



## Description of the County of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles Fire Department

### Los Angeles County Overview

Los Angeles County, one of California's original 27 counties, was established on February 18, 1850. Originally the County occupied a comparatively small area along the coast between Santa Barbara and San Diego, but within a year its boundaries were enlarged from 4,340 square miles to 34,520 square miles, an area sprawling east to the Colorado River.



In 1853, a bill was introduced to divide the eastern portion of Los Angeles County and San Bernardino County was formed. During subsequent years, Los Angeles County slowly ebbed to its present size, the last major detachment occurring in 1889 with the creation of Orange County. Los Angeles County remains one of the nation's largest counties with 4,081 square miles, an area 800 square miles larger than the combined area of the states of Delaware and Rhode Island. Of the 4,081 square miles, 1,741 square miles are flat, 1,875 square miles are mountains, 246 square miles are comprised of hills, there are 131 square miles of island (Santa Catalina and San Clemente), 59 square miles of mountain valleys, and 28 square miles of marshland.

Los Angeles County includes the islands of San Clemente and Santa Catalina. It is bordered on the east by Orange and San Bernardino Counties, on the north by Kern County, on the west by Ventura County, and on the south by the Pacific Ocean. Its coastline is 81 miles long.

It has the largest population (10,047,300 as of July 2003) of any county in the nation, and is exceeded by only eight states. Approximately 28 percent of California's residents live in Los Angeles County.

The Board of Supervisors, created by the state Legislature in 1852, is the governing body. Five supervisors are elected to four-year terms by voters within their respective districts. The Board has executive, legislative and quasi-judicial roles. It appoints all department heads other than the assessor, district attorney and sheriff, which are elective positions.

As a subdivision of the state, the County is charged with providing numerous services that affect the lives of all residents. Traditional mandatory services include fire protection, law enforcement, property assessment, tax collection, public health protection, public social services and relief to indigents. Among the specialized services are parks and recreation, lifeguard, flood control, water conservation, forestry including brush clearance, fuel modification, vegetation



management, environmental review, and many diversified cultural activities. There are 88 cities within the County, each with its own city council. All of the cities, in varying degrees, contract with the County of Los Angeles to provide municipal services. Thirty-seven cities contract for nearly all of their municipal services.

More than 65 percent of the County is unincorporated. For the one million people living in those areas, the Board of Supervisors is their "city council" and County departments provide the municipal services. The 2003-2004 County adopted budget is approximately \$17.127 billion. Twenty-six percent of the revenue comes from the state, 30% from the federal government, 15% from property taxes, and 29% from other sources. The largest percentage of the budget, 27%, goes to pay for social services, while 20% is spent on public protection and 25% on health services.

The County, with 92,687.5 budgeted employees, is the largest employer in the five-county region. Of these, 26,304 of the positions are in law and justice; 26,819.9 are in health services; and 20,518.5 are in social services. The spectrum of job listings, from clerk to truck driver, sanitarian to psychiatrist, scientist to scuba diver, and attorney to helicopter pilot, encompasses nearly every trade and profession and illustrates the complexity of County government.

### **The County of Los Angeles Fire Department**

The history of the County of Los Angeles Fire Department started in the early 1900s with the formation of two separate departments. The County Forester, in charge of protecting forest lands and responsible for planting and maintaining the landscape, and the County Fish and Game Warden, who was assigned the additional position of County Fire Warden.



In 1919, over 135,000 acres of wildland fires blackened the County of Los Angeles prompting the merging of these two separate departments and resulting in a greater emphasis on fire suppression. Between September 1923 and 1925, 31 separate fire districts were formed; the first two being in Signal Hill and Santa Monica Canyon.

In 1956, the late Fire Chief Emeritus Keith E. Klinger created the visionary Lakewood Plan, allowing incorporated cities within the County to contract with the Department for fire protection services. Today, 57 cities contract with the County of Los Angeles Fire Department which staffs a total of 163 engine companies, 31 truck companies, 79 paramedic units, and numerous other pieces of specialized apparatus.



The County of Los Angeles Fire Department is credited with the creation of the nation's second Firefighter Paramedic Program and the nation's first 911 Emergency Calling System. Throughout its history, the Department has emerged as a leader in the fire service on local, regional and national levels, growing to become the nation's second largest fire protection agency.

Operating 9 divisions, 20 battalions, 159 fire stations and 11 fire suppression camps, the County of Los Angeles Fire Department answers over 234,000 emergency calls annually. Additionally, the Department has Planning, Information Management, Fire Prevention, Air and Wildland, Lifeguard, Forestry and Health Hazardous Materials Divisions which provide valuable services to the more than 3.5 million people who reside in the 1.1 million housing units located throughout the Department's 2,278 square mile area.

The County of Los Angeles Fire Department currently has 159 fire stations, 235 fire engines, 21 ladder trucks, 20 quints, 85 paramedic squads, 11 wildland fire suppression camps, 8 bulldozers, 7 helicopters, 23 Prevention Offices, 12 Forestry Units and numerous other response vehicles and facilities. The Department serves 57 incorporated, as well as the unincorporated areas of the County.

### **Wildland Fire Protection Strategy**

#### Prevention

The most effective way to limit damage and loss due to wildfire is to prevent all but the most blatant ignitions due to arson or unforeseeable circumstances. The focus of the entire Department is on prevention through educational programs, development and enforcement of fire codes and building codes in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, Pre-Fire Planning, Vegetation Management, Brush Clearance, Environmental Review and Fuel Modification Programs. These programs are focused on awareness and mitigation of fire causes, fire spread potential, total costs and effects of fire damage associated with the protection of life, property and the environment. The Department's Fire Plan Unit coordinates the efforts and activities of these programs with the intent of creating efficient and timely Pre-Fire Management projects.

#### Vegetation Management

Vegetation management, as it relates to wildland fire, refers to the total or partial removal of high fire hazard grasses, shrubs, or trees. This includes thinning to reduce the amount of fuel and modification of vegetation arrangement and distribution to disrupt fire progress. In addition to fire hazard reduction, vegetation management has other benefits. These include increased water yields, improved habitat for wildlife, reduction of invasive exotic plant species, and open access for recreational purposes.



The Vegetation Management Program (VMP) is a cost-sharing program that focuses on the use of prescribed fire, mechanical, biological and chemical means, for addressing wildland fire fuel hazards and other resource management issues on State Responsibility Area (SRA) and Local Responsibility Area (LRA) lands. The use of prescribed fire mimics natural processes, restores fire to its historic role in wildland ecosystems, and provides significant fire hazard reduction benefits that enhance public and firefighter safety.

VMP allows private landowners to enter into a contract with CDF to use prescribed fire to accomplish a combination of fire protection and resource management goals. The Forestry Division's Vegetation Management Unit and the Air and Wildland Division's Prescribed Fire Office implement the VMP projects which fit within the Department's priority areas (e.g., those identified through the fire plan) and are considered to be of most value to the County will be completed. The Vegetation Management Program typically treats about 40,000 acres each year statewide.

### Brush Clearance

The Brush Clearance Program is a joint effort between the County of Los Angeles Fire Department and the County of Los Angeles Department of Agricultural Commissioner/Weights and Measures, Weed Hazard and Pest Abatement Bureau (Weed Abatement Division). This unified enforcement legally declares both improved and unimproved properties a public nuisance, and where necessary, requires the clearance of hazardous vegetation. These measures create "Defensible Space" for effective fire protection of property, life and the environment. The Department's Brush Clearance Unit enforces the Fire Codes as it relates to brush clearance on improved parcels, coordinates inspections and compliance efforts with fire station personnel, and provides annual brush clearance training to fire station personnel.

### Fuel Modification

The Fuel Modification Program objective is to create the Defensible Space necessary for effective fire protection in newly constructed and/or remodeled homes within the Department's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ). Fuel modification reduces the radiant and convective heat, and provides valuable defensible space for firefighters to make an effective stand against an approaching fire front. Fuel modification zones are strategically placed as a buffer to open space, or areas of natural vegetation and generally would occur surrounding the perimeter of a subdivision, commercial development, or isolated development of a single-family dwelling.

The fuel modification plan identifies specific zones within a property which are subject to fuel modification. A fuel modification zone is a strip of land where combustible native or ornamental vegetation has been modified and/or partially or totally replaced with drought-tolerant, low-fuel-volume plants.



The Fuel Modification Unit provides guidelines and reviews the landscape and irrigation plans submitted by the property owner for approval before construction or remodeling of a structure. The fuel modification plans vary in complexity and reflect the fire history, the amount and type of vegetation, the arrangement of the fuels, topography, local weather patterns, and construction, design and placement of structures.

### Environmental Review

The Environmental Review Unit works with the County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning in implementing existing environmental ordinances. The unit personnel review all County Oak Tree Permit applications submitted to the Department of Regional Planning and develop recommendations for implementation. Additionally, the unit personnel produce environmental documentation and recommendations such as non-significant impact documents, negative declarations and mitigation measures consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) mandates for construction projects and developments. The Environmental Review Unit ensures that the statutory responsibilities of the County of Los Angeles Fire Department, Forestry Division are addressed in the project planning phase.

### Passive Protection

When the inevitable wildfire does occur, the primary protection of life, property, and the environment will come from passive protection such as defensible space (fuel reduction/brush clearance), fire-resistive landscaping, fire-resistive construction and good housekeeping. Sufficient firefighting water sources must be on site for use by the property owner and/or the fire department. Moreover, residents must have the means of self-evacuating and escaping danger through safe and sufficient egress routes while maintaining appropriate ingress routes for responding fire equipment. The sum effect of passive protection is a force multiplier for active firefighting resources. A single firefighting resource may protect many more structures when passive protection is properly employed. In some cases, firefighting resources may not be necessary at all thus freeing them for other uses.

### Fire Suppression

The most effective time to control a wildfire is in the incipient stages when intensities are lower and the perimeter is small. The combined resource attack is a coordinated suppression effort including ground assets (engines, crews & dozers), aviation assets (fixed and rotary wing), passive fire protection measures, and command elements. Using in-place passive fire protection systems, incident commanders weave the varied active fire suppression assets into an aggressive and coordinated fire fighting effort.