

[How Napa County is overcoming sense of uncertainty after the October 2017 wildfires](#)

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So many people living in the North Bay counties of Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino had their lives changed one year ago. Our friends and neighbors in Lake County had endured an unprecedented firestorm two years earlier in their area; the October 2017 fires were a repeat of that, times four.

For me, dealing with disaster recovery had been a personal focus since 2008, when ABAG Association of Bay Area Governments) began an intense focus on all things related to long-term disaster recovery in anticipation of the 20-year anniversary of the Loma Prieta earthquake and the next major earthquake, which we all know could happen any day.

Since last October, that personal focus has changed. Why? Because notwithstanding all that I had previously learned about the aftermath of Loma Prieta via the ABAG work and engaging with folks from Santa Cruz, what I experienced last October opened my eyes to a different kind of work that needed to be done.

Our county OES (Office of Emergency Services) was very well organized and responded well last year. But until the actual event occurs, you just don't know what you don't know. And we learned a lot about what we did not know. We did not know we were going to be doing press conferences with worldwide press attendance every morning — so we learned how to do that on the fly. We did not know we would need to take the list of every burned property and, in a very short timeframe, determine how to communicate one-on-one with every affected property owner about their burned property rights and responsibilities.

Those two items are symbolic of the communication demands that the public has, as well as the communication demands placed on local government. So, focusing before the disaster on how better to communicate during the disaster has become one primary concern of mine. We must have improved communication plans and systems around disaster events.

The daunting enormity of the rebuilding situation caused me to have a new view about insurance. I learned how better educated all homeowners should be about it before the disaster. I'm grateful to a fire-

victim friend who alerted me to United Policyholders and its great work, so I could bring their educational and informative programs to Napa.

The fabulous response of our state and federal partners — CalOES and FEMA Federal Emergency Management Agency) — was gratifying and, frankly, beyond my expectations in terms of the personal commitment that I witnessed from the individuals that serve in those organizations. They really care, and it shows.

Having experienced locally what we all did in the last year ... imagine responding to that month in and month out for decades. They are truly dedicated, and I'm grateful that we have them in our governmental system of service.

All this points to my second new primary concern: to help citizens prepare for future emergencies.

Defensible space, a 72-hour emergency supply kit, neighborhood support teams — all and more) are essential to our resiliency as a community.

The objective of building a culture of preparedness in our community has moved to the forefront of my concerns because, without it, response to the disaster will be that much more difficult and draining on local government. We cannot sufficiently perform all our “regular” government functions — the work of maintaining public infrastructure, the criminal justice system, provision of health services, and addressing the special concerns of the elderly and our children.

Personally, even though I live in a city rather than a wildland area, what we all saw happen in Santa Rosa has left an indelible uncertainty about our safety from a firestorm like we saw a year ago. We all go about our daily lives with a little less confidence about the permanence of our built community as we know it. But rather than lament, it is better to move forward, and so I have thrown myself into the efforts in the past year at the legislature, at the regulatory agencies, and in the areas I represent to do whatever we can to never have a repeat of what we had last year. I am grateful for the opportunity to do that work to build stronger communities for all of us.