



**OFFICERS**

*President:* Kurt Cabrera-Miller  
*Vice President of Administration:* Christian Rubalcava  
*Vice President of Communications:* Maria Silva  
*Treasurer:* George Ortega  
*Secretary:* Marti Marshall

February 1, 2018

Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez, CD7  
Los Angeles City Council  
200 North Spring Street  
Los Angeles, California 90012

Re: Homeless Encampments in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones

Dear Councilwoman Rodriguez:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Public Safety Committee for the Sylmar Neighborhood Council to convey a recommendation discussed and approved by our Committee on December 19, 2017 that we believe is critically important for the safety of our community members. Our Board discussed and approved our Committee's position on January 25, 2018 by a vote of (19) Yea, (0) Nay and (0) Abstain.

Over the course of the past 15 months or so, Sylmar has experienced several fires that appear to have originated from camping/cooking stoves or other illegal sources of fire in homeless encampments, as well as intentional acts by individuals. Businesses, residents, and homeless have been threatened countless times, particularly in areas of Sylmar mapped as Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ). This is not an issue that is unique to Sylmar, as we are also aware of several fires with similar causation in the Sunland-Tujunga area and, most notably, the Skirball area. During our December 19<sup>th</sup> Committee meeting, we proposed that a multi-agency, cross-jurisdictional Task Force be created to regularly inspect and enforce a zero-tolerance policy for unlawful camping, illegal burning and trespassing in areas designated as VHFHSZs. Our community has long struggled with obtaining assistance with proactively removing encampments in these high risk areas.

As you know, Sylmar is at great risk for fires along our hillsides, is prone to extremely high winds, and has experienced several significant wildfires over the past few years (Marek, Sayre & Creek wildfires). The Skirball Fire in early December very publically highlighted the dangers that encampments pose to surrounding communities. Attached is a sampling of incidents that have occurred in Sylmar over the past 15+ months that have not garnered the same level of attention as the Skirball fire, but have nonetheless threatened our community.

We were pleased to see the announcement by Mayor Garcetti on January 5, 2018 regarding the creation of a Task Force that also appears to include connecting the homeless individuals affected by any such displacement with necessary resources and assistance. However, due the fact that many of the problem areas in Sylmar are also directly adjacent to County or Federal land, we ask that this Task Force be a cross-jurisdictional one. Particularly in

Councilwoman Rodriguez  
February 1, 2018  
Page 2 of 2

the area of the Pacoima Wash, we have experienced multiple incidents in which encampments moved from City to County to Federal lands, and our residents found it virtually impossible to obtain assistance with their removal. This specific area, as well as others areas along our hillsides, are mapped as VHFHSZs. We are aware of at least three fires that are related to encampments and/or illegally trespassing on these lands, so a multi-agency and coordinated effort is key.

Previously, we have inquired through your office as to where the 311 reports of encampments are directed, but this remains unanswered. A recent Daily News article indicated that reports should be directed to LAFD's Brush Clearance unit. We ask that you assist us with clarifying the process of reporting encampments along with the available enforcement mechanisms so that we may assist you through our work in the community.

We would also be pleased to have someone from your office attend our Public Safety Committee meetings on a regular or semi-regular basis. These meetings occur on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month at 6:30 PM.

Thank you for your work on behalf of our community and in advance for supporting this request. We stand ready to partner with you in moving this issue forward.

Sincerely,



Diane Valencia  
Chair, Public Safety Committee

cc: Mayor Eric Garcetti  
Mitch Englander – Chair, Los Angeles City Council Public Safety Committee  
Mike Feuer, Los Angeles City Attorney  
Trevor Richmond - Deputy Chief, Los Angeles Fire Department, Operations Valley Bureau  
John A. Sherman - Deputy Chief, Los Angeles Police Department, Operations Valley Bureau

**December 11, 2017** – reported by resident on [Nextdoor.com](#)

**Possible Fire Averted Behind Olive View Medical Center**

I didn't really feel like hiking today; it was windy, and cleaning up the ash & dirt in some of the 40+ properties we manage has been quite a workout. So I'm heading home and so is the Sun, and you know how pretty the mountains get with those last 10 minutes of daylight, and I love watching the sunsets from up there, so I'm passing Olive View Hospital, and I decide I can do a quick loop around the road where the trucks go up into the hills and get back to my van before it's totally dark. So I head out, walking briskly and I'm glad to be getting some exercise, and as I make a turn on that road up there, something pulled my attention in the distance: something glowing inside one of the abandoned buildings behind the hospital -- on the East side, near the Hartland Homes. I stopped to look carefully, and there was no doubt there were embers and flames inside the small building. I couldn't see anyone inside, but my assumption was somebody must be there, looking to settle for the night. I thought about going to the building and confronting them, and making sure the fire was put out. Then I thought, that could easily go sideways in many ways, and maybe make things worse. So I ran back to my vehicle, and by now I'm really getting that workout, and I'm thinking, there are always Sheriff and patrol cars around the hospital, I'll find one and show them where the issue is. And I did. To make an already-too-long story short(er), they went up, put the fire completely out, and then came back down to get a statement from me. Thank you, Officer Stewart, your partner whose name I'm sorry I don't remember, and the OV Security Dispatcher, Officer Martinez! They told me that from the way things looked, whoever started the fire was no longer there, and it appeared that he or she had left some time ago, and left the fire burning unattended -- and with gusting winds all around. What were they thinking?! They also told me there are "many" transients who take up refuge wherever they can, up in areas like that, and that they are always on the alert for issues like this. -----  
----- This evening, I lift up my hands and praise God, and give thanks to Him for His protection and His presence in our lives. All of you who agree, say Amen! See more...

23h ago · 18 neighborhoods in [General](#)  
Thank  
Reply



November 26, 2017

## **LAFD put out fire at Arroyo Business Corridor - Homeless woman's encampment near Sylmar armory**

This morning at 6:21 am, the LAFD was called by a security guard at Anthony Manufacturing (12400 Gladstone) as a homeless woman's encampment was on fire. She is going through her charred remnants this morning which is on the road leading up to the Sylmar Armory - soon to be the Women's Bridge Housing facility. This is the woman that I told you about a week or two ago. I had called LA Family Housing - Jaime Ruiz / Sylmar's navigator - to assist her. A photo coming soon. If not for the security guard's quick response and call to LAFD, there's no telling how much damage could have been done to nearby businesses. And nature blessed us with only 5 - 10 MPH winds this morning. The homeless woman is fine.





Edited 26 Nov · 14 neighborhoods in [General](#)

[Thank](#)

[Reply](#)

8 Thanks · [4 Replies](#)

[Elsa Mendoza](#), Gladstone · 26 Nov

Not to mention all the dry brush near by.

[Thank](#)

3 Thanks

[Bonnie Bernard](#), Sylmar Canyons · 26 Nov

Update... The lady went off on a business neighbor and threw barbed wire while shouting things like killing him and family. Lapd came and took her away on 5150.

[Thank](#)

3 Thanks

[Sandra Corvera](#), Sylmar Canyons · 26 Nov

Did they find out why her stuff was on fire? Who ignited it?

[Thank](#)

1 Thank

[Bonnie Bernard](#), Sylmar Canyons · 26 Nov

I was told she tried to start another fire when the police were called. Was threatening others too. I am not really sure about what happened with the first fire.



**November 14, 2017**

<https://www.dailynews.com/2017/11/14/a-brush-fire-is-burning-in-sylmar-and-firefighters-are-worried-it-will-spread/>

#BrushFire; 4:27PM; 12836 Maclay St; #Sylmar; KNOCKDOWN: Over 93 LAFD firefighters with mutual aid response from LACoFD and ANF held the fire to 5-8 acres (fire has not yet been walked to determine exact acreage) with no structures damaged and no injuries reported. LAFD Arson unit is on scene and LAPD took a suspect into custody for possibly starting the fire. The investigation is ongoing. No Further Details; FS 91; Batt 12; #ValleyBureau; Council District 7; Margaret Stewart

Verified by LAPD that transient was involved. This was in the wash (again) and has been a recurring problematic area.



[Senior Lead Officer Keith Crawford,](#)  
[Los Angeles Police Department](#) · 19 Nov

## **Recent arson arrest**

Greetings Sylmar. As some of you are aware, there was a fire recently near Mission College and an individual arrested for arson. Here are the details: On November 14, citizens observed the Suspect within the flood basin near the college acting strangely. They ultimately watched him start a fire and flee on foot. Patrol officers responded quickly and located the Suspect in the wash. After forming a tactical plan, they approached the Suspect who would not comply with the Officers' commands. He pulled out a pocket knife, then opened the knife revealing a four inch blade. The Officers used a taser to subdue him and took him into custody without further incident or injury. He was booked for Arson and the LA District Attorney's Office subsequently filed several charges, including Arson and Exhibiting a deadly weapon. Not only did the patrol Officers involved show tremendous restraint and professionalism in my opinion, but the citizens who observed this crime and called 911 should be commended! This is a perfect example of seeing something, and saying something. They watched this individual's strange behavior and knew something wasn't right. They called 911 and gave a detailed description of him and his last known direction of travel. This led to a significant arrest! Remember, if you see something, say something. Stay safe and keep each other safe

October 25, 2017 – Nextdoor.com

## fire trucks and police in wash

Lots of fire trucks and police in wash. Looks like situation is under control. Any info?

25 Oct · 15 neighborhoods in [Crime & Safety](#)

[Thank](#)

[Reply](#)

1 Thank · [2 Replies](#)

[Bonnie Bernard](#), Sylmar Canyons · 25 Oct

There is a post here about the fire that started just before 6

[Thank](#)

1 Thank

[Shawntel Mcdonough](#), Mountain Glen Terrace · 25 Oct

The fire was reported by homeowners who said they saw a homeless man with a flare gun fire it off onto the bushes. The police have him in custody, and he in fact, had a flare gun on him. This was all heard on our scanner.

## **KNOCKDOWN BRUSH FIRE 10/25/2017**

KNOCKDOWN #BrushFire; 6:11PM; [12462 Valley Vista Wy](#); #Sylmar; The first arriving 35 arriving LAFD ground personnel have extinguished all active fire, holding the wind-driven flames to just one-half (0.5) acre of grass; No injury; No structure damage; No evacuation; Fire cause under active investigation; Dispatched LAFD Units: E91 E3 RA91 E98 T98 E298 E275 T75 E475 E77 E18 E90 CM42 EM15 BC12 BC10 BC14 FR91 H2 H3 H6 AO2 WT77 E24 E87 E481 E89 E489 + LACoFD + ANF; - Brian Humphrey

## **BRUSH FIRE 10/25/2017**

#BrushFire; 5:51PM; [12462 Valley Vista Wy](#); <https://goo.gl/maps/pnj8NxsgWWp>; #Sylmar; PRELIM: LAFD ground and air response (with assistance from LACoFD and ANF) to one-eighth (0.125) acre grass fanned by 7 MPH wind from the N; Some nearby homes are threatened; FS 91; Batt 12; #ValleyBureau; Council District 7; CH: 5; 12; - Brian Humphrey

(Unconfirmed that a transient was involved)

## **October 24, 2017**

<https://www.dailynews.com/2017/10/24/sylmar-fire-threatens-at-least-one-structure-lafd-says/>

KNOCKDOWN #Fire; 8:42AM; 15865 McQueen St; #Sylmar; Address corrected from 15986 Yarnell St to 15865 McQueen St; The fire is fully contained and all active flame has been extinguished; No human or animal injury; At least two vehicles damaged; Awaiting confirmation on structure damage; The fire cause and monetary loss has yet to be determined; Dispatched LAFD Units: E98 E298 T98 RA91 E260 T60 RA18 E7 BC710 E28 BC15 E91 H3 H5 H6 T90 E290 E489; - Brian Humphrey

“Street dwelling?”

## **September 14, 2017**

<https://www.dailynews.com/2017/09/14/309327/>

Brush Fire 09/14/2017 Brush Fire; 1:35PM; 15455 Glenoaks Bl;  
<https://goo.gl/maps/6zdPVS6QwTM2>; 2 acres of light grass to medium brush burning in steep terrain near Oakridge Mobile Home Park; Burning uphill; No structure threat; FS 91; Batt 12; Valley Bureau; Council District 7; CH: 5; 12; - Brian Humphrey

This area has long struggled with encampments in the hills around their community. An individual was seen leaving the scene, unclear if a transient.

## **May 16, 2017**

<https://www.dailynews.com/2017/05/16/brush-fire-burns-about-three-acres-in-sylmar/>

<https://sfvmedia.com/sfv/homeless-man-custody-brush-fire/>



October 21, 2016

## Brush fire in wash

Update Brush Fire; 1:45PM; 12600 Maclay St; #MACLAYFIRE #SYLMAR; Forward progress of fire stopped, though firefight continues; No containment factor yet identified; Awaiting acreage update and knockdown; No injury; No evacuation; No structure damage; Maclay Street remains closed between Harding and Fenton, unknown duration; NFD; Dispatched LAFD Units: E91 RA91 E98 T98 E298 E275 T75 E77 E7 E18 E90 EM15

21 Oct 16 · 9 neighborhoods in [Crime & Safety](#)

[Thanked!](#)

[Reply](#)

11 Thanks · [5 Replies](#)

[Andrea Vanegmond](#), Sylmar Canyons · 21 Oct 16

Thank you for providing facts, not speculation

[Thank](#)

1 Thank



[Shawntel Mcdonough](#), Mountain Glen Terrace · 21 Oct 16

I have heard there are homeless living in the bushes in that hill area. More investigation needs to be had to determine the cause, but If this was the cause, something MUST be done before something else happens.

- Confirmed with LAFD Batallion 12 that point of origin was a cooking/camping stove in an encampment