

Fire Season Is Here - Technology Can Help You

(This is one of a series of articles provided by the Oakmont Technology Learning Center on the use of technology by seniors.)

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Lately the Press-Democrat, SF Chronicle, and Oakmont News have had articles about getting ready for fire season. There are many new residents to Oakmont who have not lived through emergency multi-day evacuations and the fear while evacuated of losing one's home.

This is also a reminder for long-time Oakmonters about how to be more informed about fires and wind events and to take measures in advance to protect your data. There are obvious things like go-bags to have at the ready. What about storing as much as you can electronically so you aren't trying to gather up and fill your car with "stuff" when time might be of the essence for your safety?

Sites to monitor during fire conditions. Watch Duty app (or site on your browser), Twitter (follow CalFire especially), Pulse Point, Nixle, SoCoAlert, and Windy.com offer almost up-to-the minute information on emergency conditions. Previous Oakmont News tech articles have more detail and lists of other at oakmont-learning.org on the Tech Articles page, especially articles from 4/9/22, 8/14/21, 7/24/21, 4/10/21, 2/13/21, and 1/23/21.

Internet access when the power is out. Make sure you have a way to charge your devices so you can get information online. Previous oakmont-learning.org tech articles on 2/12/22 and 6/12/21 cover ways to charge devices and how to use your phone as a WiFi hotspot.

Electronic data and pictures. Data backups are important. Make sure your data is backed up to either "the cloud" or an external hard drive (that's stored away from your home) or both. If you still have "print" pictures in albums, there might not be time to load up a closet full of photo albums when a mandatory evacuation notice comes. You might want to consider scanning the photos in, either doing it yourself or sending them out to be scanned. With data files and photos in electronic format, they can be saved in iCloud, the Google Cloud, Dropbox, Amazon, or other online "clouds." An oakmont-learning.org tech article on 9/25/21 covers cloud storage.

Important Documents. Think about what documents you might want to scan in. What if important documents get burned up? Copies of passports, driver's licenses, insurance policies, deeds, Covid vaccination records, wills, trusts, and other information will make it easier to replace them. We all likely know our driver's license number, but who knows their passport number? A list of household belongings lost in a fire might be required by your insurance company - take pictures of everything and store them in the cloud.

Lists. Do you have electronic lists stored in the cloud? Examples might be: what to grab in an evacuation, prescriptions/supplements you take, or potential hotels for evacuation (with phone numbers). Read an article about online "notes" apps dated 1/22/22 at oakmont-learning.org in Tech Articles.

For an electronic copy of this article and previous articles, go to oakmont-learning.org.