



## COMMUNITY ALERT NOT IF, BUT WHEN WITH TED ADAMS AND MIKE WILLIAMS

### California Fire Safe Council Community Alert Grant 18-SMG-SFA 122339

At 11:57 a.m. on 5 June 2004, the Gaviota Fire erupted some 15 miles west of Santa Barbara along the coastline in the historic Gaviota Pass. From the chaotic onset, the fire burned aggressively on both sides of the US-101 freeway, quickly becoming two separate and distinct fires which then burned in opposite directions. The 101 freeway which traversed the fire was closed for days, resulting in a profound impact on the San Marcos Pass community, including injury traffic collisions, vehicle fires and extraordinary traffic congestion. The major freeway artery was transferred to SR-154, a two-lane mountain roadway with history dating back to the stagecoach era.

Local, state, and federal suppression resources included 14 helicopters, 46 engines, 11 dozers, 4 water tenders, 1,370 fire and contract personnel, and 20 crews. In total, 7,440 acres burned, four structures were destroyed, and the fire fight resulted in 44 confirmed injuries to fire personnel and civilians.

Because of the fire's impact on the community, coupled with a total failure of reliable public information during the entire incident, the public information officer (PIO) group *Emergency Public Information Communicators* (EPIC) was formed by recently retired Santa Barbara County Fire Captain and PIO Charlie Johnson and Wildland Residents Association, San Marcos Pass Volunteer Fire Department President-Executive Director Michael S. Williams.

EPIC grew quickly to more than one hundred PIOs from various public safety agencies, school districts, special districts, various non-governmental agencies (NGOs), and media representatives. EPIC provided advanced training, resource coordination, and support throughout the Santa Barbara County Operational Area.



In addition to EPIC, the Wildland Residents Association, San Marcos Pass Volunteer Fire Department installed a traffic advisory AM radio station on 1040 AM. Known as the *San Marcos Pass Emergency Radio System* (SMPERS AM-1040), the station has provided local emergency and weather information 24/7 since 11 April 2005. Ultimately, the station became the model for Santa Barbara County to build a network of low-power AM stations throughout the county to provide emergency information county wide

SMPERS was so successful in providing reliable information that community members wanted to extend its use by developing a talk show to discuss local issues. However, this would not only be in violation of FCC regulations, there was no sustainable way to produce any type of program with suitable production values.

From this local desire for more information about emergency planning, *Community Alert - Not If, But When* was born. A demonstration show was recorded with Ted Adams, Mike Williams, EPIC Chair Charlie Johnson, and local American Red Cross Director Janet Stanley, and presented for consideration to Ampersand Broadcasting, the owners of KZSB – AM 1290. The show concept was accepted, with the first hour-long program airing on 20 September 2008. The program was initially sponsored with funding from the *Orfaea Foundation, Aware & Prepare Initiative*.

Over the following 13 plus years, *Community Alert* has been primarily sponsored by the California Fire Safe Council, producing 52 live shows a year. Hosted by Ted Adams and Mike Williams, program guests have included Fire Safe Council members, former California state fire marshals, a U.S. Fire Administration Superintendent, various fire chiefs, wildland fire experts, attorneys, community members, politicians, emergency services managers, and community members.

On September 28<sup>th</sup> 2021, *Community Alert* celebrated its 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary of continuous broadcasting on KZSB – AM 1290 & FM 96.9. This year the anniversary show featured the original funder, Barbara Andersen of Aware & Prepare. To date, more than 680 specific one-hour *Community Alert* programs have been produced, dedicated to public education, prevention, and risk management.

Currently sponsored by the Wildland Residents Association and the Fire Services Training Institute, *Community Alert* broadcasts live on Tuesdays at 11:00 a.m., rebroadcasting Tuesday night at 9:00 p.m., Wednesday morning at 5:00 a.m. and Saturday afternoon at 1:00 p.m. on terrestrial radio and several Internet-based forums. All previous programs are available at the WRA website at no charge..

Pictured in the KZSB studios, *Community Alert* Co-host Ted Adams, Program Engineer Richard Dugan, Ampersand Broadcasting Station Owner Wendy McCaw, and Co-host Mike Williams pause briefly from 19 hours of uninterrupted broadcasting during the Jesusita Fire on 5 May 2009.

