

SAN DIEGO REGIONAL FIRE SAFETY FORUM

A professional forum to educate the public about the threat of wildfires and what future changes are necessary to protect the San Diego Region

www.sdfiresafety.org

The San Diego Regional Fire Safety Forum consists of a cross-section of fire professionals, subject matter experts, and concerned citizens who are frustrated with the lack of progress toward improved fire protection in the San Diego region.

The public lacks adequate information about the significant wildfire threats to the San Diego region, the lack of resources to respond, and what actions are needed.

This forum is attempting to provide residents of the San Diego region with an analysis of significant issues related to wildfire response and recommends needed actions in the following areas:

1. **Leadership and Accountability**
2. **Staffing and Apparatus Needs**
3. **Land Use/Fuel Management**
4. **Mutual Aid Recommendations**
5. **Building and Fire Code Recommendations**
6. **Improving Aerial Assets**
7. **Technological Improvements**
8. **Regionalization Study**
9. **Public Notification/Evacuation/Care and Shelter**
10. **Blue Ribbon Task Force Recommendations**
11. **Economics and Funding**

It is our intent to improve the overall fire protection throughout San Diego County. We hope that this report is carefully reviewed, scrutinized and, ultimately, accepted by the general public.

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ISSUE #1: LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Problem

The San Diego region has lagged behind other California counties in providing adequate levels of fire protection.

Solution

Fixing the San Diego region's fire problems will take both leadership and accountability from multiple factions, particularly politicians, government administrators, fire chiefs, labor unions, and perhaps most importantly, the public. Since only one of these groups is elected, they should be held accountable for leading the effort to make meaningful change--a change that starts with disclosing the facts about how poorly public safety agencies in this region are funded. It also is incumbent upon the administrators, chiefs, and labor groups to work closely together to seek common solutions. Ultimately, however, it will be public pressure upon the elected officials to force upon them to find and fund the appropriate solutions that will make a meaningful difference.

Problem

Many of the fire agencies within the San Diego Region have tended to work as individual units. Since each one is a separate entity, they tend to focus on their own special needs. Normally this is a reasonable method of operation when fire issues remain within their jurisdictional areas. In cases where the region as a whole is threatened and requires additional assets, however, it lacks a central command and control structure which is capable and responsible for assigning fire assets based on regional needs. This lack of a central command and control point for the county and cities of San Diego resulted in an uncoordinated effort in both the Cedar fire and the more recent 2007 wildfires.

Solution

Leadership and accountability for the successful utilization of all assets in the San Diego region can be improved. This has been a much-discussed subject, and most have agreed that something needs to be done to solve this problem. The problem can be solved with impetus from elected officials, fire professionals, and the public. Key areas that need to be addressed are:



- 1. Priority One should be to fund a consolidated, regional fire department. This would focus primarily on the under-funded and not-currently-funded areas within the county of San Diego, but eventually could add existing departments via consolidation to better serve our communities while saving lives and property.**
- 2. Once funding is in place to create a central consolidated fire department, all training, prevention strategies, communications, and operating procedures should be established. This would provide a fully functional agency of firefighters that would operate in any area of San Diego when the need arises.**
- 3. Develop and implement a standard of coverage that could be used by all fire departments in the region. There may be a possibility that two standards could emerge (one urban and one rural), but they would be fully understood by the key operational fire professionals.**
- 4. Develop an interactive and ongoing relationship with city and county officials which will allow for a dialog on fire safety strengths and weaknesses, as well as organizational and funding requirements.**

Sustainability

A significant barrier to fire service consolidation has been in defining the costs, and then determining funding sources for those projected costs. Either existing tax revenues need to be reallocated, or a new revenue stream needs to be created so that San Diego, as a region, has a fire safety program that is suitable for all areas.

ISSUE #2: STAFFING AND APPARATUS NEEDS

Problem

San Diego has failed to provide adequate fire protection as a region. San Diego County has no fire department and currently funds only \$8 million annually for fire equipment. The existing fire agencies in San Diego County are generally understaffed. Individual jurisdictions, which may have had adequate resources in the past, have failed to keep up with the growth in their jurisdictions since the implementation of Prop 13. This has resulted in decreasing capabilities as populations have increased.

As an example, using national benchmarks, San Diego City needs 22 additional stations and 300 additional firefighting personnel to meet national response time recommendations to handle day-to-day incidents.

Solution

Create a regional fire protection agency to provide a seamless emergency response delivery system throughout the County. In addition, every existing agency should maintain a current standards of coverage document that clearly identifies response time shortcomings. The results of these studies should be presented to the governing body of each jurisdiction, and a plan adopted to address the required improvements.

County responsibility

In the absence of County-funded fire services, San Diego County should immediately purchase fifty reserve apparatus to be utilized for this purpose. These units should be deployed to existing professional fire departments with the capability to staff them within the four hour notification window.

Since two-thirds of every fire department's suppression staff are off-duty at any given time, a plan needs to be created to equip an off duty division with apparatus to deploy in the event of a major incident.

This would create a surge capacity to double the effective fire force within four hours of notification, thereby providing hundreds of additional firefighting resources to be used within the county of San Diego. This surge capacity would bridge the gap of the typical 48 hour delay in response of available firefighting resources via the state mutual aid system.



Local agency responsibilities

Each agency within San Diego County should have reserve apparatus on a one to one ratio with first line units for this concept to be effective. At a minimum, each agency should seek to bolster its reserve apparatus capability.

Sustainability

An on-going funding mechanism needs to be identified and supported by elected officials which adjusts for inflation and population growth.

Problem

Since government has not funded fire services appropriately, interim solutions must be implemented to bolster firefighting resources.

Solution

All San Diego fire agencies should jointly develop and deliver classes to train citizens and organize retired professional firefighters to assist in the protection of neighborhoods. This cadre could be named the San Diego Fire Corps, and could be coordinated by the Training Officers Section of the San Diego Fire Chiefs Association.

References:

NFPA Documents 1710 and 1720, staffing career and volunteer fire departments.

Commission on Fire Accreditation International, benchmarking documents.

ISSUE #3: LAND USE / FUEL MANAGEMENT

Problem

Many homes burn down during wildland fires even though the homeowner appears to have complied with all fire safety regulations.

Solution

The vulnerability of a home during a wildland fire depends on three basic variables: location, building design, and defensible space. Fire exploits the weakest link. If any one of these variables is not properly addressed, the chances a home will burn during a wildland fire increases dramatically.

Location

The placement of a home within the wildland/urban interface is critical. While offering the best views, home sites located at the tops of canyons or within mountain saddles are extremely dangerous. These topographical features concentrate both heat and embers and funnel them directly at the home. Such locations have been the sites of both firefighter and homeowner fatalities. Consequently, homes within such vulnerable locations are usually considered indefensible by firefighters and they will not risk their lives to protect them. While some fire risk can be mitigated on such sites by building design and fuel management, it is impossible to make them fire safe.

Design

The primary cause of home ignition during a wildland fire is by embers landing in vulnerable locations or entering attic spaces through roof vents. Therefore it is vital to install attic vents designed to resist ember entry, box-in all exposed wood surfaces (eaves, undersides of decks, etc.), and eliminate flammable surfaces that possess nooks and crannies in which embers can settle (tile/concrete roof edges, porch corners, etc.)

Defensible Space

At the minimum, all flammable material within the first 30 feet around a home should be removed (including stacks of wood, patio furniture, etc.) and vegetation within the next 70 feet should be properly thinned to 50% cover and managed to eliminate a continuous bed of fuel that could bring fire to the house. Do NOT clear vegetation down to the dirt! This will encourage the growth of weeds which, if not continually removed, can increase the fire hazard. It is critical to create a managed zone with lightly irrigated vegetation that will form a barrier to embers and



heat flow. Properly managed vegetation helps to break up and cool air currents that send embers and heat toward the structure. Plants that can produce embers (palm trees, acacia, etc.) should not be within the 100 foot defensible space zone. Native plants are OK if properly thinned. Homes above slopes may need additional fuel management beyond 100 feet.

The most common wildland vegetation type in San Diego County is chaparral (see photo), a shrub dominated ecosystem that provides important watershed, habitat, and recreational values. While flammable, we can co-exist with the system by creating fire-safe communities.

How to reduce fire risk is not a one-answer question.

It is critical to address all three variables of the fire-risk reduction triad: location, design, and defensible space.

References:

Cohen, J.D. 1999. Reducing the wildland fire threat to homes: where and how much? USDA Forest Service Gen. Tech. Report PSW-GTR-173, pp 189 –195.

Cohen, J.D. 2000. Preventing disaster: home ignitability in the wildland-urban interface. *Journal of Forestry* 98: 15 – 21.

Halsey, R.W. 2008. *Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California*. Second edition. Sunbelt Publications, San Diego, CA.

ISSUE #4: MUTUAL AID RECOMMENDATIONS

Problem #1

San Diego County generally has a lack of firefighting resources and no County Fire Agency, so when the 2007 fires occurred, the region relied on a system that was basically ineffective during the first several days. Because San Diego is located in a geographical cul-de-sac, mutual aid requests, when filled, often come from great distances. Multiple fires in the southern California region also significantly impact resource availability. California fire service leaders are growing frustrated by being asked to continually help San Diego when San Diego has not provided adequate fire protection resources on its own.

Solution

Since professional fire agencies are called to extinguish fires that typically start in the unincorporated areas, a minimum of 50 fire apparatus should be purchased by the County and assigned to existing paid professional Fire Departments for deployment to fires located only in San Diego County. This program should be managed using criteria similar to the state OES program. The reserve apparatus will be staffed within four hours with recalled off-duty firefighters, and assigned immediately to support initial attack resources (refer to Staffing/Apparatus Summary).

Problem #2

Fire Mutual Aid resources requested from areas outside of San Diego County were not adequate to respond to the priority areas of the fires. As an example, no mutual aid resources were assigned to the communities of Rancho Bernardo or Scripps Ranch in the City of San Diego during the first several days of the fires in 2003 or 2007. Those communities suffered the loss of hundreds of structures.

Solution

The development of an interim regional fire resource oversight organization, sanctioned by local government and empowered with the responsibility and authority to coordinate the fire



prevention and protection efforts of San Diego County, needs to be a top priority. This Fire organization needs to secure a seat at the Multi-Agency Coordination System (MACS) in Riverside, California to represent San Diego County in mutual aid deployment decisions. This will ensure appropriate representation on the status of wildfires and resource priorities for the San Diego Region.

Further, this regional fire organization should establish a San Diego County MACS to provide improved control of resources in San Diego County during major emergency incidents. (MACS is a body of Southern California Fire Professionals representing various agencies and is charged with several responsibilities including determining “the best allocation and assignment of resources to meet individual incident needs.”)

ISSUE #5: BUILDING AND FIRE CODE RECOMMENDATIONS

Problem:

Since the first wildland/urban interface fire destroyed 584 homes in Berkeley in 1923, California has lost well over 18,000 residential structures and hundreds of lives to similar fires. Suffering a disproportionate share of California's life and structure loss is San Diego County, which accounts for 20%. Past studies have shown that with proper vegetation clearance and building construction, over 95% of structures threatened by wildland/urban interface fires would survive unharmed. Yet most cities in San Diego County do not have fire and building codes to address these issues.

Solution - New Structures

The County of San Diego, cities of Solana Beach, Del Mar, and most fire districts in the County have adopted a modified version of the International Urban-Wildland Interface Code. Structures built to these new standards and threatened by the recent fires were generally unharmed. Universal adoption and enforcement of this code by all cities in the county would greatly reduce structure losses to future wildland fires.

Solution - Existing structures

The adoptions of new codes and regulations will not immediately resolve the wildland/urban interface fire problem in San Diego County. Unfortunately, tens of thousands of structures have been built without regard to the wildland fire threat. Adoption of new building codes will only resolve the problem for the new structures built under these codes. For existing structures, the two most critical actions are creating 100-feet of defensible space by removing highly flammable vegetation and replacing it with fire resistive vegetation, and the replacement of combustible roofing. These two items will provide a greatly improved level of wildland fire protection for these homes. This can be accomplished in two ways. First, fire departments within the County need to greatly increase their enforcement efforts. These enforcement efforts need to include both highly flammable native and ornamental vegetation.



Second, the insurance industry should charge significantly higher rate for structures that do not have proper clearance or fire resistive roofs. This would provide an economic incentive to correct these deficiencies and make the structure more resistive to wildland fire damage.

Sustainability:

After past large fires, jurisdictions have adopted improved fire codes and added fire inspectors. Unfortunately, problems arise when jurisdictions are unable or unwilling to maintain and enforce these new code requirements.

Typically, new codes are passed and enforcement is increased after a large fire or similar catastrophe. After awhile, the public's attention is drawn to a different issue and industries impacted by the new codes (like the wood roof industry) are able to successfully lobby and rescind the improved codes.

Additionally, enforcement efforts are often curtailed due to budget pressures that reduce the number of inspectors. This trend should be reversed by bolstering staff to ensure that appropriate enforcement and mitigation measures occur.

References:

State of California Blue Ribbon Commission Reports 2003 and 2008

2006 International Wildland-Urban Interface Code

ISSUE #6: IMPROVING AERIAL ASSETS

Problem

Airborne firefighting assets are a major feature of the wildfire fighting forces marshaled to deal with the large destructive wildfires occurring in Southern California. The San Diego region has the fewest dedicated wildfire aerial assets under local control of any of the highly populated California counties with significant Wildland Urban Interface areas.

Because the most dangerous fires are produced under weather conditions conducive to producing several serious fires simultaneously throughout Southern California, it is essential that the San Diego region obtain additional assets to provide greater self-sufficiency under these conditions.



Solutions

Conclude Agreements For Early Use Of Marine and Navy Helicopters

The City and County of San Diego should put in place ongoing Memorandums of Agreement with local Marine and Navy helicopter commands to provide water dropping, fire crew transportation, and logistics support on call during Red Flag Warning periods. There should be adequate provisions of water drop gear, manager support (if necessary), communications, training, certifications, etc. so this standby force is fully serviceable when needed. The goal would be to have the Marine and/or Navy helicopters able to launch within 30 minutes after a request on Red Flag Warning days.

Additional Fire/EMS Dedicated Helicopters

The city of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department (SDFD) currently operates one medium-lift twin engine multi-mission Bell 212HP helicopter (100 knots/375 gallons capacity) to respond to fire, rescue and emergency medical calls.

Procurement and staffing of a second medium-lift

twin-engine helicopter should be given the highest priority by the city. Currently, the existing city helicopter must be temporarily removed from service for periodic mandatory maintenance and inspections. A second helicopter eliminates this out-of-service time and provides a second helicopter response capability each day. Availability of two aircraft allows simultaneous responses to two geographically separate areas or the option of assigning both to a single incident to increase the impact towards resolution.

The San Diego Sheriffs Department (SDSD) currently operates two medium-lift single-engine Bell 205A1++ helicopters (95knots/375 gallons capacity). Both aircraft are hoist equipped but function primarily for fire suppression during daylight hours only.

Procurement and staffing of three (3) additional medium lift twin-engine multi-mission helicopters should be given the highest priority by the county. The three (3) county and two (2) city helicopters properly staffed 24/7 would ensure prompt response to all regional emergency incidents. A total regional fleet of seven (7) helicopters ensures availability of four (4) to five (5) aircraft at all times. All seven (7) could be available for major fire incidents.

(As a comparison, the Los Angeles City Fire Department operates five (5) helicopters and the Los Angeles County Fire Department operates nine (9) helicopters. This provides 14 helicopters for a region of similar size to San Diego)

Provide An Airborne GIS Platform

In addition to the water-dropping helicopters, a San Diego City light-category helicopter should be acquired, equipped and supported with appropriate staff so the helicopter can be used as an **Airborne Geographical Information System** platform similar to the helicopter **AGIS** program developing in the Los Angeles City Fire Department Air Operations section. This system can reduce the initial response/planning phase for a new major wildfire or other emergency incident from several hours to 30 minutes or less and improve the quality of the response. The system would facilitate more timely, optimal deployment and use of existing resources by providing incident commanders high-quality, complete, real-time information to manage incidents.

Exploratory Contacts To Obtain Additional Surveillance Assets

Exploratory contacts should be made with the California Air National Guard (CANG), Civil Air Patrol (CAP) units in Southern California and the Federal agencies that field the Predator B and Golden Hawk Unmanned Air Vehicle (UAV) systems. Discussions should include the feasibility of providing continuous area surveillance during Red Flag Warning days to identify and locate new fire starts immediately. Also, Marine and/or Navy interest in flying fire reconnaissance missions on Red Flag Warning days should be explored.

Contract Separately For Aerial Support Aircraft Services

LA County Fire, LA City Fire and CAL FIRE contract for seasonal augmentation of their indigenous aerial fire fighting forces. The San Diego region should likewise arrange to contract for supplemental standby aerial support under their direct control. Aircraft potentially available for this type arrangement include AT-802 SEATS (170 knots/820 gallons), Canadian CL-415 Superscoopers (150 knots/1620 gallons), Erickson Skycrane helicopters (95 knots/2000 gallons), Martin Mars (165 knots/7200 gallons), DC-10 (333 knots/12,000 gallons), and others.

ISSUE # 7: TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS

Problem

Most governmental agencies do not take full advantage of available technology, particularly public safety agencies.

Solution

Local government should redouble their efforts to improve the region's capabilities in several areas using technology. The use of federal Homeland Security grants should be continued, specifically in areas related to fire safety. The San Diego region generously donated over \$20 million after the fires; perhaps a regional technology solution could be funded the same way. Lastly, local government needs to place a high priority on the application of technology for adequate fire protection.

While many examples of technology improvements exist, a few specific examples are offered in the following categories:

Aerial Assets

The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (as covered in the Aerial Assets Issue) offers great promise to the future of data management for wildfire Incident Commanders, and should be pursued to enhance firefighting efforts.

The purchase of current technology equipped helicopters complete with night vision goggles should be a top priority for California officials.

Notification/Evacuation

The county's purchase of the 'Reverse 911' technology was an improvement over the efforts made during the Cedar fire, but the reality is the system is fraught with problems. Other emerging technologies, particularly one from a San Diego-region high-tech firm, will allow Incident Commander's to specifically direct customized messages to individual neighborhoods using current infrastructure, and at no cost to local government. Since homeowners would be responsible to purchase this inexpensive equipment, perhaps the



state could offer a small tax rebate (\$25 or less) to reimburse property owners for their expense.

Staffing and Apparatus Issues

Homeowners who choose to stay and defend or prepare their homes prior to evacuation may wish to be trained in the use firefighting gels which may be used to pre-treat their home in advance of an oncoming wildfire. Kits are available for purchase that will allow the homeowner to pre-treat approximately 4,000 sq. ft. of exterior surfaces per kit.

A website for this product and other homeowner devices is listed in the reference section of this document under the title ***Fire-Etc.***

References:

Fire-Etc. Website: www.fire-etc.com

ISSUE #8: REGIONALIZATION STUDY

Problem

San Diego LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) determinations indicate that the unincorporated region's system for providing fire protection and emergency medical services is dysfunctional--characterized by duplicate organizations and redundant layers of management that needlessly consume public resources and limit opportunities to provide enhanced service.

Solution

The San Diego County Fire Chief's and County Fire District's Associations have presented a proposal to reorganize fire services in the unincorporated area of San Diego County into two phases for better fire response and fire prevention coordination. Phase I would establish a service level standard in the unfunded, underfunded, unserved, and underserved areas of the San Diego Region. The fundamental purpose is to enable a regional response to a range of daily incidents such as vehicle accidents, life-threatening medical emergencies, and structure fires.

Many observers have noted that the region's cataclysmic fires originate and gain momentum in the unincorporated area before sweeping into urban communities. It would be prudent to underwrite an adequate first-responder organization for early suppression, rather than experience the devastating cost of lost property and lost income, and the invaluable loss of life that occurs when early containment fails.



Specific recommendations would:

1. Provide stable, ongoing funding for unequally funded public and unfunded volunteer organizations.
2. Eliminate 13 bureaucracies and apply savings to emergency operations.
3. Reduce disparities between city and unincorporated area automatic and mutual aid.
4. Extend emergency service to 940,000 acres that is not currently within a public fire protection agency.
5. Fully integrate volunteer fire companies into regional operation.
6. Implement a regional plan for purchasing and positioning new equipment.

References: Series of LAFCO reports available on LAFCO Web Site:

<http://www.sdlafco.org/>, "Reports and Publications" (1) Fire Funding Study (2) Fire Protection & EMS Municipal Service Review (3) MACRO Report-Options for Providing Structural Fire Protection and EMS (4) MICRO Report-Reorganization of Structural Fire Protection and EMS.

Problem

The County of San Diego has adopted an Evacuation Plan with components dealing with public notification, evacuation, and care and shelter for evacuees. The public notification system has improved, the evacuation portion lacks agreements with mass transit and animal welfare, and the care and shelter section relies too heavily upon the American Red Cross.

Solutions

Public Notification

The new reverse notification system is capable of not only calling traditional land-line (hardwired) telephones, but cellular phones, pagers and email if programmed, although each device must be individually registered at www.AlertSanDiego.org. A looming crisis exists because of limited bandwidth of local cell sites unable to carry the large volume of cell phone notifications as phone registration increases. Technology now exists to provide site specific evacuation notices through a multitude of mobile- and home-based equipment (See Technology Issues).

Evacuation

The County's Office of Emergency Services needs to immediately formalize the agreements dealing with the utilization of mass transit (road and rail), the coordination of several jurisdictions evacuating simultaneously, animal evacuation coordination, and the difficulties of identifying and moving Special Needs populations.

Awareness of one's surroundings may be the key to individual survival. Residents who are in harm's way before an official evacuation order is issued, those who lack adequate transportation, and those who choose not to comply with an evacuation order may have to shelter in place. Education about how to prepare yourself and your property, what equipment is necessary, and hands-on training should be provided to interested residents.



Care and Shelter

The County's Emergency Plan, and Federal Charter, charge the American Red Cross (ARC) with the responsibility for care and shelter for evacuated persons. Based on the performance of the ARC after the initial hours of Firestorm 2007, it is obvious that ARC volunteers are victims first, and the ARC didn't have the resources to meet the countywide need for shelter.

The County needs to better publicize its ability to operate shelters, and encourage all local jurisdictions to train and equip staff and volunteers to establish and operate independent local shelters.

References:

San Diego County Operational Area Evacuation Plan

ISSUE #10: BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

(These recommendations remain unchanged from the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission Task Force)

The unprecedented natural disaster risk facing California in the 21st Century demands a new commitment to investing in fire and emergency response capacity and sensible land-use and fire prevention.

*The **Blue Ribbon Task Force** is an 18-member independent panel of fire service professionals. Its first report on the 2007 Southern California Firestorm details more than a dozen specific recommendations to increase permanent state and local emergency services, build additional response to meet catastrophic needs, break down bureaucratic barriers between governmental agencies and establish a new commitment to fire-safe construction and land-use planning. [California Professional Firefighters](#) is one of the founding participants in the Task Force, along with [CDF Firefighters Local 2881](#) and the [California Fire Chiefs Association](#).*

The Task Force report's core recommendations center around an urgent upgrade in the fire and emergency response capabilities at the state and local level. Specific recommendations include:

More firefighters

Expand CALFIRE statewide, with permanent three-person staffing year-round and four-person staffing statewide during periods of highest fire risk. Establish reasonable standards of coverage for wildland-urban interface, and build strong statewide fire training program.

More fire engines

Fund purchase of 150 new engines by the state Office of Emergency Services. The OES engines would be deployed with local fire departments throughout the state, boosting local protection and providing rapid response during all disasters, including wildland fires.

More aircraft

Accelerate upgrade of CALFIRE helicopter fleet and redeploy functioning resources to local fire agencies as available to provide additional surge capacity.



Improved tactical abilities

Establish way to exchange real-time intelligence information among fire responders. Fund satellite or other "cross-band" real-time communication, so firefighters from different agencies can talk to each other.

Less red tape

Establish direct liaison between state and local governments and military to cut through bureaucratic delays in deployment of resources. Urge Congress to establish and firefighting as an ancillary function of the military.

Fire-safe construction and land-use issues

Create a working group to develop a model hazard-reduction strategy, including specific fire-safe land-use guidelines, defensible space standards, model building and fire codes, and public education efforts.

References:

Blue Ribbon Summary on CPF Website:
http://www.cpf.org/default/whats_new/blue_ribbon_task_force_report/index.cfm

ISSUE #11: ECONOMICS AND FUNDING

Problem #1

San Diego County households are paying a high price, roughly a billion dollars a year, for inadequate fire protection.

This cost is paid in the form of higher insurance costs for homeowners, reductions in home values, high rents and renter insurance rates. There are also uncompensated losses and disruptions to San Diego's economy when fires occur as well as harm to ecosystems and mudslides.

Local government agencies do not directly face these costs. San Diego County households are largely unaware of the links between the various fire-related costs and the level of fire protection they expect. The end result is that San Diegans pay dramatically more in insurance and other costs than they would with the implementation of a comprehensive program to deal with the growing threat of large-scale urban wildfires.

Solution

Determine true economic cost of different fire protection levels that could be feasibly implemented, and educate the public and local government agencies about the advantages of increasing protection levels.

Problem #2

Each major wildfire in San Diego County tends to be viewed as an extremely rare event that nothing could stop. This view allows local officials to avoid taking the necessary steps to prevent wildfires from doing major damage to the region.

Solution

Recognition that the possibility of major wildfires is a key feature of the Southern California environment. The weather conditions that give rise to such fires appear on a sufficiently frequent basis that it is economically prudent to plan on how to prevent, contain, and reduce the amount of damage they do.

Problem #3

Failure to have a plan for quickly deploying resources to stop a fire while they can still be contained before hitting urban areas may save



money in most years but over longer periods of time is much more costly to the public.

Solution

The only way to have resources available early in the course of a fire is to have them available locally or have them available for deployment on short notice.

The current strategy effectively calls for an escalation of firefighting resources over the course of a fire. Increasing the resources that are available at the beginning of the fire season that can be quickly deployed will decrease the likelihood that a fire will get away and actually reduce overall firefighting costs when calculated over a multi-year period.

Problem #4

Local government agencies get most costs reimbursed only if a disaster is declared.

Solution

Change reimbursement system. The current system of reimbursing local and state agencies only after a major disaster has been declared does not provide incentives for local and state agencies to spend resources on initial efforts that might well prevent the disaster. The Federal Government will save money in the long run by putting their assets on call during periods of high fire risk and preemptively making them available at the initial stages of a potential runaway wildfire rather than paying much larger costs for dealing with a fire after it enters an urban area.