

After Action Report Prepared by: Michael Schlenker  
-Chairman Bel Air Crest Emergency Preparedness Committee  
December 15, 2017



# Bel Air Crest

## Skirball Fire - December 6, 2017

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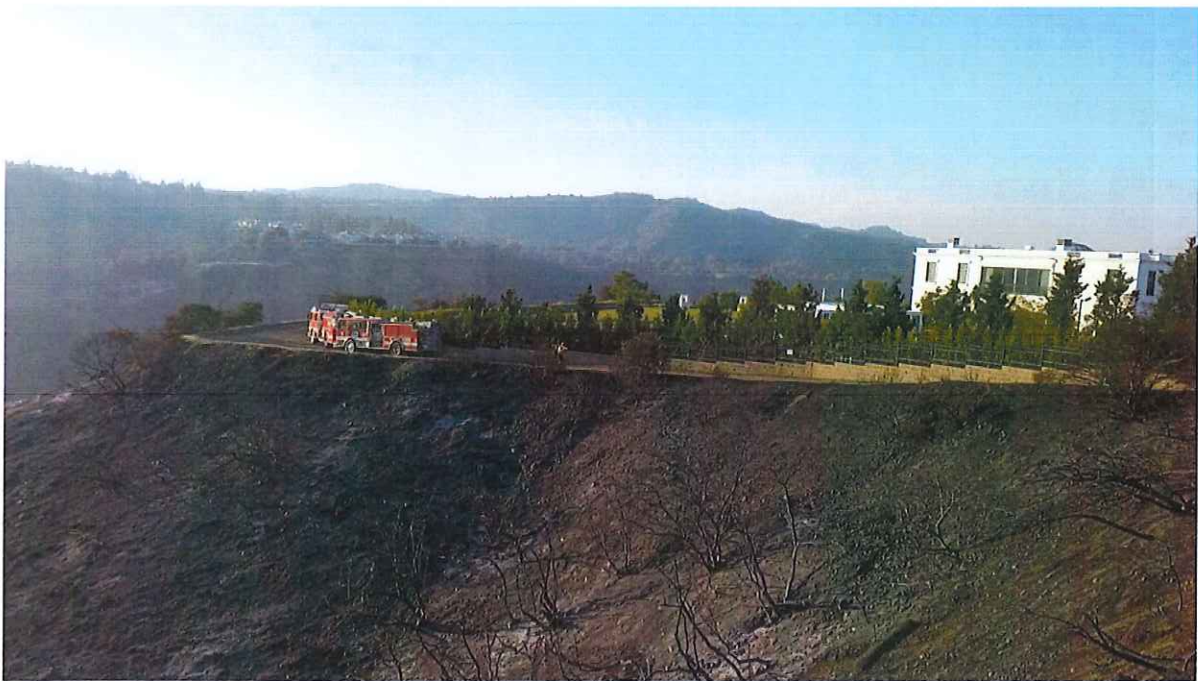
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## Foreward

The Skirball Fire erupted during the pre-dawn hours of Wednesday, December 6, 2017 on the east side of the 405 Freeway at the south end of the Bel Air Crest Community.

Extremely dry weather and strong Santa Ana winds drove the fire into Bel Air, burning 422 acres, damaging 12 structures, and destroying 6 homes. Thankfully, no loss of life or serious injuries occurred.

We are in awe with all the firefighters who fought bravely and tenaciously against a difficult fire that could have been disastrous for our community. We thank them and appreciate their extraordinary dedication and service.



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## First Response Event timeline:

- 911 call to Fire Department by a Bel Air Crest Resident. Resident then called Bel Air Crest Guard Station, BAC Incident Commander, Operations & Planning Officers to report the fire. Guard Station called Emergency Chair/Logistics Officer
- 4:52 - Call was dispatched to LAFD to 1230 NB 405 Frwy
- 5:15 - Operations Officer and Logistics Officer first on scene with Bel Air Crest Water Tender. Size-up provided by Operations Officer indicated that the fire was moving south and east of Bel Air Crest along the East Sepulveda Fire Road and the 405
- 5:15 - Manager's office opened as Incident Command. Planning Officer initiated the Bel Air Crest Emergency Broadcast to all Bel Air Crest residents. Planning Officer began to coordinate Block Captains to help with resident notification. Incident Commander and PIO begin to notify residents to prepare to evacuate via phone trees. IC field phone calls & receive status reports from residents & Block Captains
- 5:26 - Battalion 10 LAFD ACS / HCEC member contacted BAC Logistics officer for update and sent notification to the HCEC group about the fire and evacuations
- 5:30 - BAC Emergency Broadcast received notifying residents to prepare for evacuation
- 6:06 - 1st responders - LAFD Engine 104 (Winnetka) arrive into Bel Air Crest
- 6:10 - Upper Casiano gate open for Bel Air Crest community evacuation
- 6:12 - LAFD 104 on scene at Stratford Circle fire road gate. Operations Officer and Logistics Officer brief LAFD Captain. Block Captains instructed to report any spot fires in the community
- 6:53 - Mandatory Evacuation Notice from LA City via reverse 911
- 7:00 - BAC residents begin to evacuate through Casiano and Sepulveda Gates
- 8:15 - LAPD arrive in community and begin door to door mandatory evacuations
- Incident Command operations continue to support LAFD and other agencies
- 1800 - BAC Water Tender and Incident Command demobilize

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## **Incident Command Staff & Incident Management:**

The Community of Bel Air Crest established its Emergency Action Plan in 2011. The plan follows the FEMA Incident Command System for command, control, and coordination of an emergency response. We have implemented a plan to prepare our residents for disasters and to organize into teams to address the immediate and specific needs of the Bel Air Crest Community. While our teams train to activate and respond after an earthquake, we use many of these same procedures and coordination for an emergency fire situation.

The initial response to the Skirball Fire consisted of three procedures similar to our earthquake plan:

- 1.) An Incident Command Center will be activated. This time at the Clubhouse.
- 2.) The BAC Emergency Broadcast System will send out an alert message and subsequent information as we get it.
- 3.) Block Captains report in and ensure residents in their area of responsibility are notified on conditions.

Because of the fire history in the area, Bel Air Crest owns a 2000 gallon water tender used for fire suppression and Fire Department support. The initial actions for the water tender consisted of fire defense on the Alpha flank at the top of the East Sepulveda Fire Road. Prior fuel modification efforts, the fire road break and heavy Santa Ana winds blowing from the north slowed the progression of the fire. LAFD provided structure protection and the BAC water tender provided assistance. Water and foam drops from air operations knocked down the active flame and the water tender was used as a resource to supply water to the fire line until 1800 hours.

## **Incident Command Staff & Incident Management Issues:**

- Not all Emergency Broadcast updates were processed successfully due to technical difficulties
- Not all Block Captains checked in with the IC
- Access to East Sepulveda Fire Road was blocked by a locked private gate

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## **Notifications & Communication:**

The Community of Bel Air Crest previously established an Emergency Voice Broadcast system to notify residents of emergencies and evacuations. The system is also used when access to the community is impacted. Additionally, an inbound information hotline is updated as the incident progresses. Bel Air Crest also has business band "walkie-talkies" that are used internally by our Command Staff and Block Captains.

Bel Air Crest is connected with other nearby communities as part of the Hillside Communities Emergency Communications Group (HCEC). The group is comprised of amateur (ham) radio operators living in the hillside communities of the Santa Monica Mountains and Canyons. The group consists of members of the Los Angeles Fire Department Auxiliary Communications Service (LAFD ACS) and follows established radio communication plans and protocols.

In 2015, the Bel Air Beverly Crest Neighborhood Council partnered with the LAFD Auxiliary Communications Service by supplying funds to purchase amateur radio equipment to be used by BABCNC residents and stakeholders who volunteer for the LAFD ACS program. LAFD ACS provided training and helped to build the HCEC network of qualified and trained emergency communicators.

Shortly after the Skirball Fire started, LAFD ACS Battalion 10 Communication Leader started an official HCEC radio "net" with over 18 ham radio operators providing situational reports and information. (See attached ICS-214)

## **Notifications & Communication Issues:**

- Many residents called the Incident Command Center directly for information and updates which tied up phone lines and IC personnel.
- Not all radio operators on the HCEC net were LAFD ACS trained and some had issues with radio operation skills and communication protocols.

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### **Logistics with City & LAPD:**

The City of Los Angeles sent out its Emergency Evacuation Notice to many residents of Bel Air Crest including members of the Command Staff just before 7:00 am. The notice came early and many residents evacuated immediately as they had been previously notified and evacuation planning was already underway.

LAPD Officers conducted evacuation notifications through vehicle public address systems and by going door to door.

During any emergency, response personnel often confront confusing and conflicting information about the current status of the incident. The BAC Command Center received conflicting reports from news media and other sources that Bel Air Crest was excluded from the evacuation order. Many of these reports conflicted with the coordination efforts of the LAPD when they arrived in the community to implement the evacuation order.

### **Logistics with City & LAPD Issues:**

- With the closure of Sepulveda Boulevard, Mulholland Drive and reports of neighboring street closures and traffic jams, the Bel Air Crest Incident Command Staff was unable to provide accurate evacuation instructions.

### **Logistics with City & LAPD Recommendations:**

- Further planning with LAPD about evacuation procedures needs to be addressed between LAPD and the Bel Air Crest Command Staff.

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## Lessons learned:

All residents need to have emergency supplies for both earthquake and fire. For fire emergencies, residents need to be better prepared with a "Ready, Set, Go" action plan. When our City is under Red Flag Weather conditions, Bel Air Crest residents need to have evacuation supplies and plans at the ready.

- **Ready** – *Pre-assemble supplies and prepare lists of things you need to take during an evacuation. Consider cash, medications, important papers, clothing items, phone chargers, computers, and food for pets. Check exclusions on your residential dwelling insurance, especially brush fire exclusions. Make sure you have sufficient coverage for fire protection to your home and valuables. Arrange where you will stay in case of evacuation. Have a contact person out of the area to pass information. Consider purchasing masks and goggles to protect you against smoke and debris in the air. Sign up for the City of Los Angeles notification system at <http://emergency.lacity.org/notifyla>*
- **Set** – *Have your vehicle in the driveway facing the street and load it with everything you need to take. Move burnable furniture and items away from around your house. Home awnings should be retracted and patio umbrellas should be closed to prevent embers from igniting them. Gates should be open to allow ingress to your home areas. Monitor the news, watch for the BAC Emergency Broadcast System call and make sure you have the contact in your phone so you recognize the on screen number. Call for updates using the BAC Emergency Update Line.*
- **Go** – *The latest information suggests that you should not be told to evacuate but consider leaving early. Firefighters appreciate the room to protect your property.*

We had a number of residents drive to fire locations blocking evacuation routes and impeding firefighting efforts. ***"Lookie-loos" endanger the entire community and cannot be tolerated. Unless you are on an emergency team, stay indoors until you evacuate the premises.***

During any emergency, response personnel often confront confusing and conflicting information about the current status of the incident. The Command Center did an outstanding job in getting the information on-hand out to residents.

The Emergency Preparedness Team has discussed a number of suggestions to improve our community readiness for the next fire emergency. We will promulgate additional guidance to our community to make sure we are as prepared as possible for any emergency.

<b>LAFD ACS UNIT LOG</b>		1. Incident Name Skirball Brush Fire	2. Date Prepared 12/11/17	3. Time Prepared 1058
4. Unit Name/Designators <b>Hillside Emergency Net</b>		5. Unit Leader (Name and Position) Dan Tomlinson (NR6V), ComL		6. Operational Period 12/6/2017 0630-1830
10. Radio Channel Assignments				
#1	ACS-03	Operations	#3	
#2	ACS-01	Back-up	#4	
7. Personnel Roster Assigned				
Name		ICS Position		Home Base
Dan Tomlinson		Com-L		ACS Battalion 10
Bill Coss		Rado		ACS Battalion 14
Tom Rosholt		Rado		ACS Battalion 10
Jonathan Zimmerman		Rado		ACS Battalion 14
Deborah Okoniewski		Rado		ACS Battalion 10
8. Activity Log				
Time	Major Events			
<p>Background: For the past few years, ACS Member Michael Schlenker, a resident of Bel Air Crest, has been organizing his and several adjacent neighborhoods in preparation for a brush fire or other disaster. Schlenker has encouraged neighbors to earn their amateur radio licenses and ACS provided a training class to that end. Schlenker created the Hillside Communities Net which operates each Saturday morning to provide practice for amateur radio operators in the Bel Air, Brentwood, and adjacent areas.</p> <p>On 12-6-2017 the Skirball Brush Fire immediately affected Schlenker's and adjacent neighborhoods. At about 0615-hours, ACS Member Dan Tomlinson awoke to the news of the Skirball fire and, being aware of the Hillside Net, turned into the ACS-3 repeater to "open" the Hillside Communities Net to see if there were stations monitoring. Immediately, area residents checked-in. For the next 12-hours, ACS members continued the Net, providing up-to-date, vetted information and obtaining first-hand information from the residents.</p>				
0630	Tomlinson "Opens" Hillside Communities Emergency Net from home; Check-in's begin			
0715	KD6BAC reports receiving text from EMD; Mandatory Evacuations Mulholland North, Sunset South, 405 West, Roscomare East			
0915	KM6NAF advises per neighbor, Mandatory Evacuations Mandeville Canyon			
0920	Tomlinson confirms with EMD, Only Mandatory Evacuations are as announced at 0715; Prepare to evacuate order given to Mountaingate & Mandeville and adjacent canyons			
0940	KTLA TV reports Bel Air Crest removed from mandatory evacuation list.			
0945	Coss takes over Net Control for approximately 30-minutes			
1025	Tomlinson resumes Net Control			
1030	KD6BAC advises that per LAPD, Bel Air Crest back on mandatory evacuation list			
1130	Net traffic minimal; Net Control moves to Comms Trailer 88 (Coss, Rosholt, Zimmerman, Okoniewski)			
1830	Hillside Emergency Net Closed; ACS Members Depart Comms Trailer 88			
9. Prepared By (Name and Position) Dan Tomlinson, NR6V ACS ComL 10 & 17				