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WILDFIRE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

agency's Facebook page at 3:44 p.m. on Sept. 8 detailed how rapidly the North Complex Fire exploded that day, at a rate of 1,000 acres every 30 minutes. (Sjolund told the CN&R this "was astronomical" and "off the charts.") It grounded aircraft and made it challenging for USFS to get data on the fire. A representative projected that the North Complex Fire would reach Oroville and urged everyone to check their county's evacuation information and follow those orders to leave.

As for PG&E, company spokesman Paul Moreno told the CN&R that the utility's power-safety shutoffs are triggered by low humidity, wind and fuel conditions, and other fire risk factors. He said that PG&E notifies customers multiple times before the power is shut off and also alerts emergency responders in advance.

"We do meet with and hear from agencies to get feedback on the PSPS [Public Safety Power Shutoff] program and to help us identify ways we can improve the program," he said via email. "We also urge customers to be prepared for PSPS events and other power outages by charging cell phones and devices, having a battery or crank radio, and to have an emergency plan."

Life-saving improvements

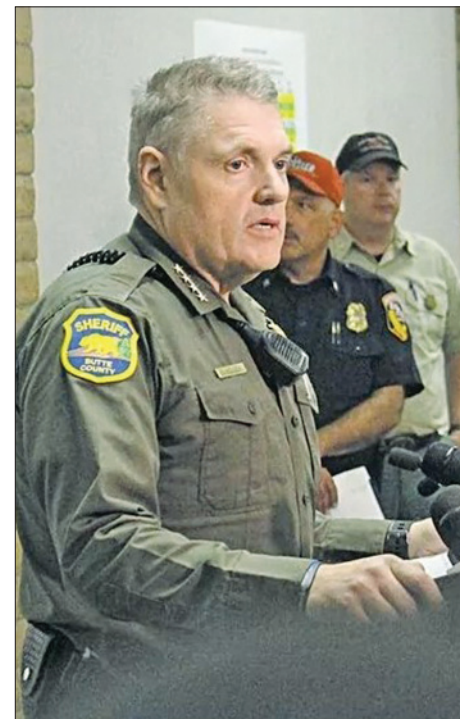
Sjolund said the magnitude of the loss of life in the Camp Fire wasn't ignored after that massive blaze, pointing to changes made as a result.

Cal Fire set up a triage unit at its Berry Creek station during the North Complex Fire, he said, noting that Highway 162, a major evacuation route, was cut off by the blaze. Firefighters brought imperiled residents to this refuge point, Sjolund said, and treated more than 20 for second- and third-degree burns.

"That was something very significant on the incident that saved lives," he said.

Cal Fire has made additional operational improvements since the North Complex Fire, too. This summer, incident commanders received a technology upgrade that allows them to examine current weather and fuel types to create wildfire models, Sjolund said. This new tech was used extensively during the Dixie Fire.

They deployed drones with infrared technology that examine fire lines to provide real-time information to firefighters on the ground, he said. In addition, they



Sheriff Kory Honea speaking to the media during one of the nightly briefings in the days following the Camp Fire. CN&R FILE PHOTO BY KEN SMITH

installed mobile communication devices on their pickups that allow them to receive satellite communications.

Sjolund said these changes aren't, in part, why the Dixie Fire hasn't been as devastating for Butte County.

"It is very fresh in our memories on what worked and what hasn't worked in the last four years," he said. "I think it could have been a lot worse."

Meanwhile, earlier this year, Honea was contacted by Global Security Systems, a company that specializes in emergency alert technology. The company recommended a program called ALERT FM, which is used by emergency personnel to send alerts, such as evacuation orders, via satellite to FM radio stations and on to battery-powered receivers in people's homes. The devices display messages and emit a bright, flashing light and a high-low siren sound.

In May, the Butte County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to spend \$500,000 from its Camp Fire settlement with PG&E to pay for the system's satellite services, licensing, installation, operation and warranty for five years. Shortly after, PG&E committed \$100,000 to subsidize the cost of receivers for citizens in remote parts of the county.

Honea said he intends to get ALERT FM off the ground as soon as possible.