



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov. 10, 2009

Contacts:

Marisa O'Neil at (714) 310-5478 or marisa.oneil@ocparks.com
Lynnette Round at (714) 290-7772 or lynnetteround@ocfa.org
Sergio Prince at (949) 933-0595 or sergio.prince@ocgov.com

County to Launch New OC Fire Watch Program on Anniversary of Freeway Complex Fire

(Irvine, CA) – Orange County Board of Supervisors Chair Patricia C. Bates will join the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) and OC Parks officials Thursday to announce a new, countywide fire watch program to alert the public of elevated fire dangers in wilderness parks and communities across Orange County. The press conference introducing OC Fire Watch will take place Thursday, Nov. 12 at 11 a.m. at the Orange County Fire Authority Headquarters, 1 Fire Authority Road in Irvine.

Wildfires are more likely to occur and spread during Red Flag conditions, when strong winds are accompanied by low humidity levels and high temperatures. OC Fire Watch will increase public awareness of the fire dangers by raising red "Fire Alert" flags at OC Parks and other County facilities, as well as at OCFA fire stations and participating City Halls throughout Orange County. The program will also incorporate fire watch volunteers to help monitor the County's wilderness parks, which are especially vulnerable to fire during Red Flag conditions.

"The memories of last year's Freeway Complex Fire and the Santiago Fire two years ago still linger as painful reminders of the devastation wildfires can inflict on our wilderness areas and nearby residential communities," said Supervisor Bates. "I proposed the Red Flag program and volunteer component of OC Fire Watch to involve the public in our effort to protect lives, property and our natural areas during periods of extreme fire danger. OCFA and OC Parks are to be commended for their participation in this important joint effort."

OC Parks and OCFA will raise Fire Alert flags at their respective facilities during designated Red Flag conditions, which will be based on CALFIRE advisories.

"OC Parks manages nearly 40,000 acres of beautiful parkland and wilderness that is still largely in its natural, undisturbed state," OC Parks Director Mark Denny said. "But extra vigilance is needed to protect it during Red Flag conditions. Time is of the essence to prevent large-scale damage to these wilderness areas and nearby homes."

OC Parks will coordinate the deployment of OC Fire Watch volunteers in and around the County's wilderness areas during designated Red Flag conditions. OCFA will train the fire watch volunteers in communication procedures and map reading, as well as how to recognize and report potentially dangerous situations.

"The OC Fire Watch program will heighten public awareness of increased fire dangers," OCFA Chief Keith Richter said. "Orange County residents should take personal responsibility for protecting themselves, their families and their properties. OC Fire Watch, along with OCFA's Ready! Set! Go! Program can help you through advanced planning and preparation."

#