

The 2021 Caldor Fire in Lake Tahoe, CA – When the personal and the professional combine

- The fire took an “unprecedented” path over the Sierras into the Tahoe Basin, leading to evacuation of 30,000 people around Lake Tahoe
- My family (parents, sister and young children) were able to evacuate ahead of evacuation warnings due to wildfire smoke, able to use discounted Airbnb
- Conversation with friends/colleagues at transportation district led to realization about important “untold story” of the agency evacuation of transit and paratransit riders
- Interviews with agency staff about their professional experiences, which were also personal
- Sought to understand transportation agencies perceived and actual role in evacuating the most “at risk populations” (CalFire) with “access and functional needs” (FEMA).

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1035 is the highest I've seen yet. This is horrifying. I feel helpless.

PA_64785
Near: [South Lake Tahoe, California](#)
LOW COST PM2.5 SENSOR (PurpleAir) [DISCLAIM](#)

HAZARDOUS
PM2.5 NowCast AQI: 1035
As of 08/22/2021 9pm PDT [HISTORY](#)

Stay indoors.



Transportation agency wildfire evacuation

Key Findings

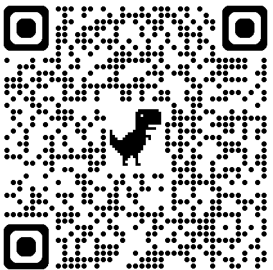
The local transportation district successfully evacuated over 1,800 bus riders, including many local unhoused people and nearly 500 people with disabilities, but:

- Neither the agency itself or local or regional agencies had emergency plans that included transit and paratransit evacuation considerations
- Inclusion of the transportation district in emergency response was late and not structured
- Successes relied on “above and beyond” efforts of individuals rather than robust protocols or plans



Full Natural Hazards Center report here:

<https://hazards.colorado.edu/weather-ready-research/transit-agencies-and-wildfire-evacuation>



Lessons for Researchers



Personal experience and relationships can be a powerful source of research opportunities

Recognizing “positionality” is key to conducting ethical research, particularly when personal connections are relevant



People are often affected both personally and professionally

People often live where they work. Even studies of professionals in their official roles needs to use trauma-informed approaches.



Adjust your expectations, and use your relative power to adjust systems’ expectations

This work takes time. Quality over quantity, care over efficiency. Need human subjects review, publication systems, and funders to understand and support this type of work.



Planning for sustainability of research efforts to be able to follow trajectories over time is important (and hard). **So is translation of the research – but providing value to studied communities should be a central goal.**