

One Call Now: A life-saving wake-up call for the residents of this remote community

Kagel Canyon Civic Association

Fires. Mudslides. Earthquakes. Natural disasters are all too familiar to Californians. And that's why many residents of Kagel Canyon, California, have come to rely on the One Call Now mass notification system.

Kagel Canyon is an unincorporated community of about 300 households, set in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, in the Angeles National Forest. Though less than 25 miles from the hustle and bustle of our nation's second most populated city, Los Angeles, Kagel Canyon is isolated. And quiet. Except when Mother Nature stirs things up.

With no local government representation, Kagel Canyon residents look out for one another, with the help of the Kagel Canyon Civic Association (KCCA). The KCCA is a voluntary membership organization that plans special events for the community – like square dances, barbecues and concerts. Also, the KCCA helps residents rally together when political issues affect their community—and when disaster strikes.

Alternative to Phone Trees Needed

Several years ago, following fires, the KCCA considered setting up manual phone trees to help residents pass the word to pack up and evacuate in the event of emergencies. But, says KCCA President Kelly Decker, there were too many possibilities for the manual phone tree to fail.

That's when Michele deLorimier, a KCCA board member, began looking for a reliable alternative.

"We thought there has to be a better way to do this than the old-fashioned phone tree, and that's how we found One Call Now," Decker says.

The KCCA carefully examined One Call Now before signing a contract. And from the outset, the KCCA decided to use One Call Now for emergency notifications only. Many communities also use the notification system to inform residents about special events.

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THE CLIENT

The Kagel Canyon Civic Association (KCCA) is a nongovernmental membership organization that serves the 300 households of Kagel Canyon in Los Angeles County, California. The KCCA plans special events and provides residents a voice in political issues and concerns that affect the well-being and safety of their community.

THE CHALLENGE

An isolated community in Angeles National Forest, Kagel Canyon is vulnerable to natural disasters. Fires can spread quickly, so residents need to be alerted when disaster strikes. The KCCA has tried phone trees for notifying residents of emergencies, but they have not been reliable.

THE SOLUTION

After looking for alternatives to the traditional phone tree, the KCCA discovered One Call Now. The KCCA uses One Call Now exclusively for emergency notifications by text, phone call and email to alert residents to natural disasters that could threaten their lives and property.

THE RESULTS

Many One Call Now users in Kagel Canyon say One Call Now notifications may have saved their lives during the most recent major fire, which broke out in the early morning, when residents were asleep.

For Emergencies Only

Decker explains, “For our purpose, when you get a call from One Call, it’s an emergency. We believe that One Call Now needs to be reserved for emergencies, so people don’t ignore it.” And so that they associate One Call Now with potentially life and death situations.

KCCA first used One Call Now in 2016 to alert residents to evacuation orders for the Sand Fire, which burned about 38,000 acres in the Angeles National Forest.

The next major fire came about a year later, the Creek Fire, which broke out on Kagel Canyon Road at 3:44 a.m. Dec. 5, 2017. The fire eventually burned 15,619 acres and destroyed 123 structures, including 60 homes, before being contained on January 9, 2018.

“It came up suddenly in the morning, at the top of our canyon, and of our 300 households, 16 of them burned to the ground and several more suffered fire damage,” deLorimier said. “We had the strongest winds that had ever been recorded in southern California that day.”

KCCA sent out seven One Call Now alerts to update residents about various stages of the Creek Fire, deLorimier said, eventually notifying residents when they could return home. KCCA used One Call Now shortly after when rain raised the potential for mudslides.

“One of the huge advantages of the One Call Now system is we wanted something that was citizen-based and not government-based—something that the residents here could be in charge of,” Decker said. Five KCCA members are authorized to send out One Call Now notifications.

One Call Now Puts Community in Control

Los Angeles County, in which Kagel Canyon is located, has its own notification system to warn residents of fires and other emergencies. But Decker offers the following testimony as to why she’s thankful Kagel Canyon has its own system—One Call Now. Because, in short, it’s easy for a small community like Kagel Canyon to get lost in the shuffle of a county of more than 10 million people.

“The first call that I put out to the community, just to wake people up and say... (Decker’s voice breaks with emotion) there is a fire and you need to be awake and look out and decide if you need to leave or not.

“That first call was at 4:02 in the morning. The next message was at 4:12, and the next one at 4:30. And by 4:30 at least five homes had already been destroyed by the fire.

“On the night of the creek fire, I was home alone with four little kids [one of them a newborn] because my husband was up in Ventura working on the Thomas fire. The first call [One Call Now alert] woke me up and I immediately started getting ready to evacuate, knowing that trying to evacuate four young kids, three dogs, a bunny and a tortoise would take me a while. By the time the second call came through to GET OUT, I was nearly ready and was able to get us all out safely. I am SO thankful for the One Call system and for the KCCA!”

Susanna M.

CLIENT CASE STUDIES *continued*

“The County of Los Angeles did not issue notifications to residents until after 8 o’clock in the morning...”

Decker’s voice breaks again, and deLorimier picks up, “Many more homes would have burned, and people would have perished, if it hadn’t been for the notices.”

Decker adds, “If we would have relied on the county or the government to have received notices about emergencies, this would have been a disaster.

“So, the fact we have a mechanism by which we can take it into our own hands and let residents know what is going on, that is incredibly important to us.”

Residents Thankful for One Call Now

Due to her role in managing One Call Now notifications for Kagel Canyon, Decker has become recognized by first responder agencies in Los Angeles County as the community’s point person, deLorimier says. “They have all come to respect her, have her home phone number, and know they can call her to issue information that needs to go out to the community.”

About half of Kagel Canyon’s households are signed up for One Call Now. By nature, Kagel Canyon residents are independent, and many are protective of their privacy and phone numbers. But those on One Call Now look out for neighbors who aren’t, and share notifications with them, deLorimier says.

“I believe people who participate in One Call Now are very grateful for it, because they recognize it for being a potentially life-saving situation and a very good means of sharing information,” Decker said.

deLorimier adds, “A lot of people have said they think it might have saved their life last year in the Creek Fire. And it also probably saved a lot of pet lives. If people had three extra minutes before they had to run for their lives, they were able to grab their pets, and who knows, family heirlooms or whatever. It definitely helps our canyon. It definitely had a huge impact—people are relying on it.”

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