

1. INTRODUCTION

To protect resources, both natural and developed, public policy demanded an aggressive initial attack fire suppression strategy. This strategy resulted in the interruption of California's natural fire regime with lower frequency, shorter seasons, larger average fire size and increased intensity. The consequences of this change in the fire regime include increased fire hazards and increased continuity of fuels, including vegetation and structures, which complicate firefighting. Skyrocketing firefighting costs and unacceptable damages to natural and developed resources have resulted.

At the same time, a boom of growth in residences increased the number of ignitions in the wildlands, posing an unprecedented threat to natural resources while prompting changes in firefighting techniques and strategies. Recently a change in emphasis—from fire protection resources to pre-fire management—has been embraced by all major agencies with natural resource management and fire protection responsibilities.

The effectiveness of pre-fire management is demonstrated by house survivability studies. For example, information from wildland resource expert Ethan Foote's *Structure Survival on the 1990 Santa Barbara "Paint" Fire* indicates that homes with a noncombustible roof and vegetation clearance had a 90% chance of survival (99% when defensive actions were also taken by civilians or firefighters). These measures tend to create a defensible space so that people may defend the structure. Houses with combustible roofs, no vegetation clearance, and lack of intervention had a 4% chance of survival. Under this scenario, pre-fire management provided nearly certain survival as opposed to nearly certain destruction.

Legislators have recognized the need for and effectiveness of pre-fire management by way of various laws. These encompass hazard assessment, requirements for noncombustible roofing, and disclosure for fire hazards when selling real property.

It is now the responsibility of those who implement fire safe regulations to apply these strategies using common sense. This guide will assist in implementation and help promote positive action.