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Officials Urge Preparedness at Wildfire Drill Recap Town Hall

Virginia City Highlands, Nev. — Storey County officials urged residents to strengthen wildfire preparedness during a Town Hall Thursday evening at the Virginia City Highlands Community Center, following the June 14 wildfire evacuation drill.

The Town Hall, hosted by Storey County Emergency Management along with the Sheriff's Office and Fire Protection District, focused on lessons learned from the drill and next steps to improve response plans.

"Prepare now — it's not a matter of if, but when," said Adam Wilson, Storey County Emergency Management Director. "Our goal is to make sure everyone is ready before the next wildfire event."

Officials reminded residents of key steps they can take now:

- [Sign up for emergency alerts through Smart911](#)
- Pack a **go-bag** in advance
- Know **evacuation routes**
- Have a **destination and plan** in place

Wilson also clarified that Storey County does not use ribbons or any similar system to indicate whether a resident is home during an evacuation. Wilson explained that placing a ribbon could take time away from residents during an emergency.

"We would not use ribbons for any type of alert or evacuation system," Wilson said. "All emergency notifications are handled through official channels like Smart911 and county communications."

Officials noted strong agency participation in the June 14 drill, which included the Nevada Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, Truckee Meadows Fire, North Tahoe Fire, the Bureau of Land Management, NV Energy, Nevada Department of Transportation, and others. About 50 residents also took part in the evacuation exercise.

“We had tremendous support from our partner agencies and only a few dozen residents in the drill. Next time, we’d love to see even more community engagement, because preparedness only works when everyone is involved,” Wilson added.

Storey County Fire Chief Jeremy Loncar thanked community members who participated and encouraged them to share the experience with neighbors.

“We need these drills to find our weaknesses,” Loncar said. “It was good to get all our participating agencies in the room. This exercise helped identify areas for improvement. It’s been a long time since we’ve done a drill in the Highlands, and we want to thank the residents and partners who participated.”

Wildland Battalion Chief Chris Barton explained the simulation table used during the drill to evaluate how a wildfire could impact the Virginia City Highlands.

“We set it up as a typical summer day,” Barton said. “It ran with no suppression element applied. We wanted to see where it might hit and work with law enforcement to assess impacts on residents.”

He added, “Slow is smooth, smooth is quick. Don’t panic; it makes it harder to get resources in. Just keep that in mind if that does happen.”

Storey County Sheriff Mike Cullen emphasized the speed of the simulated wildfire and the importance of preparedness.

“Even with a coordinated and scheduled exercise with many players, issues arose. Imagine if this happened during a real workday,” Sheriff Cullen said. “It’s going to move very quickly, and the Sheriff’s Office is going to be behind it, trying to get ahead of it. Learn from this, tell your neighbors to be prepared, and participate in these drills. Have a go-bag and keep it updated every few months. Everyone here at the county is working to save lives, and these scenarios are critical for preparedness.”

County Manager Austin Osborne highlighted the county’s role in supporting operations.

“It’s the county’s job to provide background support in public works and communications. Follow us on social media (@storeycounty) and sign up for Smart911 alerts to get information immediately as it becomes available,” Osborne said.

Future drills are planned in all areas of the county to ensure continued readiness for all residents. More information on wildfire preparedness is available at storeyfire.org/fire-prevention/public-education.php.

Participating Agencies:

Nevada Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, Storey County Fire Protection District, Storey County Volunteer Fire Department, Storey County Sheriff's Office, Storey County Public Works, Storey County Jeep Posse Search & Rescue, Storey County Health & Community Services, Storey County Manager's Office, Bureau of Land Management, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, North Tahoe Fire Protection District, Nevada Department of Transportation, NV Energy, and Living With Fire.

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About Storey County:

Nestled in the mountains of Western Nevada, Storey County is a historic region renowned for its rich mining heritage, vibrant community, and progressive approach to economic development. Home to the iconic Virginia City, the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center (TRI-Center), and a thriving business environment, Storey County blends its historical legacy with a forward-looking vision for the future. The county government is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for its residents through effective public services, public safety initiatives, and economic growth strategies. With a commitment to community well-being, Storey County ensures that both its rural and industrial areas prosper while preserving their unique character.