**Woolsey Fire (November 9-14, 2018)**

On Thursday morning, November 8, 2018, there was a high pressure system inland which causes the dreaded east (or Santa Ana) hot wind off of the desert towards the ocean. At about ~4:00 PM, the city manager of Calabasas issued a phone call to all residents pointing out that there was a large fire of 1000 acres, north of the city of Calabasas and that it was predicted to spread to Calabasas. At ~7:00 PM, there was another phone call stating that the fire was now 2000 acres and areas North of the 101 Freeway should be evacuated due to the fast moving fire. All schools in the Las Virgenes school district that includes both Agoura and Calabasas would be closed on Friday (good move).

On Friday, November 9, at ~7:00 AM, the power from Southern California Edison went off. Our phone service, internet, and television (all supplied by Charter) became non-existent. I looked out the North facing window to see fire along the ridge of the mountains about 10 miles (16 kilometers) away and large columns of black smoke from a point directly north to a point directly west. The prevailing wind direction in that location during the Santa Ana conditions is from north to south. It sure looked like the fire would progress rapidly straight down Malibu Canyon past the Ventura Freeway (101), through Malibu Creek State Park, to the ocean. That is exactly what happened.

On Friday morning, I inquired about freezer space among the people that were close. Cirilo said he had a better idea and showed up with a gas powered generator. The two outlets on the generator were hooked up to: **1.** our refrigerator, with all the frozen ocean fish that we were trying to save. **2.** the playhouse, and then up the hill to our neighbor’s refrigerator in their kitchen. They also appreciated the multiple outlet that let them charge up their cell phones. The only disadvantage is that we only had a 2 gallon plastic gas container that had to be filled every 6 hours. The generator gas tank capacity was 4 gallons, so we got a 5 gallon container for future use. On Friday, I had to go to the dermatologist in West Hills which was near an evacuation zone. There were not many people there. I drove around the streets that were just outside the fire area and there did not seem to be any problems at that time. However, on Friday evening, the wind shifted and I noticed from several fires in that area from my backyard. The Ventura Freeway (101) was closed between Valley Circle and Thousand Oaks.

On Saturday morning, there was a large amount of smoke heading south from the fire zone. There were reports of scattered fires in Malibu, Agoura, Westlake Village, and Oak Park. The news reported about 170 structures lost. Meanwhile, up north, the town of Paradise was completely wiped out with 7000 structures lost. The usual gentle onshore wind had returned, and the air was smoky. At noon, the electricity returned. I turned off the generator, and disconnected the extension cord to the refrigerator. Life returned to normal with the exception of phone, internet, and television service that used to be provided by Charter Communications. Chris went off to work, while Louis cleaned the gutters and got rid of some of the clutter in the yard. The proposed activity for Chris was from the Conejo Ski and Sports Club: “Hike the new Sapwi Trails Park!”. The invitation said “(rain cancels)”. It should have been obvious to everyone that (fire/smoke cancels). The previous week has been really difficult for Conejo Valley residents. Thousand Oaks used to be one of the safest cities with a population of over 100,000 in the country. The Borderline Bar and Grill event was a big shock. Here!?

On Sunday, we found that the Mulholland Heights neighborhood that we overlook to our east was a mandatory evacuation zone. That area was separate from the main evacuation zone, and the nearest house there is only 200 meters away. There were deputies blocking Mulholland Highway near Gelson’s Market so Chris had to detour around Liberty Bell streets in order to sneak back home. I have no idea why that neighborhood was declared a mandatory evacuation zone, but it still looks like many residents are still there. Some parts of the other evacuation zones just do not make any sense at all. Many residents are not leaving, because if they do, they may have trouble returning through the blockades. The Las Virgenes School District elementary, junior, and high schools remain closed.

On Monday, we awoke to clear skies with no wind. There was no newspaper. Some wind was predicted during the day. Chris got nervous and packed up a suitcase with valuable papers and some clothing items. She then left it at home and went to work since she has a critical project right now. We still had electricity and water, but Charter still had not provided internet, phone, and television. The entire city of Calabasas had been declared an evacuation zone. You could leave, but you could not come back. I received phone calls from Emily and Ken asking why I had not evacuated. I think that both these people should get jobs so they can get paid for worrying about the problems of others.

The wind became moderate with clear blue skies and not a hint of fire anywhere. Emily assured me that there were problems in Old Topanga, and I agreed if I lived there, I would have evacuated due to the lack of clear routes to safety. That town was supposed to be evacuated last Friday anyway. I certainly did not understand why all of Calabasas was in an evacuation zone without any immediate risk factors. Most of the neighbors are still here, judging from illuminated houses at night and cars in the driveway. The trash trucks came by as usual on Monday to pick up the blue(regular), black(recycle), and green(yard waste) barrels. Homes in Los Angeles City directly adjacent to Calabasas were not in an evacuation zone and they did not lose their electricity provided by the Department of Water and Power.

Now what? When will the government admit their mistake and let residents back into their homes? The day continued with not a trace of an environmental problem. To pass the time, I wrote about uncomfortable events that occurred around the year 2005. I cleaned up the attic from the outdated clothing that had accumulated there over the years. I placed containers of water around the pool cover as an anchor to prevent the light plastic cover from blowing away in the rising wind. In the Santa Ana wind situation, the wind always approaches my property from the northwest where there are many houses and no brush. I would be concerned if there was a south wind containing smoke across the hills from the Old Topanga town site, where there is a lot of unoccupied territory (Edelman Park) with a thick brush accumulation. The burning embers might then cause problems where they landed.

There were reports that the 118 Freeway was closed over the hill to Simi Valley. That is close to where the “Woolsey Fire” started on Thursday. There was also another fire on Thursday near the 118 and Santa Rosa Road called the “Hill Fire”. That one burned very quickly southward toward Point Mugu State Park and the ocean. Students at the California State University, Channel Islands, near Camarillo were evacuated. Apparently, an arsonist went along the roads north of Thousand Oaks, setting fires along the way where there was brush available. Santa Ana wind conditions in Southern California are dangerous enough without someone deliberately trying to cause firestorms. The City of Calabasas may have been concerned, with the upcoming Santa Ana conditions, that more fires would be set. It is now Monday evening; it is dark outside; most houses in the mandatory evacuation area that I can see have lights on. I am not sure anymore what “mandatory evacuation” means. I suppose if a fireman knocks on your door and says “get out now”, that would be a signal to leave. The wind has subsided; there is supposed to be more wind tomorrow during the day. Chris went around the barricades and came back home. There are deputies around, but the enforcement seems to be just observing cars.

On Tuesday morning, it is cold and calm. If we could only get the Charter service back, life would return to normal. Maybe, normal is only in my imagination; the reality has changed. Violence of some forms seems to be increasing in the United States (or is it just more publicized). President Trump is not helping with his campaign against immigrants. That reminds me of our society historically blaming Blacks, Jews, Japanese, North Koreans, Vietnamese, Russians, Muslims, and Chinese for our problems.

The deputies are back; they are really blocking all the streets now. They claim that there is a fire one mile (1500 meters) from here, but there is still no evidence. No one is being allowed to enter the area. Chris had to leave for work anyway. I wonder how many homes in Calabasas were actually destroyed by the fire except for a small area north of the Ventura Freeway on Las Virgenes Road on Friday. The northwest wind increased during the day but still not a trace of smoke anywhere within visibility, which is 40 kilometers to the northwest. Louis is still at home trapped, unable to return if he leaves.

It is Tuesday afternoon at 3PM. The City of Calabasas has declared most regions of the city to be available, but not the Mulholland Heights area where we live. The Calabasas City Manager should be immediately dismissed. The residents of Calabasas have been under a mandatory evacuation order. The purpose of evacuation is unknown. There were no visible fires and no prospects of conflagration. Many people decided that they would be safer just staying home. The sheriff deputies were brought in to prevent people from returning to their homes. They could leave, but then they could not get back. The situation did not make any sense. The only known action available to me, as a resident, is to vote against the city council members that appointed the City Manager. I would hope that other avenues of protest will become available. Charter Communications will probably claim they could not get into Calabasas as an excuse for not fixing their service, which is still non-existent. The newspaper could not be delivered. How was I supposed to understand what is going on without the mail, newspaper, internet, phone, or television? At least Southern California Edison has maintained electric power.

I am looking for ways to prevent such arbitrary government interference. Such actions seem like in the book *1984:* “Big Brother”. The good thing is that a mandatory evacuation is not mandatory. Some people really have nowhere to go! I regard shelters (where were they anyway?) as inadequate and inhumane. At 9 PM, Chris finds that for the first time, there is no way to drive home. She is walking from an accessible area in Mulwood where she parked her car. She walked along a dark area with no street lights and escaped notice. I drove down Eddingham to pick her up. One other car attempted to leave, looked at the police car at the bottom, and then turned around. Most of the houses appear to have lights in the living area. There are occasional patrols along the fire road on top of the ridge which can be seen from the house. Next time, even if there is real danger, people are unlikely to leave.

It is now Wednesday morning; I wish I knew what is going on. We are still under siege by the police. My guess is that the fire department is concerned about a fire coming into this area from the south over the ridge separating us from Edelman Park. This can only happen if there is a strong onshore air flow and there is already brush ignited in that area. However, there is no trace of smoke in any direction; the sky is clear and there is a slight wind from the northwest. Louis will drive Chris down to the barricade; she will walk two blocks to her car and go to work. Oh well, another day trapped. There might even be fewer people in the area without the police block. We can last here for another month.

I have been informed that I missed the following policy changes from the sheriff department. How are people without any news connectivity supposed to know that this happened?

!! …10 AM News flash: residents who can show proof that they live in this neighborhood are allowed to return…!! !!...4 PM News flash: blockade is gone. Mail service restored…!! Well, almost normal, there is still no Charter service. Malibu probably has their priority? All Las Virgenes schools are closed until the Monday after Thanksgiving, November 26, due to something about cleanup. I wonder when they will reschedule the Calabasas High play: *Auntie Mame*.

Louis attempted to attend the Calabasas City Council meeting on 2nd Wednesday night of the month at 7 PM. Eventually, I found that it had been cancelled. Maybe they did not want to see the citizen response. For people who have to make important choices, good decisions are the criteria, not the effort amount. President Truman had a sign on his desk: “The buck stops here.” In Calabasas, the position of city manager is appointed by the elected city council; they need to make a change. During the fire, the initial response from the city was inadequate, and the later decisions were inappropriate. Poor choices should have consequences. Besides, the City Manager should have little credibility left among the citizens of Calabasas. I do not want to get another phone call from the City Manager telling me to go vote or other less relevant information. I wonder if comments from the spectators during a city council meeting about something that is not on the agenda are allowed. Then I wonder how to get something on the agenda. My experience with civic meetings is that the agenda is tightly controlled, so issues are restricted. How is injustice or incompetence addressed?

It is now Sunday, November 18. Some Malibu residents are still evacuated. Over 1000 structures lost.