

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



FROM: Supervisor Bob Buster

SUBMITTAL DATE:
June 9, 2009

SUBJECT: Fire Hazard Reduction Task Force Report

RECOMMENDED MOTION: That the board receive and file the report from the Riverside County Fire Hazard Reduction Task Force.

BACKGROUND: This is an update from the Fire Hazard Reduction Task Force (FHRTF) which will provide information and recommendations for reducing fire hazards within Riverside County, informing and educating the public regarding the fire hazards and risks, planning fire safe communities, enforcing fire laws and ensuring safe and timely evacuation of citizens in the wake of an advancing wildfire.

The FHRTF is a standing committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors following the October 2006 Esperanza Fire that killed 5 United States Forest Service firefighters. Supervisor Bob Buster authored the initial Form 11 (November 21, 2006, Policy Item 3.25) to create the FHRTF. The committee is comprised of federal, state and local government representatives in addition to civilian members appointed by each Supervisor.

Bob Buster

Bob Buster, 1ST District Supervisor

Departmental Concurrence

FINANCIAL DATA	Current F.Y. Total Cost:	\$ N/A	In Current Year Budget:	N/A
	Current F.Y. Net County Cost:	\$ N/A	Budget Adjustment:	N/A
	Annual Net County Cost:	\$ N/A	For Fiscal Year:	N/A

SOURCE OF FUNDS:	Positions To Be Deleted Per A-30	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Requires 4/5 Vote	<input type="checkbox"/>

C.E.O. RECOMMENDATION:

County Executive Office Signature

- Consent
- Policy
- Consent
- Policy

Dep't Recomm.:
Per Exec. Ofc.:



FIRE HAZARD REDUCTION TASK FORCE

**REPORT
TO**

**THE RIVERSIDE COUNTY BOARD OF
SUPERVISORS**

JUNE 9, 2009

**PRESENTED BY
RIVERSIDE COUNTY FIRE CHIEF JOHN HAWKINS**

INTRODUCTION

This is an update from the Fire Hazard Reduction Task Force (FHRTF) providing information and recommendations for reducing the fire hazard within Riverside County, informing and educating the public regarding the fire hazards and risk, planning fire safe communities, enforcing fire laws and ensuring safe and timely evacuation of citizens in the wake of an advancing wildfire.

The FHRTF is a standing committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors following the October 2006 Esperanza Fire that killed 5 United States Forest Service firefighters, destroyed 34 residential structures and burned over 40,000 acres. Supervisor Bob Buster authored the initial Form 11 (November 21, 2006, Policy Item 3.25) to create the FHRTF. The committee is comprised of federal, state and local government representatives in addition to citizen members appointed by each Supervisor. Since the task force formation, the committee has met numerous times and made one presentation to the Board of Supervisors.

Right after the formation, the FHRTF determined the major considerations of the task force should be: (1) evacuation, (2) education, (3) engineering (planning), and (4) enforcement. Subcommittees were formed to represent each of these disciplines.

This report to the Board of Supervisors will update activities of the FHRTF and provide significant recommendations to improve evacuation notifications and citizen evacuations, to better inform and educate the public about the risk of wildfire, to better plan development within the County and to better enforce existing fire laws and to recommend other fire regulatory measures.

ENFORCEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

Goal #1 Working to Standardize Enforcement

Accomplishments

- Have conducted training with local Riverside County Code Enforcement Office
- Have attended Southern California Hazardous Vegetation Management Assoc. Meetings.

Challenges

- Bringing local agencies together

Recommendations

- Have Board assist in locating contacts with other agencies
- Fiscal restraint of agencies involved to facilitate enforcement

Goal #2 Coordinate and cross train with County Code Enforcement

Accomplishments

- Have conducted training with Code Enforcement
- Were educated on residential fire hazard reduction program (LE100), RCO 695 & 772
- Code Enforcement rode along with Fire Prevention Technicians

Goal #3 Adequate Staffing

Accomplishments

- Prioritizing of inspection areas based on Fire Severity Zones

Challenges

- Current funded positions are not filled for current level of hazard abatement necessary under County Ordinance
- Additional Office space would be needed in other areas of the County
- Increase staffing to equal increase in County areas inspected

Recommendations

- A funding mechanism to assist with program costs
- Automation of the inspection program could reduce staffing needed, funding to establish automation program would be necessary. The bark beetle program in the Idyllwild area is beginning researching an automated program which may be compatible to hazard abatement inspections.

Goal #4 Penalty Issues

Accomplishments

- Current administrative fee for contractor hazard abatement costs under County Ordinance 695 is estimated to increase from \$126 to approximately \$300
- Current administrative fee for contractor abatement costs under County Ordinance 772 is estimated to increase from \$126 to \$1000.

Challenges

- Fees are only based on properties requiring abatement by Contractor
- Properties inspected and abated by the property owner has no fee associated

Recommendations

- Administrative fee returned to budget to assist in funding program

EDUCATION SUB-COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

In cooperation with our partner agencies; local, county, state, and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, public and private partnerships, a thorough public education campaign for wild land fire safety and defensible space in Riverside County is continuing to the best of our ability and utilizing all resources available.

Accomplishments:

- o Important public information was printed in the County Connections Newsletter produced by Economic Development Agency.
- o Working with the Evacuation Sub-Committee, we continue to expand the Counties Early Warning Notification System (EWNS)

- Working with Cal-Fire, public information about Defensible Space and the 100' clearance requirements have been widely distributed in the high fire areas of Riverside County.
- Several training exercises have been conducted in Riverside County focusing on the danger from wildfire and the impacts on the residents.

CHALLENGES:

The main challenge facing the Education Sub-Committee is the lack of available funding and staff to fully support our educational outreach efforts. While everything possible is being done with existing resources, additional resources are needed to continue and expand the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Continue to support existing Fire Safe Councils and assist with the creation of new Fire Safe Councils in high fire danger areas.

Continue to update and expand the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for the San Jacinto Mountains (San Bernardino National Forest), and continue work on the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for the Cleveland National Forest.

Continue to support outreach and education efforts taking place in our local schools.

Continue to pursue grant opportunities.

ENGINEERING SUBCOMMITTEE

Accomplishments

Accomplishments include the Fire Department and Building and Safety Department drafting new conditions of approval, requiring the most current construction and fire-flow standard to reduce fire hazards in High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. These conditions would apply to new construction and newly installed manufactured homes, mobile homes, and commercial modular structures in these areas.

Accomplishments include County staff's continuing efforts to alert the public early in the process of the hazards and added responsibilities of building and living in High Fire Areas, including establishing and maintaining defensible space, and constructing buildings with enhanced fire resistance, adequate fire flows, and secondary access.

Recommendations

Engineering recommends introducing an amendment to the Safety Element of the General Plan to raise standards in high fire areas for new subdivisions, when the County Fire Department takes the updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps for the Local Responsibility Area back to the Board for approval.

Engineering recommends amending the General Plan to include strategies and policies to implement the existing Riverside County General Plan Incentives Program (Administration Element) and Density Transfer Program (Land Use Element) to encourage development outside of high fire areas.

Engineering reviewed the role of Homeowner Associations and Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions (CC&Rs). The challenge is to maintain common areas free of flammable vegetation in high fire areas, and although fire protection/vegetation management plans are required by the Fire Department for new subdivisions in these areas, the responsibility of the Homeowner Association for adhering to its plan is not included in the CC&Rs. Engineering's recommendation is to establish a new condition of approval that requires this responsibility to be set forth in the recorded CC&Rs.

The Task Force identified other engineering challenges including hardening structures housing critical public and private facilities like water pump stations in high fire areas. The Task Force's recommendation is for the Fire Department to establish model standards for hardening these critical facilities against fire.

Evacuation Subcommittee

GOAL #1: Riverside County shall continue with and expand contingency planning to other wild-land-urban interface high risk areas. This work will be done in collaboration with Fire, to determine the best evacuation routes for area residents, and also identify specific areas where residents could be sheltered in place.

Background: Several key areas of Riverside County have been studied and mapped for the best evacuation routes. However, other vulnerable areas still need to have detailed evacuation plans developed and tested. In addition, in some areas, evacuation is not the optimal solution during fire events. When possible, citizens should be allowed to shelter in place in lieu of evacuation. Determining which areas are best suited for this option is also needed.

Action Steps	Sequence	Accountability	Schedule	Resources	Policy Issue / Fiscal Impact
Visit various sites to identify evacuation routes and potential safe zones.	1	Fire	May 2008	Fire Inspection personnel	No Policy Issues and No Fiscal Impact
Document and map locations	2	Fire	By October 2008		No Policy Issues and No Fiscal Impact
Meet with residents to share plan	3	Fire and Sheriff	By January 2009		No Policy Issues and No Fiscal Impact
Conduct drills to test plan	4	Fire and Sheriff	June 2009 and Ongoing	Fire and Sheriff	No Policy Issues and No Fiscal Impact

GOAL #2: Expand Early Warning Notification System (EWNS) and continue funding. Working with the County Fire / Office of Emergency Service (OES), continue to expand public information program to educate both citizens and county employees about the capabilities of the system.

Background: The County has already purchased and is currently operating an early warning notification system, often referred to as "reverse 911." It is essential to continue the use of technology and to train citizens and employees about how the system operates and what features it can provide. Accurate resident information is needed to ensure that the largest numbers of citizens are notified in the event of an emergency. System expansion is likely given the continued growth in Riverside County.

Action Steps	Sequence	Accountability	Schedule	Resources	Policy Issue / Fiscal Impact
Train personnel on system use and capabilities	1	OES	April 2008		No Policy Issues and No Fiscal Impact
Conduct system tests	2	OES	Ongoing	OES, Sheriff, Fire, Community Health Agency	No Policy Issues and No Fiscal Impact
Update data in system	3	OES	Ongoing		Funding to ensure up to date information and future expansion

GOAL #3: Identify issues related to private property owners' use of fire retardant foam.

Background: Many insurance companies are utilizing private vendors to apply fire retardant foam on residences in areas affected by fire. This is done as a prevention effort during active fire events, particularly on high value properties. The identification of legitimate vendors is essential to ensure the security of evacuated areas.

Action Steps	Sequence	Accountability	Schedule	Resources	Policy Issue / Fiscal Impact
Determine list of vendors	1	Fire	May 2008	Fire Inspection personnel	No Policy Issues and No Fiscal Impact
Identify properties likely to use retardant foam application service	2	Fire	By July 2008		No Policy Issues and No Fiscal Impact
Develop plan for identifying vendors	3	Fire and Sheriff	By July 2008		No Policy Issues and No Fiscal Impact
Develop vendor access plan for field personnel to follow	4	Sheriff	By September 2008	Fire and Sheriff	No Policy Issues and No Fiscal Impact