
BIG PARK REGIONAL COORDINATING COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes
Emergency Preparedness Plan Committee
March 4th, 2022
Updated March 22nd, 2026

Call to order: The meeting was held at the VOCA Clubhouse and called to order by Gwen Hanna at 2:03.

Attendees

Gwen Hanna, Co-Chair
Mary Pope, Co-Chair
Phil Feiner
Mary Morris
Pat Murphy
Leslie Osborne
Camille Cox, Ex-Officio

Guests

Heidi Howard, Public Affairs Officer, Yavapai County Sheriff's Office
Lt. John Johnson, Eastern Area Commander, Yavapai County Sheriff's Office
Phil Cox, PVPOA

Absent: Art Bertolina

Agenda Items: The Agenda was adjusted by acclamation to permit Lt. Johnson to speak before other business items were considered.

- 1. Frontline Agency:** Co-Chair Gwen Hanna welcomed Lt Johnson and Heidi Howard as representatives of the first of the frontline agencies to meet with the committee. Camille Cox than explained the background and purpose behind the formation of the committee. She stressed that the intent is not to be hands-on, but rather to distribute educational materials and preparatory guidance. The committee expects to curate information specific to the Big Park community, not to create it.

Lt. Johnson described his responsibility as the management of large-scale incidents. He emphasized that the Sheriff's department has the sole responsibility for evacuation.

Decisions on who to evacuate and the timing of evacuations are based on input from other agencies such as the Fire District. In the case of fire, local expertise on the time needed to evacuate is balanced with the speed and the fire's behavior and traffic conditions. Depending on the nature of the emergency, other agencies (eg DPS, Sedona Police, ADOT) might be called in by the Sheriff's Office to stop traffic coming into the Village; but the concept of "contra-flow" is unlikely due to the size/type of roads in the village and the safety issues associated with contraflow outside controlled access interstates. Sections of the Big Park community are

“segmented” according to a YCSO “plan”. Evacuation is organized in stages, with those closest to the threat or with challenging egress paths would be the first to be placed in a set or go status(Ready-Set-Go). For example, along Jacks Canyon Road, Pine Valley would evacuate before La Barranca in order to keep the road passable. Lt. Johnson suggested that if residents have another home elsewhere or can conveniently arrange lodging out of the area, that they consider early self evacuation, reducing their own anxiety and the number of evacuations necessary if the emergency escalates.

Firefighting assets are shared among communities and states based on need. Often the decisions are economic and assets will be allocated to protect homes before brush fires. Large-scale air support comes from Prescott and Mesa, whereas helicopters are available locally and have a faster turnaround. Recently approved increased State funding for fuels reduction and Fire-Wise type preparations is expected to provide additional resources.

During an initial response in the first few hours the Sheriff’s Office will be working directly with the incident commander responsible for the fire fighting and together they will make decisions on areas which should be placed in Set or Go. The Cornville fire last year was an example of such an incident in which YCSO collocated with the USFS Fire IC and made decisions on communities which were placed in set and go. As a fire continues and becomes more complex to manage an all-hazards Incident Management Team may be brought in to manage the fire. These can range from Type 3 relatively less complex to Type 1 Teams which handle the most complex incidents. Just in 2021 the Sheriff’s Office had liaisons embedded with Type 1 Teams on three different fires, Cellar, Backbone and Rafael.

As a fire continues the Sheriff’s Office works with the Fire Incident Management Team and establishes Management Actions Points or pre-set lines on the map that once the fire reaches those points it leads to a conversation between the SO and Fire on the need to place additional areas in set or go.

These Management Action Points are created collaboratively and include many dimensions. These dimensions include the characteristics of the area to be evacuated such as difficult egress in more remote rural areas, functional needs, senior or memory care facilities and others. The Village of Oak Creek has better conditions for rapid egress as compared to other parts of Yavapai County which we have had to evacuate in the past.

Other dimensions include the topography of the area between the fire threat and the neighborhoods themselves. Fire moves more quickly while it travels uphill. flat or downhill terrain reduces the speed of fire movement. Fuel conditions is based on their presence and current measurements of the moisture content of the types of fuels in the area such as grasses, brush and larger fuels. Weather conditions including temperature, humidity, and wind speeds are also factored.

The Incident Management Teams will often employ fire modeling which help develop informed predictions on possible fire behavior including the time for the fire to move.

The Sheriff's office uses "Ready-Set-Go" as their action model and stressed that the community needs to take the "Go" message seriously as a lot of information, expertise and experience goes into that decision. The community needs to have faith in the Sheriff's decisions and abide by them as these decisions balance the cost and disruptive impact of an evacuation with safety needs and requirements.

Lt. Johnson explained that evacuation of short-term rentals and assisted living facilities present a greater challenge in communication and assistance. The County Health Department maintains a list of folks who need special help. He noted that where individuals need additional help neighbors often assist, but the larger facilities like Sedona Winds are a greater challenge. These factors would contribute to increased time being allotted for the evacuation and move up the decision to place a community in Set or Go. Residents in Yavapai County including the Village can fill out the functional needs form and email it to mrc@yavapaiaz.gov

He suggested that a positive approach for a community to take would be proactive Fire-Wise mitigation, noting that the Village area has done a good job in this regard. Homeowners should consider defensible space around their home in a balanced approach (improving fire safety while maintaining the appearance and unique character of the environment), and evaluate improvements in drainage for flood control. Knowing your neighbors can also be helpful in emergencies. Fires move more slowly in neighborhoods than in the forest, and they tend to go quickly uphill (Chimney effect) and across flat open spaces rather than downhill. Other areas he manages such as Crown King are far more dangerous in this regard than the Village.

Checklists and having a Go-Bag ready are critical in being able to evacuate quickly with a minimum of stress. Cars should always have sufficient gas to be able to leave the area, and minimal supplies such as water and spare clothing should be kept in the car. See ready.gov for more information.

Notification of the community takes many forms. ~~The Code Red app (with residence address and phone number recorded, not just cell phone location services from the App itself) are a critical resource for area evacuations. You can sign up for Code Red at the Sheriff's office website (ycsoaz.gov)~~

Update 2026: To stay updated on potential emergencies, sign up for agency alerts and notifications and be prepared. [Smart 911 – Login](#), [Yavapai County Sheriffs' Office Emergency Notifications](#) For area-wide emergencies, Genesys Protect provides information as well as emergency notifications for specific zones within Yavapai County including Sedona and the VOC. Navigate to [Genasys Protect](#) and get information for your zone, and you can opt in as a resident and receive notifications directly. Information includes finding your zone, what zones are on SET, what zones are evacuated, roadblock locations, evacuation shelters, animal shelters, and sandbag locations for flood times.

2022 Minutes continue: The Sheriff's Office also uses Facebook, Next Door and Nixle (which is through the City of Sedona) to get information out in an accurate and timely fashion. He cautioned against "sharing" anecdotal, unofficial information via social media as this can result in unnecessary fear and panic. He also emphasized

that if information from the various official sources do not reach individuals, there will be officials and/or volunteers assigned to knock on doors with instructions to evacuate.

In response to a question on a new Forest Service road from the end of Lee Mountain and/or Jacks Canyon Road to I-17, Lt. Johnson said that needed to be discussed with the Forest Service, and thinks that getting a new road approved would be very challenging in light of cost issues, environmental regulations and is probably unlikely.

In response to a question on APS cutting power to the area and disrupting communication, Lt. Johnson noted that in addition to battery backup on cell towers, the cell utilities often use generators. APS would coordinate with the Sheriff's Office in the event of a power outage. APS is a great partner and would communicate any plans to cut power to the area ahead of time. Such a plan would weigh heavily on a decision to place the area in Go. He thinks other mechanisms of grid disruption would be more likely to unexpectedly cause a complete loss of power as compared to wildfire. Other means of communication exist (e.g., Jeep Posse, VSAR and other volunteers personally knocking on doors).

Lt. Johnson then explained about the Jeep Posses, Verde Search & Rescue and the Yavapai County Search and Rescue Team. These three volunteer organizations provide upwards of 400 volunteers to assist in an emergency situation. Volunteers have radios and cell phones in their vehicles for rapid communication and are called into the area during an emergency. He suggested volunteering for or contributing to Verde Search & Rescue as that organization is the closest to the Village.

When asked how many deputies are in the Sheriff's Dept., he noted that there should be 140, but currently they are having difficulty recruiting and retaining deputies and other personnel for a variety of reasons. It takes a year to bring a recruit on board as they need to attend the police academy for training and then months of on-the-job training before assuming solo active duty.

Snow emergencies are less likely in the Village and equipment is generally not kept here. Yavapai County Public Works does have snow removal equipment which is regularly deployed along Dry Creek Road as topography greatly affects snow accumulation.

In answer to a question on how BPRCC can help, Lt. Johnson suggested that we talk about preparedness, letting people know how to become connection and how to prepare. He again emphasized that un-substantiated information should not be shared as it can create unnecessary fears, and inappropriate reactions which can hinder emergency responses. Lt. Johnson suggested that people recognize that through some simple preparedness steps they can have confidence knowing they can evacuate promptly if there is a need. Recognizing many significant topographical fuel reduction and resource availability advantages that benefit the Village, residents should be prepared but should not be anxious or over emphasize the level of risk associated with wildfire in our area.

BPRCC can help direct people to the proper places for the latest and most accurate information. He said that he'd be happy to help review the BPRCC website when it is in Beta mode and also the planned brochure.

Lt. Johnson and Ms. Howard were thanked for their time and excellent information presented. The committee also expressed thanks to Sergeant Rumpf, our local station deputy, for his assistance and reports to the Council over the years.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes of the February 4th EPPiC meeting were unanimously approved on a motion by Camille Cox, seconded by Mary Morris.

Website Review: The process of reviewing information available on www.ready.gov has begun with several areas noted to be of interest such as the Monsoon Awareness brochure, Ready-Set-Go, Fire Defensible Space illustrations, Emergency Checklists and links to Code Red and Nixle. Committee members were again charged with reviewing the information to prioritize information for inclusion in the EPPiC website. A question was asked if Neighborhood watch has a website. KISS is the objective of the future EPPiC website, not to overthink or become bogged down in details that the frontline agencies are charged with handling.

Gwen noted that people respond to issues in two ways, emotionally and realistically. Their reactions are more realistic if they feel that they can control or influence the situation.

Adjournment: Meeting was adjourned at 4:34pm.

The next meeting will be April 1st 2:00pm at the VOCA Clubhouse. Room TBD. YCEMS is scheduled to be at the May 6th meeting. Patrick Murphy will ask Amy Tinderholt if she or a designee is available on April 1st or June 3rd. Mary Morris is working with the Fire District to schedule their participation and will share her letter explaining the process with Patrick.

Prepared by: Mary Pope

Approved: 1 April 2022