



JOINT STATEMENT



To our community:

An article recently published in the *Orange County Register* called into question our response to the Coastal Fire, and we felt it important to communicate directly to those we serve.

During any emergency or crisis, protecting life, protecting property – protecting *you*, our community – is our focus. Our response to the Coastal Fire reflects that commitment.

We welcome questions about our response and the work we do. We also welcome criticism and always look for opportunities to improve our techniques and tactics. However, when that criticism is rooted in unrealistic and inaccurate information, it can cause additional trauma for a community still recovering and rebuilding.

In the early minutes of this incident, we worked together to ensure a quick and effective response. The OC Sheriff's Department (OCSD) helicopter, which was on air patrol when the fire broke out, provided real-time aerial information to Orange County Fire Authority's (OCFA) boots-on-the-ground effort. Thousands of homes were evacuated without any injuries and the swift response undoubtedly saved lives and dozens if not hundreds of additional structures.

Information on our response was provided to the *Register* reporter, but much of it was not included in the article. Instead, the reporter relied heavily on the opinion of a former OCSD employee who was transferred from Sheriff's Air Support for performance issues. As a result, a rehashing of a years-old and long-resolved issue between our agencies served as the column's focal point. From our perspective, this led readers to draw the conclusion that, if not for this brief past issue, our efforts during the Coastal Fire may have been different. This is not only untrue, it is unfair to the residents who lost their homes and the first responders who put themselves in harm's way to protect life and property.

Every decision made in the early moments of the Coastal Fire and throughout the days that followed was made in partnership and with the best interest of the community in mind. We stand by our response and are proud of the firefighters and law enforcement personnel who worked the front lines for days on end — first to aggressively fight the fire and safely evacuate residents, and then to provide comfort and care as the families returned.

And finally, while we take solace in knowing that our unified response saved hundreds of structures and prevented any civilian injury or loss of life, our hearts remain heavy for the residents whose homes were lost or damaged. Together, we stand with each of you as we recover and rebuild our community in the weeks and months ahead.

Sincerely,

Two handwritten signatures in blue ink. The first signature is for Brian Fennessy and the second is for Don Barnes.

Brian Fennessy, Orange County Fire Authority Chief
Don Barnes, Orange County Sheriff-Coroner