



# SAN DIEGO COUNTY

## WILDFIRE PREPARATION & RESPONSE

2003

At the height of the fires, **5,754** personnel were assigned to fire response in San Diego County. **2,453** residential structures, **22** commercial properties and **763** outbuildings were destroyed. The fires consumed about **383,269** total acres. There were **17** fatalities including **1** firefighter.

### During the fires...

Deputies went door-to-door asking people to evacuate.

Emergency responders experienced difficulty communicating across agencies.

Lack of fire representation in the Emergency Operations Center hampered the County's ability to receive current, updated information on the progress of the fires.

Media staff was inundated with calls from the public.

Multiple, simultaneous single agency press conferences created confusion.

31 news releases were sent to the media during the fires.

85 County nurses were deployed to work 115 shifts at evacuation shelters in San Diego County.

Damage assessment teams conducted windshield surveys of damaged areas and provided GIS mapping.

### After the 2003 fires...

- The Board of Supervisors partnered with the Sheriff's Department to **invest \$22 million in the County's Regional Communications System**. The upgrades vastly improved communication among emergency responders during the 2007 fires.
- The County **launched ReadySanDiego** website, the region's one-stop disaster preparedness resource.
- The County **bought two firefighting/rescue helicopters** and a 4,000 gallon fuel truck - and reached an agreement to put CAL FIRE captains and Helitack crews in County aircraft.
- In 2004, the County and CAL FIRE signed contracts to provide year-round, **24-7 coverage** in remote areas of the backcountry.
- The County expanded and **upgraded its Emergency Operations Center** in 2006. This is the state and federally recognized center where government and emergency managers work together to respond to a disaster.
- The Board of Supervisors ratified 16 independent fire district fire-code books into **one County Consolidated Fire Code**.
- In 2004, County leaders **improved building codes**, requiring use of more ignition-resistant materials such as stucco for exterior walls, dual-paned windows and heavy timber for wood patios, decks and fences.
- The County and local agencies spent about \$47 million to **remove about 530,000 dead, dying and diseased trees** from evacuation roads in and around Palomar Mountain and Julian.
- The County improved its regulations in 2004 by requiring 100 feet of **"defensible space"** around homes.
- Together with CAL FIRE and other partners, the County launched a program in 2004 to help homeowners meet **brush clearance** requirements. 12,000 inspections a year result in about 90% of residents complying with recommendations to clear brush.
- The County's Office of Emergency Services became the only local government in the state to earn **national accreditation** for disaster preparedness and response.



Since 2003 the County of San Diego has invested more than \$285 million in fire protection. This includes the purchase of firefighting equipment; advances in regional communication; planning; fire service improvements; and fire fuel reduction.

Flames consumed nearly **369,000** acres or about **13%** of the total land mass of the County of San Diego. **515,000** people were evacuated. **1,751** residences and businesses were destroyed; **17,561** homes were saved. Ten lives were claimed in the fires.

## During the fires...

"Reverse 911" telephone system alerted residents by phone to evacuate. Together with the internet-based system "AlertSanDiego," the County placed 377,000 emergency calls to evacuate 515,000 people.

The County deployed 120 public health personnel to assist at emergency shelters. In total, 20,000 people sought shelter in 45 separate locations.

CAL FIRE representation within the Emergency Operations Center vastly improved awareness of the progression of the fires.

More than 200 media releases, including numerous maps, were sent to media during the fires.

Fire maps were produced within three hours of activating the Emergency Operations Center.

2-1-1 San Diego serves as the primary agency providing disaster information to San Diego County citizens. 2-1-1 operators answered 109,000 calls during the first week of the fires.

The County's emergency web site, [www.sdcountyemergency.com](http://www.sdcountyemergency.com), was consistently updated with emergency information but overwhelmed by the number of visitors seeking fire information.

Military disaster support is available once a State of Emergency is declared. Three Navy Seahawk helicopters were dispatched to help local firefighters battle the 2007 firestorms. CAL FIRE has agreements in place with the Marines and Navy and all parties have participated in joint exercises.

## After the 2007 fires...

- The County led the effort to establish comprehensive regional **Hazard Mitigation, Evacuation and Recovery plans**.
- The County created a guideline which tells builders how to assess environmental impacts and **build projects as fire-safe as possible**. Until 2007, builders faced a confusing collection of state and local fire codes.
- All 57 County departments and agencies have written and exercised **Continuity of Operations Plans**, which establish how they will function and serve the public when disaster strikes.
- In 2008, the Board of Supervisors **created the San Diego County Fire Authority** to consolidate fire and life safety services in unincorporated parts of the county.
- The County purchased **33 additional pieces of equipment**, including 19 fire engines and 14 water tenders and support vehicles for use by volunteer fire companies and districts.
- In 2008, CALFIRE **hired an additional 75 firefighters** and increased staffing levels to four firefighters per engine at 26 state-funded stations.
- The County's Office of Emergency Services mailed 1.1 million **"Wildfire Preparedness Guides"** which includes guidance on how to protect your home from fires. The guide and other resources are available at [www.ReadySanDiego.org](http://www.ReadySanDiego.org).
- Since 2005, the County has **led one full-scale exercise every year** to improve disaster readiness and regional collaboration.
- The County led the **development of a Childcare Disaster Plan and Guide** and mailed it to more than 5,100 childcare providers. A free disaster preparedness training was held for medium-sized and small, in-home childcare providers.
- The County's **Family Disaster Plan was converted to Braille** and audio and translated into six languages.
- The County conducted a training with first responders on **meeting the needs of the deaf** community during a disaster.



## NOW...

- San Diego County residents can register to receive emergency notifications over cellphones, Voice Over Internet Protocol and email, and Accessible AlertSanDiego provides audio, and video messages. In 2013, more than **230,000 cellphones are registered with AlertSanDiego**.
- Residents get real-time emergency information wherever they are through the **County's emergency website and mobile app**. The County can also use the federal Wireless Emergency Alert system to target cell phones.
- The County is **creating training for shelter workers** to improve their ability to care for people with a disability or other physical or mental health needs.
- Hundreds of County employees have been **trained in specific disaster worker roles** to assist with the region's disaster response and recovery.
- The County has recently **invested \$7 million in upgrades related to the Regional Communications System** and is working with regional partners on plans to replace RCS with a next-generation system within the next few years.
- The San Diego County Fire Authority, local government and CAL FIRE currently **protect 1.42 million acres of land** with 54 fire stations countywide. Volunteer fire departments, fire protection districts and SDCFA man 36 of those stations. CAL FIRE and SDCFA fund 18 stations, 26 engines and two Helitack bases. CAL FIRE and U.S. Forest Service operate one air attack base.