

**SUBMITTAL TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA**



FROM: Supervisor Jim Venable **SUBMITTAL DATE:** November 7, 2003

SUBJECT: Mountain Communities Fire Safety.

RECOMMENDED MOTION: That the Board join with me to direct the Executive Office to work with Riverside County Sheriff's Department, Riverside County Fire Department / California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), Riverside County Fire Department / Office of Emergency Services, and Information Technology to research the following five issues and make a full report to this Board within two weeks:

- (1) Determine how we can quickly access our County's fair share portion of the \$20,000,000 of federal appropriation funding for dead tree removal, and utilize the County funds that we have expended so far as our apparently required "match" for these critically needed dollars;
- (2) Determine how we can obtain through CDF "additional staffing as necessary to expedite the processing of contracts and grants in order to pass federal funds to the communities as quickly as possible," as so directed in the Governor's Executive Order D-69-03, dated June 20, 2003;
- (3) Research the feasibility and cost of a "reverse 9-1-1" system to be used for emergency evacuation notices;
- (4) Determine what process would be required and what agencies would be involved in closing all highway access to Riverside County's mountain communities in the event of "red flag" fire conditions; and
- (5) Look into the potential of enacting an emergency tree removal ordinance due the extreme fire danger.

BACKGROUND: On March 5, 2002, this Board took action to declare a Local Emergency due to the extreme fire hazard that we recognized that we had in our mountain communities due to unprecedented drought and insect infestation. This Board has renewed that Local Emergency every two weeks since that time, and has also put \$420,000 of direct funds into that process as well as over \$3,000,000 in indirect support. In spite of ongoing planning meetings, aggressive attempts at tree removal, public education programs, Town Hall meetings, evacuation plans, etc., we still have to ask ourselves, in light of the horrific fires that we have seen in the past several weeks, "Have we done all we can to be prepared if a fire occurs in our mountain communities?"

(Continued)

Jim Venable
Supervisor, Third District
JV:msm

Mountain Communities Fire Safety (Continued)

On November 6th, we held another Town Hall meeting in Idyllwild with our public safety personnel and our constituents and heard chilling stories from the experts on the unbelievable and totally unprecedented fire behavior that they observed during the recent fire siege. The word from them is that even though much has been accomplished, there is still much more to do. We must stop debating the issues; it is a time for action.

We have learned that the recent federal appropriation of \$20,000,000 for dead tree removal in the three Southern California counties (San Bernardino, San Diego, and Riverside) is coming to us via programs that require a 50/50 match. If the money that we have spent so far cannot be considered as a match, these are additional costs that this county simply cannot afford. We must find ways to work with our federal legislators on this critical issue.

We also must have more "hands" to help with this process. Our capable County Fire /CDF staff have done an excellent job coordinating our tree removal process, but the burden has become overwhelming. We are calling on our state government to honor the Governor's directive to provide more assistance.

Also, a safe and orderly evacuation is of highest concern to our office and all our public safety personnel. We need to find out in advance how we can ask for the roads into our forested areas to be closed for the safety of our constituents. We also need to research the "reverse 9-1-1" system which could make recorded phone call evacuation notification to all residents within a given area. This method was utilized to great advantage by Southern California Edison to notify residents of the pending power outages during the recent fire siege.

And finally, we must seek all possible remedies for removing dead trees. It is especially a problem with absentee property owners. Our existing abatement ordinance does not clearly provide for enforcement of dead tree removal. Many Hill residents are urging us to institute a stronger program. Therefore, we are asking our Fire Department to look into how this Board can strengthen that aspect of the ordinance, at least during the current emergency.

Bottom line, our fire season is not over. The small amount of rain that we have had has made no significant difference whatsoever in our horrendous fire threat. We cannot work too fast to address these critical issues.