

The Rancho Palos Verdes Incidents of 2009

PVARC members respond to nighttime Peninsula brush fire and evacuation

By Diana Feinberg, AI6DF

A fast-moving brush fire in Rancho Palos Verdes and Rolling Hills (designated the "PV Incident") during the night of August 27-28, 2009, burned 230 acres and resulted in evacuating 1,200 people from their homes. Numerous amateur operators that night either checked-in to PVARC's K6PV repeater with reports or, if they were a Los Angeles County Disaster Communication Service member, put on their uniforms in response to an activation from the Lomita Sheriff's station.

Dale Hanks, N6NNW and City Radio Officer for Rancho Palos Verdes, activated the RPV emergency communication center shortly after the fire erupted at 8:05 pm and did a fine job serving as net control using the K6PV repeater. Numerous PVARC members (and PVAN members) checked in with reports and comments during the next two hours and beyond.

As the incidents scale grew, the Lomita Sheriff's station activated its DCS unit at 10:15 p.m. on August 27. I advised the DCS members monitoring K6PV to report to a Sheriff's command post at the Promenade shopping center in Rolling Hills Estates. (Our DCS district includes all four cities on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, plus Lomita, Torrance, Redondo Beach, and Hermosa Beach.) It's important to note that DCS members may not "activate" themselves--we are directed by the Sheriff's Department and must await an official activation from either our local Sheriff's station or the County Emergency Operations Bureau.

This was a localized incident on a week-night (not a widespread "earthquake"), so we did not need all our members to respond immediately. DCS members with weekday jobs would be



Photo courtesy of Betty Reidman

deployed starting late Friday afternoon if the incident continued into the weekend. But an initial team of six uniformed DCS members reported to the Sheriff's command post including PVARC members Bob Closson, W6HIP; Matthew Cruse, N6MDC, and Nigel Keep, W6NBK, as well as myself. Deane Bouvier, N5DQ from Torrance who is deputy leader of Lomita DCS, had begun operating the Lomita Sheriff's station DCS radio room while Dale Hanks, also a DCS member, continued operating from the RPV ECC.

After the remaining Sheriff's volunteers at the command post had been assigned to the Red Cross evacuation center at Peninsula High School, two DCS members were sent from the command post to block through-traffic at Palos Verdes Drives North and East near the reservoir for the next three hours.

The Sheriff's and Fire Department command posts combined at St. John Fisher Church around 1:00 a.m. after the flames were largely extinguished thanks to an aggressive fire attack. The County Fire Department then asked that a DCS member be sent to Ladera Linda Park near the eastern edge of the fire zone to report weather conditions via amateur radio to the

command post every 15 minutes.

The fire battalion chief was interested in receiving temperature, wind, humidity, and any new signs of "glowing" or smoke visible from that area. A DCS member from Hermosa Beach handled this assignment initially. DCS and PVARC member Denzel Dyer, KG6QWJ, as well as another DCS member from RPV were assigned to report these weather conditions to the command post during the daylight hours.

Lomita station DCS deactivated from the "PV Incident" at 1:35 pm Friday as events scaled down and fire vehicles were being re-deployed to the much-larger Station fire in the San Gabriel Mountains.

We were pleased to help, but this real-world incident was also extremely beneficial for enhancing our future disaster communication capabilities on the Peninsula and elsewhere. Our participation at the incident command post also provided an excellent interface with first responders, when needed. That's one of the reasons why we are required to wear uniforms. Finally, although the K6PV repeater is normally dedicated to PVAN during a major disaster, DCS and I greatly thank the Palos Verdes Amateur Radio Club for the use of its repeater during this "PV Incident".



Photo courtesy of Betty Reidman

The Fire Department Makes Short work of the Crenshaw Blvd fire.



Photos Courtesy of Herb Epp (the fire came a little too close to his place.)