

Wildfires Taught Derick Mahome a Valuable Lesson

By BILL HEARD and ADRIENNE S. BLYTHE

(Oct. 31, 2003) Watching the wildfires consume the brush near his Simi Valley home, last weekend, gave Derick Mahome some sleepless nights. But, he also learned a valuable lesson: Be prepared!

Details are not confirmed, but a Central City Division 1 Transportation Operations Supervisor Harry Bayless, 53, a 20-year MTA veteran, is said to have lost his home in the Rancho Cucamonga wildfire.

Despite firefighters' best efforts in starting backfires, on Monday the flames jumped the 118 Freeway and came within three-quarters of a mile of his three-year-old house. Heavy smoke obscured the sky and ash rained onto the neighborhood.

"It was almost surreal," says Mahome, an assistant transportation manager at West Hollywood Division 7. "You don't think this can happen to you, but it was!"

Mahome had been working seven days straight because of the transit strike. But, for three days this week, his first priority was to his family.

As the situation in Simi Valley deteriorated, Mahome worked alongside his wife, Marina, and their college-age kids, son Tytan, 22, and daughter Ma-Ryia, 20, to pack their cars with as much of their household goods as possible. Many of the neighbors left the area during a voluntary evacuation.

As the fire approached, Mahome took pictures of his house and its contents in case he had to make an insurance claim. He gathered important documents.

Jammed their cars

The family packed their clothes – deciding which clothes was difficult – and some family photos. They jammed as much of it as they could into their cars.

In the end, the family was able to remain in their house, although the property and their cars werer blanketed with ash. "The pool looks like someone took a bath in it and left a ring around the tub," says Mahome.

Since the threat of fire has receded and life is getting somewhat back to normal, Mahome has had time to reflect on how he and his family can be better prepared in the event of another such crisis.

They're stocking emergency supplies and assembling insurance documentation, organizing their important papers and placing some in a safety deposit box at their bank. They also will send copies to family members for safekeeping. They have walkie-talkies ready for use.

They made a list of critical phone numbers and have devised a plan with a meeting place in case the family is separated in an emergency.

And, if the fire comes again or another disaster strikes, Derick Mahome and his family will be better prepared. They may not sleep easy, but it won't be the nightmare they just experienced.

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