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NEWS

Waldo Street Fire Highlights Damage Faced by First Responders and Homeless Residents

By Linda Sutter October 23, 2026

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For Jessica Matthias, the fire meant watching a place she called home go up in flames.

CRESCENT CITY, CA (MPG) - A trailer fire on Waldo Street Wednesday brought more than smoke and flames. It exposed the difficult and dangerous conditions our first responders face while serving some of the community's most vulnerable residents.

For Jessica Matthias, the fire meant watching a place she called home go up in flames. Matthias had been moving her belongings to another location and was away when her trailer caught fire. The cause remains unknown.

Surrounding the burned trailer is an area that has deteriorated over the years into what resembles an illegal dumping ground. Discarded furniture, garbage, abandoned materials and makeshift shelters create a maze of obstacles for anyone attempting to move through the property.

Yet, among the debris, people continue to live.

For the firefighters responding to Wednesday's emergency, reaching the flames required navigating hazardous surroundings while maneuvering hoses and equipment through an area never designed for safe emergency access.

These are men and women who answer calls for help without knowing what dangers await them. They do not get to choose the neighborhoods they protect or the conditions under which they work. Their responsibility is to save lives, and they carry out that responsibility regardless of the circumstances.

During the response, Matthias reportedly asked about receiving assistance from the American Red Cross. A firefighter explained that the organization would not respond without an address.

"2020 Waldo," Matthias answered.

Yet photographs of the property show no clearly visible address marking the location. For someone who has just lost her shelter and possessions, something as simple as establishing an address should not become another obstacle to obtaining assistance.

Approximately one hour after responding to the fire, local fire stations received another emergency call, this time for medical assistance.

And once again, our first responders answered.

Many of these individuals are volunteers. They leave their families, interrupt their meals and set aside their personal responsibilities to help complete strangers, often without recognition or appreciation.

But this story is also about the people living in these conditions. Homelessness does not diminish a person's need for safety, dignity or compassion. No one should have to live surrounded by hazardous debris, and no emergency responder should have to struggle through those conditions to reach someone in distress.

The photographs raise troubling questions about why this property has remained in such disrepair for years. Who is responsible for addressing the accumulated waste? What can be done to provide safer access for emergency personnel while protecting those who have nowhere else to go?

These are questions deserving attention before another tragedy occurs.

Jessica Matthias lost her trailer, but fortunately, she was away when the fire started.

Our first respond - ers deserve more than a passing thank-you. They deserve safe working conditions, community support and recognition for the sacrifices they make.

And those struggling to survive without permanent housing deserve something equally important: the assurance that their lives matter, too.

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