s body was found floating near Blackwood Lake Condominiums on the North Shore on Sunday afternoon. There are no signs of foul play.

Woolpert and his wife, Rose Ann, have two children, Marianne and Arthur.

Funeral arrangements are pending, Severson said.

Healthy bones for older athletes topic of discussion

William Cottrell, osteoporosis specialist, will speak about bone health in the maturing athlete on June 27.

The free hour-long discussion begins at 6pm at Carson City Community Center, 851 E. William St., Carson City.

For more information on the lecture, call (530) 543.5537.

Strider bike competition at Northstar for youngsters

Northstar is putting on the Lake Tahoe areas first Strider Cup Series.

With a focus on developing balance and coordination, Strider no-pedal balance bikes have proven much easier for children to control when learning to ride a bicycle than those with pedals.

Every Tuesday beginning July 3 from noon-4pm in the village the Strider Adventure Zone will provide children aged 18 months to 5 years the opportunity to test ride a Strider bike while playing, learning, and enjoying a custom designed obstacle course.

Access to the adventure zone is free, and a limited number of bikes will be available for use on a first-come, first-served basis. Guests are encouraged to bring their own bikes.

The Strider Cup Series is a moto-style event offering kids the chance to participate in friendly competition in a fun, safe environment. These events are scheduled to take place July 4, July 21, Aug. 4, Aug. 18 and Sept. 29 from 3:30-4pm in the Village at Northstar. Participation in the Cup Series is free, and each participant will receive an award.

For more information, go online.

Internet infidelity a growing concern among couples

By Lauren Ruvo, Las Vegas Sun

Instant messaging via Twitter, Facebook and smart phones allow people to reach out to others at all times, and for instant support.

But there’s a dangerous downside: It can lead to Internet infidelity.

Katherine Hertlein, an assistant professor in UNLV’s marriage and family therapy department, says Internet infidelity can occur with an act as simple as chatting online with someone else to the exclusion of a person’s primary partner.

Texting someone while in another person’s physical presence may create closeness between the people texting, but it creates a distance between the two people who are together, says Hertlein.

One reason Internet infidelity may plague a couple, Hertlein says, is because couples rarely take the time to define their definition of infidelity.

“You’ll have one person who says ‘It’s a breach in the relationship, you cheated on me,’” Hertlein said, “and the other person is saying ‘No, I never touched anyone. Yes I was talking to people but that’s not a breach.’”

Read the whole story

Heavenly writes checks to help area students with college costs

For the ninth consecutive year, Heavenly Mountain Resort awarded $4,000 scholarships to five recent high school graduates, bringing the resort’s overall commitment to the Heavenly Mountain Resort Community Scholarship Program to $180,000.

The scholarships are designed to help further the education of local area students.

Sixty-nine students applied for this year’s scholarship. The 2012 scholarship recipients include from South Tahoe High: Tanner Burghard (San Diego Community College), Jacob Stowell (undecided) and Anna Tikhomirova (UCLA); from Douglas High School: Cora Moody (Marion Military Institute); and from Whittell High School: Nina Jimenez (Stanford).

To date, Heavenly has awarded 55 scholarships.