



North Tahoe and Meeks Bay Fire Protection Districts



April 21, 2017

Chief's Corner: Sierra Sun

"Can We See Your Address?"

Now that spring has finally decided to show up, we are seeing the record setting snow levels and exceptionally high snow-banks slowly melt away. As many of you know, driving around trying to find an address on a home is difficult when there's a fortress of snow surrounding a home, but the snow isn't the only thing keeping our firefighters/paramedics from locating your address.

I'm sure you know where you live and where your address numbers are, but we are sometimes delayed when looking for a house address. All of our apparatus are equip with computers that enable mapping to emergency incidents. However, cell coverage and technology is not always reliable.

Often address numbers are painted to match the house (or tarnished to match the color of the natural wood stain), hidden behind a tree or branch, installed on the side of the house that is not as visible from the road, or altogether missing. We're not the only ones who complain of this issue. Delivery trucks, law enforcement, and neighbors and friends also have the same challenge.

Yes, I know that it's easy to see a fully involved structure fire; however, the majority of our calls are medical in nature. Unless you send someone out into the road to flag us down, we have to slow down to a crawl and look for the address numbers. Visualize cruising by a new place at 2:00 a.m. on a snowy morning, trying to find the address in the 2-5 seconds it takes to drive past the home. During emergencies, every second counts-if we have to search for your address, it could make a difference in your outcome!

The North Tahoe Fire Protection District has adopted Section 505.1 of the California Fire Code. The following is an excerpt from the code:

The address identification shall be legible and placed in a position that is visible from the street or road fronting the property. Address identification characters shall contrast with their background. Address numbers shall be Arabic numbers or alphabetical letters. Numbers shall not be spelled out. Numbers shall be no less than 4 inches high, with a minimum stroke width of ½ inch. Where access is by means of a private road and the building cannot be viewed from the public way, a monument, pole or other sign or means shall be used to identify the structure. Address identification shall be maintained.

The best solution for your residence is: 6" or bigger numbers, contrasting color against the structure, and posted in a very conspicuous spot on your home. Having the numbers either lit or reflective is also beneficial. If your home is set deeply on your lot (or down a long driveway) please install another set of numbers at the edge of the main road. Make sure the numbers are high enough so they'll be visible over the tall snow-banks. Think BOLD, BIG, And BRIGHT. I realize that aesthetics are important; however, when it comes to finding your home during an emergency, this is one case where function has to be more important than form.



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Even if you think you'll never have a reason to call 911 for an emergency, enhancing your address helps us find your neighbor.

Michael Schwartz joined the North Tahoe Fire Protection District as its Fire Chief in 2012, after serving 29 years with a neighboring fire agency. Along with his wife Jean, they have been a part of the Lake Tahoe community since 1978.