

Avila Valley Advisory Council

San Luis Obispo County, California

P.O. Box 65

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Date: February 11, 2024

To: San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors

Subject: Fire Safety and Evacuation in Avila Valley

Honorable Supervisors,

With each fire related disaster and the ensuing devastation in our national spotlight whether it is Paradise, Lahaina and now Southern California, local awareness of our similar circumstances is heightened, as are our concerns for safety. We appreciate the efforts of our Supervisor Dawn Ortiz-Legg and all county agencies that participated in two separate town hall meetings in 2024 to inform us regarding the roles and protocol of personnel involved in emergency responses and we commend their commitment to the safety of our residents. With that said, we feel there is still much more that needs to be done to ensure the safety of Avila Valley residents.

Our County Office of Emergency Systems has done a fine job in setting up alert systems and coordinating these systems with all agencies involved. However, the lack of adequate cellular coverage in all areas will be a great detriment to residents receiving those alerts. This situation was highlighted during the January 2023 floods when power was out for nearly 2 days. Without power already poor cellular coverage was non-existent. AVAC has addressed this situation at meetings several times since then and zero progress has been made towards improving these conditions.

The majority of the streets and roads in Avila Valley residential areas are narrow, hilly and/or dead-ends where traffic jams readily occur even when there is not an emergency. There have been many instances when our residents have not been able to exit to Highway 101 or the beach due to the high volume of regular summer weekend traffic from tourists and event attendees. Gridlock clearly happened during the Avila Fire, June 2020, and the area was not even under an evacuation order. The chaos that ensued did not inspire confidence that emergency responders would have been able to get to our area had the winds changed and brought the fire northeast or if another ignition occurred simultaneously within our area.

It is not enough to put the burden on Avila Valley homeowners to take measures to protect our lives and property. Yes, home-hardening, knowing evacuation routes, possessing Go-Bags, signing up for cell phone emergency alerts, etc. will help and we take that seriously. However, if safety is the truly the #1 priority for the county and agencies, then you, **our Supervisors**, must do more:

- Continue to provide a firebreak for our communities.
- Hire more emergency responders to provide additional boots on the ground.
- Run drills that assume the worst road conditions that prove emergency responders will be able to reach all critical areas and perform their duties.
- Provide full cellular coverage for all residential areas of Avila Valley including the canyon areas that currently have limited or no service.
- Build a true public second road. With over 2,000 residents the loss of just one life would certainly justify the cost and the potential of more lives lost and immense property damage even more so.
- It would be wholly irresponsible to approve any extensive residential or commercial development in the urban wild land interface while these deficiencies still exist.

Once again, we commend our emergency responders and local county agencies for the outstanding job they have done in past situations to keep us safe. They are our heroes. We want the next inevitable disaster in our area to be a success story for them and for our residents not a tragedy.

Thank you,

Denise Allen

AVAC Chairperson