

*****PRESS RELEASE*****

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West Contra Costa Community Members Establish Fire Safe Council

Richmond, CA — Community members have established West Contra Costa's first Fire Safe Council (WCCFSC). The Fire Safe Council shall assist in planning and managing community wildfire preparedness in West Contra Costa, which includes areas that are classified as Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) by the State Fire Marshal.

The WCCFSC is registered as a California nonprofit organization for public benefit and plans to apply for grants from the state and federal agencies such as CalFire and the California State Coastal Conservancy.

Soheila Bana leads the WCCFSC as president, alongside Marilyn Saarni, vice president; Ra Criscitiello, secretary; and Rebecca Orona, treasurer. Richmond Fire Chief Angel Montoya is the Agency Representative to liaison with other agencies.

Residents of Richmond and unincorporated El Sobrante who live in Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas make up the Council's 20-person Board. The Advisory Board members include representatives from local fire departments, East Bay Regional Parks District, East Bay Municipal Utilities District, PG&E, CalFire, California Fire Council, Diablo Fire Safe Council and Oakland Fire Safe Council.

The WCCFSC is one of several emergency preparedness efforts led by Soheila Bana, who founded the 94803 Emergency Preparedness Alliance (94803.org). The 94803 Alliance has promoted public wildfire safety and community preparedness since 2020, and many of its members have carried over to help lead the WCCFSC. Initially, Richmond Mayor Tom Butt encouraged the 94803 Alliance to work with local agencies and other major landowners on vegetation management. The 94803 Alliance reached out to Richmond Fire Chief Montoya who initiated the Fire Safe Council concept, with the assistance of the California Fire Safe Council, and was instrumental in assisting the 94803 Alliance with establishing a Fire Safe Council. After a year of coordinated efforts, the WCCFSC was established for community wildfire risk reduction and resiliency.

Residents are encouraged to contact Soheila Bana at soheilabana@gmail.com or (510) 779-7280 to learn more.

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