

## **THE FIRE SITUATION**

### **GENERAL LOCATION**

The San Diego Unit is comprised of San Diego and portions of Imperial County located in the extreme southwest corner of California. It is bordered by the Republic of Mexico to the south and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Riverside and Orange counties make up its border to the north and Imperial County to the east. San Diego County spans over 4,200 square miles and its population has grown to 2.9 million people which ranks second in the state. The unit is responsible for protecting 1,237,201 acres of state responsibility lands, 301,130 acres of cooperative direct protection responsibility lands and 4 local government full service fire protection agreements.

### **WILDFIRE OVERVIEW**

The San Diego County fire history map shows that the county has a significant history of major fire incidents over the last 50+ years. Almost every community in San Diego County has been threatened by wildfires during this period. Readily available fuels, influenced by topography and server weather conditions, such as the Santa Ana winds, create fire behavior conditions that present challenges to fire suppression operations in the Unit year-round. Combine these factors with the populace continuing to move to the wildland urban interface areas (WUI) and reduced budgets, will continue to hinder our effectiveness to suppress unwanted wildfires. The San Diego County Office of Emergency Services has developed a Community Protection and Evacuation Plan (CPEP) template to help facilitate communities in establishing local plans. These plans will include evacuations, safe zones, emergency agency response, critical infrastructure protection, and mitigation strategies. The county with cooperation from Forest Areas Safety Taskforce (FAST) and Fire Safe Councils are presenting this template in town hall-style meetings throughout the county.

### **SAN DIEGO UNIT RESOURCES**

The San Diego Unit comprises of:

- 18 CAL FIRE Fire Stations, 26 CDF Fire Engines.
  - 7 Local Govt. Stations, 11 Fire Engines
  - 4 CAL FIRE / CDCR Conservation Camps, 19 Handcrews
  - 1 CAL FIRE / USFS Air Attack Base - 1 CDF OV-10
- 2 CAL FIRE / San Diego County Sherriff Type 2 Helicopters  
2 CAL FIRE S-2T Air Tankers  
1 USFS Type 2 Helicopter
- 4 CAL FIRE Bulldozers
  - 1 CAL FIRE / USFS Interagency Command Center, Monte Vista Headquarters

### **GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION**

Our plan focuses on reducing the occurrence of large damaging wildfires in the San Diego Unit. Coupling pre-fire assessment and Battalion pre-fire plans our activities include: fuel breaks (both shaded and non-shaded), defensible perimeters around communities, and clearances around structures. By strategically treating vegetation to create a diverse and mosaic arrangement of vegetation will facilitate successful firefighting operations, and reduce the cost and losses to the public and the environment.

## **IGNITION WORKLOAD ASSESSMENT**

### **\* FUELS**

San Diego Unit predominate fuel type is a mix chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation. At higher elevations, the fuel type consists of oak woodlands and mixed conifer forest. The county is currently in a 10-year rain drought. Drought conditions directly affected the live fuel moisture in 2007, 2008, and currently 2009. For each of these years, live fuel moistures reached the critical level 30-45 days earlier than live fuel moistures during normal rainfall years. Essentially, the fuels are drier and ready to burn not only during the traditional fire season period, but also during winter months as well.

### **\* WEATHER**

San Diego County is referred to as a high desert climate. Given the county is currently experiencing a 10-year rain drought, this situation has the potential to generate “severe” to “extreme” fire behavior conditions on any given day including the winter months. The average weather conditions for the summer months place the county in a “High Fire Danger” classification. During the months of September, October, and November the unit experience a high frequency of Santa Ana winds. Santa Ana winds occur when a high pressure develops over the southwestern states causing strong dry winds to blow from the east and northerly directions. Santa Ana wind speeds have reach 90 miles per hour in San Diego County.

## **FIRE HISTORY**

San Diego County has a long history of major wind driven fire occurrence distributed throughout the county with only the lower desert and immediate coastal areas excluded. San Diego County experienced two major wind driven fire events occurring in the last eight years (2003 & 2007 fire sieges) both in the month of October with a total of 338,801 acres burned.

### **FRAP ANALYSIS (Fire Hazard Severity Zones FHSZ)**

Analysis by FRAP, illustrates by the FHSZ Map, indicates that nearly the entire San Diego County (State Responsibility Area) and portions of Local Responsibility Areas are in the Very High Hazards Zones. Fire Hazard Severity Zones mandate how structure will be built under the California Building Codes.

### **AREAS OF CONCERN**

Based on fire history and the amount of 30-year plus vegetation, there are three major areas of concern in San Diego County:

- \* The area located south of the Interstate 8 corridor east of Buckman Spring Road, north of Highway 94 to Harbison Canyon
- \* The area next to Highway 79 at the 76 split through Warner Spring in to Riverside County including the east and north side of Palomar Mountain
- \* The area near the Highway 15 corridor, south of the Riverside County, and north of Highway 78

## **STRUCTURE ASSESSMENT**

There are approximately 28,000 developed parcels in San Diego County’s unincorporated areas. The number of structures within this area is likely to be doubled if not tripled. Most of the

unincorporated area falls within CAL FIRE's jurisdiction for wildland fire protection. Structure Assessment is an ongoing process throughout the Unit. Each Battalion is identifying areas of concern in each initial attack area and is listed in the Asset at Risk Section. To ensure property owners are informed of defensible space requires, CAL FIRE engine companies are making contact with homeowners and educating them on how to prepare their homes against wildfire.

### **FREQUENCY OF SEVERE FIRE WEATHER**

Because of extreme fire weather in the Unit, strategic solutions have been developed. During days of high wind events, the Unit will cover additional fire engines (reserve and camp), additional handcrews, mobilize Santa Ana strike teams from all over the state, receive more air tankers from other bases, and notify the public via media to help prepare themselves in case of wildfires in the county

### **CONCLUSION**

The combined factors demonstrate the need for pre-fire management activities to the San Diego Unit. The Unit will continue its efforts, as previously outlined, to initiate projects in cooperation with partner stakeholders and the public in and around identified communities at risk.