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Marin Independent Journal

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SAN ANSELMO

Fatal fire raises concerns about cellphone coverage



ALAN DEP — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

A firefighter walks back to his engine after a fire in the Sleepy Hollow neighborhood of San Anselmo on Oct. 26. A resident died in the fire, which highlighted cellphone service problems in the area.

Remote Sleepy Hollow area, safety outage limit connection

By Matthew Pera
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Brian White could see flames torching the house behind his fence, sending a column of smoke billowing into the sky, but he knew there would be no sense trying to call 911.

Pacific Gas and Electric Co. had shut off the power in most of Sleepy Hollow because of dangerous fire weather. White's landline wasn't working during the outage and cellphone service is scarce in the remote San Anselmo neighborhood, so he rounded up his son and two neighbors and they began spraying water on the fire with garden hoses.

When firefighters arrived

to the blaze at 41 Dutch Valley Lane, they found 96-year-old Jean Kinney dead inside the home. The fire, which started shortly before 4:30 p.m. on Oct. 26, served as a grim reminder for some Sleepy Hollow residents that reporting an emergency from their neighborhood can in some cases be troublingly difficult.

The first 911 call came from a gardener working in the neighborhood, who ran up a hill in order to get cellphone service, said Marin County fire Battalion Chief Bret McTigue.

"I don't know how long the delay was, but that did delay the 911 report," McTigue said.

The National Weather



SHERRY LAVARS — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

Retired San Francisco firefighter Dan Dunnigan saw the Sleepy Hollow fire, but had to look for a spot to get cellphone service to call 911.

Service had issued a "red flag" warning for fire danger that day. Meteorologists had predicted strong offshore winds and low humidity, a familiar October weather pattern that has set the stage for some of Northern California's most

destructive wildfires.

Inside the Marin County Office of Emergency Services, officials were preparing to order evacuations in Sleepy Hollow if the house fire turned into a wildfire, said Woody Baker-Cohn, a

FIRE » PAGE 2

MARIN COUNTY

Tighter operating rules for business

Surge in virus infections prompts new restrictions

By Richard Halstead
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Marin County Public Health Officer Matt Willis announced Friday that he is moving in tandem with other Bay Area counties to tighten restrictions due to troubling local increases in COVID-19 infections.

"We are making a decision to adopt red tier policies preemptively because our case numbers are increasing so dramatically," Willis said. "The projections are we could even be moving into the purple tier before the end of the month."

Willis said effective Tuesday he is directing all bars and breweries and indoor pools to close. Restaurants, movie theater concessions and food courts must suspend indoor service. San Francisco banned indoor dining earlier this week.

"As COVID-19 rates increase, indoor environments where facial covering is not used, like restaurants, become less safe because there's a higher probability that you're sharing the space with someone who is infected," Willis said in a statement. "This isn't limited to the business environment but applies to holiday gatherings and travel as well."

Many other Marin businesses are also affected by the order. Retail stores and malls must reduce their capacity to 50%. Museums and places of worship must cut capacity to 25%. Gyms and fitness centers must reduce capacity to 10%.

Several venues — wineries, family enter-

RESTRICTIONS » PAGE 4

HEALTH EXPERTS

Say 'no thanks' to unsafe parties on Thanksgiving

Virus risks heightened when different households gather

By Rong-Gong Lin II
[Los Angeles Times](https://www.latimes.com)

How should Thanksgiving be celebrated in the middle of the worst global pandemic in a century?

As safely as possible, experts say. Think small, and stay at home.

Thanksgiving offers profound risks if large numbers of guests hailing from different households — especially those traveling from far away — gather. Those who are elderly or have underlying medical conditions are at particular risk for severe illness or death should they be infected with the coronavirus.

The warnings come as the governors of California, Oregon and Washington issued travel ad-

PANDEMIC » PAGE 2

+ Inside: Newsom sorry for attending multi-household dinner. **Page A4**

SAN RAFAEL

Five charged in church vandalism case

Suspects accused of toppling statue of Serra during protest

By Matthew Pera
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Marin County prosecutors have filed felony vandalism charges against five people accused of tearing down a statue outside of a San Rafael church last month, but the suspects will not face hate crime charges recommended by police.

The five suspects caused at least \$10,000 in damage in connection with the Oct. 12 incident at St. Raphael Catholic Church on Fifth

Avenue, according to a complaint filed Thursday by the Marin County District Attorney's Office. Under state law, vandalism is considered a felony if the damage exceeds \$400.

The incident occurred during an Indigenous Peoples Day demonstration outside of the church. Police said a small group of protesters painted and destroyed the church's statue of Junipero Serra, an 18th-century Catholic priest who founded nine of California's



DOUGLAS ZIMMERMAN — SPECIAL TO THE MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL
Protesters poured red paint on a statue of Junipero Serra and knocked it off its foundation.

missions.

Melissa Aguilar, Mayorgi Nadieska Delgadille, Vic-

toria Eva Montano Pena, Moira Van de Walker and

VANDALISM » PAGE 2

WHITE HOUSE

Trump gives upbeat COVID-19 vaccine update

Trump offered an update on the race for a vaccine for the resurgent coronavirus, while gliding over challenges to come. **PAGE A6**



POLITICS

Progressives look to make mark on White House

Progressives are pressuring President-elect Joe Biden to embrace their policy solutions to major issues. **PAGE A7**

BUSINESS

- Dow Jones** 29,479.81 (+399.64)
- S&P 500** 3,585.15 (+48.14)
- Nasdaq** 11,829.29 (+119.70)

ONLINE

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TODAY IN HISTORY

1862

During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln gave the go-ahead for Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside's plan to capture the Confederate capital of Richmond; the resulting Battle of Fredericksburg proved a disaster for the Union.

1940

During World War II, German planes destroyed most of the English town of Coventry.

1965

The U.S. Army's first major military operation of the Vietnam War began with the start of the five-day Battle of Ia Drang.

1969

Apollo 12 blasted off for the moon.

1970

A chartered Southern Airways DC-9 crashed while trying to land in West Virginia, killing all 75 people on board, including the Marshall University football team and its coaching staff.

1990

It was revealed that the pop duo Milli Vanilli (Rob Pilatus and Fabrice Morvan) had done none of the singing on their Grammy-winning debut album, "Girl You Know It's True."

Birthdays

Former NASA astronaut Fred Haise is 87. Composer Wendy Carlos is 81. Britain's Prince Charles is 72. Rock singer-musician James Young (Styx) is 71. Pianist Yanni is 66. Actor Patrick Warburton is 56. Rock singer Butch Walker is 51. Actor Olga Kurylenko is 41.

Star report

Gillian Anderson brings 'Iron Lady' to 'The Crown'

Gillian Anderson's portrayal of British political leader Margaret Thatcher in "The Crown" was built step by step.

Olivia Colman, who as Queen Elizabeth II goes coif to coif with Thatcher, found Anderson's Thatcher so uncanny that it was "quite scary." The U.K.'s first female prime minister and Conservative Party leader died at 87 in 2013.

"Sitting opposite her, especially with the light behind her a bit, it was" — Colman paused, shivering dramatically and widening her eyes — "like she was there." — The Associated Press

LOTTERY

WINNING NUMBERS

Daily 3 Afternoon:

1, 0, 1

Daily 3 Evening: 2, 1, 4

Daily 4: 5, 4, 4, 0

Fantasy 5:

11, 12, 14, 21, 22

Daily Derby

1st: 9, Winning Spirit

2nd: 12, Lucky Charms

3rd: 8, Gorgeous George

Race Time: 1:42.96

SUPER LOTTO PLUS

Wednesday's drawing:

6, 7, 11, 29, 38

Mega Number: 23

Today's estimated jackpot: \$26 million

MEGA MILLIONS

Wednesday's drawing:

6, 7, 14, 28, 59

Mega Number: 7

Friday's estimated jackpot: \$165 million

POWERBALL

Friday's drawing:

13, 15, 17, 45, 63

Mega Number: 13

Today's estimated jackpot: \$168 million

Vandalism

FROM PAGE 1

Andrew Lester Mendle each face one count of felony vandalism.

San Rafael police arrested Aguilar, Delgadille, Montano Pena and Van de Walker at the scene of the incident. Ines Shiam Gar-

dilic, who was also arrested, was not named in the complaint. Police recommended charges for all five people who were arrested, in addition to Mendle, who was later identified as a suspect.

Police Chief Diana Bishop said her department recommended a charge of vandalism to a place of worship for each of the six

suspects. She noted that such a charge is considered a hate crime.

In a letter to District Attorney Lori Frugoli last month, San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone urged prosecutors to follow the San Rafael Police Department's recommendation to pursue hate crime charges.

"I am asking you to press

charges to the full extent of the law," Cordileone wrote.

In a statement on Friday, Cordileone said Frugoli's decision to charge the suspects was "a breakthrough moment for Catholics."

"While a hate crime was not charged in this case, let us hope that this prosecution will nonetheless contribute to putting an end to attacks on all houses of

worship," Cordileone said.

Frugoli did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Friday.

Bishop said Frugoli told her last week that prosecutors didn't have evidence to pursue hate crime charges, which would require proof of intent.

"Based on her explanation, I agreed with the decision," Bishop said.

Fire

FROM PAGE 1

county emergency services coordinator.

"Given the red flag, it was really a big concern," he said.

But power outages also make it more difficult for officials to send out alerts about wildfires and other disasters, Baker-Cohn said.

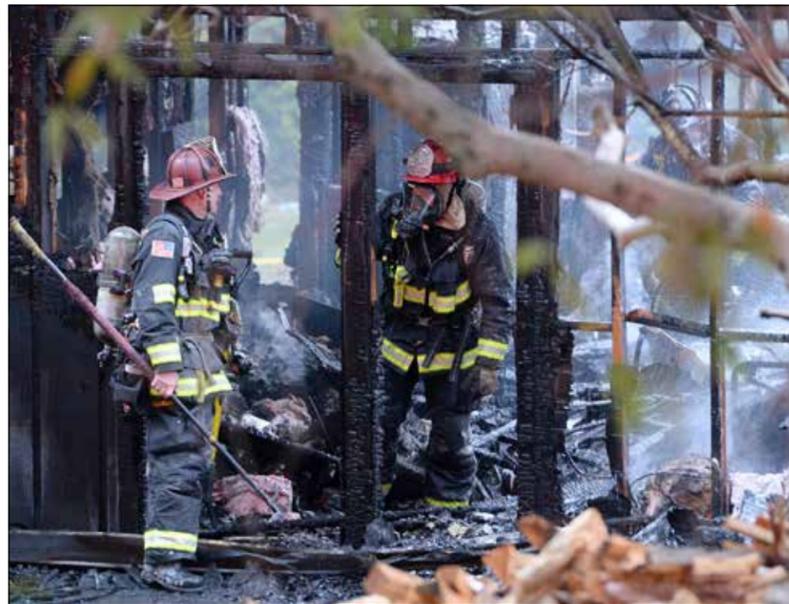
If Sleepy Hollow residents needed to evacuate on Oct. 26, county officials would have sent out a "reverse-911" alert to cellphones in the area, Baker-Cohn said. But in that case, "we only would've got to people with cell service," he said. Others would have been notified by sheriff's deputies blaring sirens and knocking on doors.

PG&E's preemptive power shutdowns have become a logistical challenge for officials managing emergency alert systems. The shutoffs typically come during dangerous fire weather in an effort to prevent the utility's electric equipment from sparking more wildfires. During a shutoff in October 2019 that lasted more than four days in some parts of the county, more than half of Marin's cell towers stopped working. To Baker-Cohn's surprise, landlines were down too for many residences.

"It was really problematic," Baker-Cohn said.

PG&E aims to give telecommunications companies at least 72 hours notice before power shutoffs, said Deanna Contreras, a spokeswoman for the utility.

"Since these critical facilities support public safety, we give them advanced notifications, prioritized res-



Fire captains talk at the scene of a fire in the Sleepy Hollow neighborhood of San Anselmo on Oct. 26. A resident died in the fire, which highlighted cellphone service problems in the area.

toration, additional communications and other resources," Contreras said.

Baker-Cohn and other emergency managers are urging telecommunications companies, in turn, to notify county officials when their cell towers aren't working. But the companies have been reluctant to share such information, Baker-Cohn said.

For many Sleepy Hollow residents, cellphone service doesn't reach their homes. Some rely on internet connection to make calls, while others use landlines. But power outages can sometimes render those options useless.

"When people see smoke and their phone doesn't work and their backup landline is down, that's where you're going to have major problems," said Dan Dunnigan, a retired San

Francisco firefighter who lives in Sleepy Hollow.

Dunnigan was walking home with his dog when he first caught a glimpse of the fire on Dutch Valley Lane. When he realized that there were no firefighters on scene, he turned around and began walking back up the hill he had just come down from, hoping to find a spot where he could place a 911 call.

"I'm looking down like, 'Oh my God, there are no sirens,'" Dunnigan said. "Not one siren."

By 5 p.m., firefighters had doused the blaze and stopped it from spreading beyond the house. The cause of the fire remains under investigation, but investigators have determined that it was not caused by a generator or an electrical problem, according to Marin County fire

Chief Jason Weber. The investigation won't be closed until the county coroner's division determines a cause of death for Kinney, he said. A man was also injured in the blaze.

White, who was shaken by the incident, stayed up late that night talking about the fire with his family, shining flashlights in the dark. Eventually, they all went to sleep. But just after 4 a.m., White was jolted awake by the smell of smoke and the crackle of fire.

He pulled back the curtains covering his bedroom window and again saw flames rocketing into the sky from the same neighbors' house.

"My heart sank," he said.

White bolted out of his house in the dark and piled into his car with his dog, his wife and their three

Pandemic

FROM PAGE 1

visories Friday urging people entering their states or returning from outside the states to self-quarantine to slow the spread of the coronavirus, California Gov. Gavin Newsom's office said.

Testing before Thanksgiving also isn't a sure wave to stave off the spread of the illness, as people can be highly contagious even when showing no signs of illness.

A negative test "should not be used as a free pass to gather with others or to not follow the basic core public health measures that are essential to keeping us all healthy," said Dr. Christina Ghaly, Los Angeles County's director of health services.

That's why the safest bet is to stick to your own household for the holiday this year, public health officials say.

"I know everybody wants to know what to do for Thanksgiving, and the basic answer — to be the Grinch who stole Thanksgiving — is not to do it," Dr. George Rutherford, an epidemiologist and infectious diseases expert at UC San Francisco, said at a recent campus town hall meeting.

"It's just going to be my wife and me. I already told the kids, 'Forget it,'" said Rutherford, who has six adult children.

Feel free to make a special dinner. But to "host," it's safest to connect with extended friends and family through video calls or the telephone, while keeping in-person guests among only the members of your household.

California has seen significant jumps in coronavirus infections, hospitalizations and positive test rates, and officials expect deaths to rise too. "This much of an increase in cases may very well result in tremendous suffering and tragic deaths down the road," said Bar-



Travelers check in at the American Airlines terminal at the Los Angeles International Airport in May. The governors of California, Oregon and Washington urged people entering their states or returning from outside the states to self-quarantine to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

bara Ferrer, the Los Angeles County director of public health.

The advisories from the governors urge people to avoid non-essential out-of-state travel, ask people to self-quarantine for 14 days after arriving from another state or country and encourage residents to stay local, a statement said.

"California just surpassed a sobering threshold — one million COVID-19 cases — with no signs of the virus slowing down," Newsom wrote. "Increased cases are adding pressure on our hospital systems and threatening the lives of seniors, essential workers and vulnerable Californians."

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said in a social media video Thursday, "If we do not act immediately we will soon reach a breaking point."

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee sounded a similar warning.

"We have to rethink spending time with people from outside our households right now, including Thanksgiving and the December holidays," he wrote on social media. "This is

temporary. We will get back to normal. But right now, it is just too dangerous to gather."

"Please choose to be part of the solution because it's going to take all of us to avoid increased heartbreak," Ferrer said. "We're actually recommending this Thanksgiving be a stay-at-home Thanksgiving."

Ferrer said she won't be driving this year for Thanksgiving to see her grandchildren, who live in a state that has a lot of coronavirus cases.

"It's just not good idea. And I'll be really sad about this. Like all of you, I wish things were really different, but they're not," Ferrer said. "I don't want to be one of the people that's contributing to ... increasing cases that could result in other people getting sick and even dying."

Limiting gatherings to within your immediate household means only those who currently live with you and share common spaces in your housing unit, officials say. That doesn't include college students or other family members who

live elsewhere.

"Obviously, the preference is for people not to be flying home for the holidays — for students or for others," Ferrer said.

Health officials nationally and in California continue to urge people to avoid travel, which raises the risk of contracting and spreading the coronavirus.

If students do fly home, some colleges are recommending they don't return to campus until after the new year, Ferrer said, "so that you're not really exposing lots more people when you come back here to to finish out the semester."

A person infected with the coronavirus on average goes on to infect two to four more people. One person can easily be responsible for the infection of more than 1,000 people after 10 cycles of virus transmission.

Public health experts are extremely concerned about large gatherings during Thanksgiving as the virus surges nationally to record levels, with more than 100,000 people infected every day.

The pandemic's first global spread coincided with a holiday quite like Thanksgiving in China: the Lunar New Year. Celebrations proceeded in Wuhan, the global epicenter of the pandemic, even though there were ample warnings the virus was spreading. And it hitched a ride with travelers as they fled the region just before a quarantine was enforced.

Dinners have also been shown to be a big spreader of the coronavirus. Disease investigators in Arizona who studied an outbreak tied to 60 people found that many of the cases likely stemmed from transmission at an indoor potluck dinner, where attendees did not wear masks, and a subsequent graduation dinner with more than two dozen attendees. Two of those who fell ill had to go to an emergency room, and one required critical care.

California still generally prohibits large gatherings and has outlined the following requirements:

Gatherings are limited to no more than three households and for a duration of no more than two hours. Gatherings are to be held outside; attendees may go inside to use restrooms, which should be frequently sanitized. Attendees need to be able to maintain six feet of distance away from people not in their household. As much as possible, food or beverages should be handed out in single-serve disposable containers, and if not, should be served by someone who washes their hands often and wears a mask. Masks should be worn as often as possible, and removed only when eating or drinking. If three households are coming together, Rutherford said one idea to keep things safer is to assign each group its own table.

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