

# Santa Barbara County Communities

## Wildfire Protection Plan

### WILDFIRE PROTECTION ADMINISTRATION



*Copter 308*

### The Fire Protection System

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department actually has a dual fire protection role. The Santa Barbara County Fire Department provides structural fire protection and rescue services to the Santa Barbara County Fire Protection District, which encompasses approximately 1,236 square miles (791,040 acres). With the exceptions of the Santa Barbara City area around the airport, City of Buellton and City of Goleta, these lands are outside the limits of the County's eight incorporated cities, although numerous unincorporated communities are within the fire department's jurisdictional boundaries.

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department is also one of six contract counties, which has executed a contract with the State of California to provide wildland fire protection on state responsibility area (SRA). The SRA within the jurisdiction of the Santa Barbara County Fire Department is 686,688 acres.

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department operates 15 Type I capable engines,

9 Type III engines, 3 Type II/III - reserve firefighter staffed engines, 2 bulldozers, 2 Type II helicopters, 3 water tenders, 1 hazardous materials squad, 1 truck company, and 1 breathing support unit from 16 locations.

The publication known as the Gray Book is Exhibit A of the “Contract County Agreement” between the Santa Barbara County Fire Department and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF). The Gray Book identifies resource allocations, which the CDF considers necessary for the protection of SRA and provides funding accordingly.

In addition to the Santa Barbara County Fire Department there are ten other fire agencies providing fire protection within the County of Santa Barbara: Of the eleven fire protection agencies, only the United States Forest Service, Santa Barbara County Fire Department and the Vandenberg Air Force Base Fire Department have wildland fire protection, as part of their primary mission. The primary mission of the remainder of the fire protection agencies in the County is structural fire protection and rescue type services.

#### Santa Barbara Fire Department

The Santa Barbara Fire Department operates 7 Type I capable engines, 1 Type III engine, 1 hazardous materials squad, 2 airport crash/fire/rescue companies and 1 truck company, from 8 locations. The Santa Barbara Fire Department has 124 fulltime employees organized into three functional areas – 107 employees in Operations, 11 employees in Prevention and 6 employees in Support Services.

### Santa Maria Fire Department

The Santa Maria Fire Department operates 3 Type I capable engines, 1 Type III engine, and 1 truck company, from 3 locations. The Santa Maria Fire Department has 37 fulltime employees organized into three functional areas – 31 employees in Operations, 3 employees in Prevention and 3 employees in Support Services.

### Lompoc Fire Department

The Lompoc Fire Department operates 2 Type I capable engines and 1 truck company, from 2 locations. The Lompoc Fire Department has 25 fulltime employees organized into three functional areas – 23 employees in Operations, 1 employee in Prevention and 1 employee in Support Services.

### Solvang Fire Department

The Solvang Fire Department operates 2 Type I capable engines, 1 Type II/III engine, 1 Type III engine and 1 squad from 1 location. The Solvang Fire Department has 2 fulltime employees.

### Guadalupe Fire Department

The Guadalupe Fire Department operates 2 Type I capable engines and 1 squad from 2 locations. The Guadalupe Fire Department has 1 fulltime employee.

### DOD - Vandenberg Air Force Base Fire Department

The Vandenberg Air Force Base Fire Department operates 5 Type I capable engines, 1 hazardous materials squad, 5 airport crash/fire/rescue companies, 3 water tenders, 1 hand crew and 1 truck company, from 6 locations. The Vandenberg Air Force Base Fire Department has 124 fulltime employees organized into three functional areas – 107 employees in Operations, 11 employees in Prevention and 6 employees in Support Services.

### Carpinteria-Summerland Fire Protection District

The Carpinteria-Summerland Fire Protection District operates 2 Type I capable engines from 2 locations. The Carpinteria-Summerland Fire Protection District has 25 fulltime employees organized into three functional areas – 23 employees in Operations, 1 employee in Prevention and 1 employee in Support Services.

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### Montecito Fire Protection District

The Montecito Fire Protection District operates 2 Type I capable engines, 1 Type III engine and 1 squad from 2 locations. The Montecito Fire Protection District has 38 fulltime employees organized into three functional areas – 26 employees in Operations, 6 employees in Prevention and 6 employees in Support Services.

### Orcutt Fire Protection District

The Orcutt Fire Protection District operates 2 Type I capable engines, 1 Type III engine and 1 squad from 1 location. The Orcutt Protection District has 2 full-time employees.

### USDA Forest Service – Los Padres National Forest

The USDA Forest Service – Los Padres National Forest operates 10 Type III engines, 2 Type II Bulldozers, 1 Type I handcrew, 1 Type II helicopter and 1 water tender.

The fire suppression resources in the Santa Barbara County fire protection system that are appropriate to wildfire suppression include: engine companies, particularly Type III engine companies, bulldozers, helicopters, handcrews, air tankers, and water tenders. Although the typical municipal engine company is capable of and is often used for wildfire suppression, the Type III engine company is designed specifically to fight wildfire. The Type III engine carries more tools and equipment for wildfire suppression, has a short wheelbase, high ground clearance and often has four-wheel drive for off-road operation.

Although engine companies are the typical gage for initial attack capability and response time, most wildfires in the initial attack stages require that engine companies be supported with other resources. Many wildfires begin and develop with such intensity and rapid rate-of-spread that bulldozers, aircraft and/or handcrews must supplement the initial engine company response. A fairly recent addition to the Santa Barbara County Fire Department wildfire suppression arsenal, are two Type II helicopters. Of all the recent advancements in Santa Barbara County Fire Department capabilities, the addition of the helicopter is the most significant in terms of addressing the true “fire problem” in the County. The Type II helicopter is particularly versatile in the wildland-urban/interface fire. Not only is it capable of dropping 300 gallons of water in rapid succession, it can also act as an aerial observation platform for tactical and evacuation purposes and can perform rescue operations.

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department’s two bulldozers have been a mainstay in the wildfire suppression program for many years and remain so despite some perception that they are environmentally insensitive. Fire agency bulldozer operators are experienced in rapidly constructing fire line while minimizing any negative environmental impacts. The Santa Barbara County Fire Department Type III engine fleet is being upgraded and in some cases company staffing levels have been increased, which has improved the overall wildfire initial attack capability. In July of 2005 the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors authorized the re-establishment of a 24 person handcrew for a trial period of six months. This resource is proving to be invaluable for both suppression and pre-suppression purposes.

Both the USDA Forest Service – Los Padres National Forest and the DOD Vandenberg Air Force Base Fire Department staff 20-person inter-regional “Hotshot” handcrews. Hotshot crews are highly trained and organized wildland firefighting crews that are extremely versatile. The CDF maintains conservation camps in Ventura and San Luis Obispo Counties that house inmate handcrews.

### **Cooperative Fire Services**

A cornerstone of the fire protection system in Santa Barbara County is the Master Mutual Aid Plan. Just as is the case at the State level, no single fire agency can muster the resources necessary to combat multiple fires or large fires on an ongoing basis. The California Fire Master Mutual Aid Agreement requires each county to have a mutual aid plan. Because several cities and unincorporated areas of the County provide their own fire protection services, the Santa Barbara County Mutual Aid Plan becomes an essential mechanism for coordinating fire protection resources.

Mutual Aid takes on several different forms. For initial attack purposes, “local mutual aid” facilitates the day-to-day responses where the closest resources are dispatched regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. Although local mutual aid fills a gap in the county fire suppression system, the approach is still not ideal. Because several of the agencies maintain their own dispatch centers, any mutual aid request must be relayed between dispatch centers, creating the potential for error and increasing response times. Duplication of services frequently occurs as a result of either different operational or administrative policies.

Fiscal constraints also hinder system effectiveness. With agencies under pressure to reduce costs, providing mutual aid can become a source of concern that the aid is not reciprocal.

If an incident requires reinforcement resources that cannot be met through local mutual aid agreements, the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid Plan is followed. All fire service entities in California are signatory to the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid System, Master Mutual Aid Agreement.

### **Fire Suppression Policies and Philosophy**

As mentioned in other areas of this document, “initial attack” is the primary focus of wildfire suppression activities for the Santa Barbara County Fire Department. As a “Contract County,” Santa Barbara County Fire Department is contractually obligated to provide an initial attack force designed to achieve the goal of

containing 90% of all wildfires occurring on SRA to 10 acres or less. With so much emphasis placed on quickly extinguishing all wildfires, it might seem that all fire in the wildland is a bad thing. Quite to the contrary, fire is absolutely a necessary element in most the County's ecosystems. Since too many assets are at risk to allow the natural occurrence of wildfire, prescribed or controlled burns must take the place of naturally occurring wildfire.

The human element is always the number one priority for all fire suppression efforts. Many rules and guidelines have been developed to stress firefighter and public safety during wildfires. These rules and guidelines can be helpful for the layperson to understand why firefighters may say or do certain things related to wildfire. Some of these rules and guidelines are: "The Ten Standard Firefighting Orders," "The Eighteen Watchout Situations," "Common Denominators of Fire Behavior on Tragedy and Near-miss Forest Fires," "LCES – Lookouts, Communications, Escape Routes, Safety Zones," "Look Up, Look Down, Look Around." On occasion firefighters have been quoted as saying things such as, "we're not going in there, that place is going to burn," or "we can't do anything, mother nature will just have to take its course" and while these statements might be true at a given time, it shouldn't be misconstrued to mean that firefighters are helpless once a fire escapes initial attack.

With all wildfires, certain strategic and tactical actions must take place. From the time of alarm to the abandonment or closure of a wildfire, one single unified entity must be in command of the incident. To accomplish this, all fire agencies in the County and in the State, for that matter, use the Incident Command System (ICS). Tactically all wildfires must be anchored, which means that a secure starting point is established from which all other strategic and tactical decision-making can build upon.

Once a wildfire grows beyond the initial attack stage where there are assets at risk, particularly in the wildland/urban interface/intermix, two additional dimensions are added to the already complex nature of wildland firefighting. In addition to anchoring and flanking the fire to narrow the flame front, firefighting resources must also be committed to protecting assets out in front of the fire and

resources must be left to protect assets from residual embers and fire after the fire passes through.

Although fire is a necessary component of the local ecosystem, in most cases, unchecked wildfire is no longer a viable fire/fuel management option in Santa Barbara County. Mostly because of population growth, assets at risk have interfaced and intermixed with the wildlands to such an extent that uncontrolled fires must be quickly extinguished. Therefore, an aggressive initial attack firefighting strategy is at the heart of the wildfire protection system in Santa Barbara County.

The initial attack concept relies on the system being designed to provide enough resources, of an appropriate type, in an expeditious enough manner to suppress a wildfire before it causes unacceptable damage. For initial attack, as well as extended attack purposes, applying the appropriate type of resources is paramount to a successful operation.

### **Programs, Projects and Activities**

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department maintains a multitude of programs designed to reduce the costs and losses associated with wildfire. The Hazard Reduction Program provides defensible space through the annual application of PRC 4291. The Strategic Fire Access Road Program is maintained by the Construction Section who in turn keep many miles of unimproved roads accessible to firefighting forces. The Vegetation Management Program provides a mechanism for conducting large scale projects using prescribed fire and mechanical means that can reduce hazardous wildland fuels. In conjunction with the FireSafe Council, the department participates in many community education and outreach programs designed to increase awareness of the wildfire problem and how to deal with it. The High Fire Hazard Area Burn Permit Program gives property owners in high fire hazard areas a means of disposing of hazardous vegetation through burning. The Planning and Engineering Program establishes regulations and oversight for development in hazardous fire areas. The Investigation and Enforcement program determines cause and enforces

regulations for the purpose of reducing the number of wildfires. And finally the Initial Attack Wildfire Suppression Program is intended to keep wildfires to ten acres or less.

### **Funding and Fiscal Framework**

As the WPP evolves, this section will document who receives the benefits and who pays for the fire protection services being provided in the county. This section will also describe grant administration through the National Fire Plan as well as other sources. The various governmental budget processes will be discussed here as well. The goal is to provide a complete fiscal framework for wildfire protection in the county.

### **Institutional Issues**

Issue: With air quality being an issue for the constituents of Santa Barbara County, as well as being an asset at risk, substantial limitations apply to the use of fire for fuel reduction.

Issue: High fire hazard area development standards.

Issue: The City of Santa Barbara and the Montecito Fire District have begun the construction of a fuel break in the foothill interface area. There exists a gap between these two areas that is Santa Barbara County Fire Department. With open ends, the value of this fuel break is severely limited.

Issue: Weather data collection for historical tracking of severe fire weather, real-time tracking of weather conditions for pre-fire management projects such as prescribed burns, fire danger rating notifications, and red flag fire alert notifications is severely lacking due to the limited number of remote automated weather stations (RAWS) representing the varied climatic areas of the County.

Issue: The US Forest Service has a large fuel management project planned for the Brookshire area of the Santa Lucia District of the Los Padres National Forest. This project uses prescribed fire to treat 31,433 acres of old age class fuels which directly benefits the Tepusquet Canyon area of Santa Barbara County.

There is a large area of SRA land between the Forest Service project and Tepusquet Canyon, which should be treated in order to enhance the benefits of the Forest Service project to the Tepusquet Canyon area.

Issue: The high-risk interface/intermix areas of the County need a consistent and comprehensive fire danger rating and red flag warning system.

Issue: The Burton Mesa area of the County has several residential communities that interface with a large wildland area with very old age class fuels that is for the most part managed by the California Department of Fish and Game. This interface poses significant risk to both the structures in the community and to the wildland area, which consists of several endangered plant species.

Issue: The Oak Trails, Woodstock, and Rancho Ynecita areas of the Santa Ynez Valley are adjacent to the Sedgewick Reserve that is managed by the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). The Reserve has a number of acres that has old age class fuel that has been identified in the Reserve Management Plan for prescribed burning.

Issue: Many high fire hazard area community members are interested in conducting fuel reduction projects on their own properties, but don't have the means to dispose of the cut vegetation.

Issue: The current hazard reduction programs administered by the County Fire Department and other fire agencies have considerable workload requirements that can limit the effectiveness of these programs.

Issue: The Range Improvement Association of Santa Barbara County and the Vegetation Management Program conduct prescribed (controlled) burns that face considerable constraints on when and how these burns will be conducted. Due to air quality issues, only a limited number of days are considered favorable from an air quality standpoint. For biological reasons, some entities feel that frequent burning cycles can convert the fuel type to grasses from heavier fuels. Due also to biological reasons, some entities desire that prescribed burning be conducted during specific times of the year in order to mimic somewhat natural burning

conditions and not disturb the nesting and or reproduction of birds and other animals.

Issue: Because of the expense associated with large-scale training exercises, training associated with commanding a large wildfire in the interface has only occurred on a limited basis.