



DIANNE JACOB

**VICE CHAIRWOMAN
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: December 2, 2003

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: **PROTECTING LIVES AND PROPERTY FROM FIRE IN THE UNINCORPORATED AREA (District: All)**

SUMMARY:

Overview

As the residents of San Diego County begin to rebuild their homes and lives, it is time to take stock of what we knew before the fires, the challenges we faced during the fires, and take immediate, aggressive action to ensure that this never happens again. Two-thirds of the region did not burn, and the County must implement immediate changes using a common sense approach to prepare the region now and for the future.

Reasonable, common sense approaches to protect lives and property will be the driving force behind these changes. A regional fire management plan must be developed and implemented that addresses the topography, geography, land uses, vegetation, Santa Ana wind conditions and drought conditions that are unique to our region.

As the regional fire management plan is implemented, there are several immediate actions related to fuel management, access, defensive land use design, brushing and clearing, and building codes that can be taken by the County to reduce the risk of another devastating fire.

Recommendation(s)

VICE-CHAIRWOMAN DIANNE JACOB:

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to immediately allow the local fire district or fire protection agencies the authority to require brush management such as clearing and brushing as deemed necessary and appropriate, without County limits.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to immediately initiate increased fire prevention and protection efforts for County-owned, operated, or controlled properties.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to launch an aggressive public education program to increase property owner awareness on steps for fire prevention and risk

SUBJECT: PROTECTING LIVES AND PROPERTY FROM FIRE IN THE UNINCORPORATED AREA (District: All)

reduction on private property.

4. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop options and funding for fuel management including prescribed burns, fire breaks, dead tree removal and brush management and removal.
5. Direct Chief Administrative Officer to review and propose amendments to existing County codes and ordinances to increase wildland fire protection including, but not limited to, the building, fire and zoning codes and subdivision, zoning and weed abatement ordinances dealing with fire safety including setbacks, lot design, landscaping, dead orchards, groves, vines and trees, structure placement, clearing and brushing and emergency access, roofs, siding, windows, attic and crawl space vents, wood decks, fire sprinklers, LPG tanks and fuel tanks and miscellaneous structures such as barns, storage buildings and pump houses.
6. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to pursue the supplemental funding available under H.R.2657 or other Federal or State resources for hazard mitigation, fuels reduction and forest health protection as matching funds become available.
7. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to identify any needed changes to State and Federal law to reduce risks from wildland fires and return to the Board with recommendations for inclusion of the identified changes to State and Federal law in the Board's Legislative Program.
8. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer and the County's legislative advocates to work with the region's State and Federal Representatives to support legislation and funding that would reduce risks from wildand fires.
9. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to utilize the Wildland Fire Technical Working Group to implement recommendations three through eight and return to the Board of Supervisors in 30 days with proposed actions.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with this request.

Business Impact Statement

N/A

BACKGROUND:

As the residents of San Diego County begin to rebuild their homes and lives, it is time to take stock of what we knew before the fires, the challenges we faced during the fires, and take immediate, aggressive action to ensure that this never happens again. Two- thirds of the region did not burn, and the County must implement immediate changes using a common sense approach to prepare the region now and for the future.

SUBJECT: PROTECTING LIVES AND PROPERTY FROM FIRE IN THE UNINCORPORATED AREA (District: All)

Reasonable, common sense approaches to protect lives and property will be the driving force behind these changes. A regional fire management plan must be developed and implemented that addresses the topography, geography, land uses, vegetation, Santa Ana wind conditions and drought conditions that are unique to our region.

As the regional fire management plan being developed is implemented, there are several immediate actions related to fuel management, access, defensive land use design, brushing and clearing, and building codes that can be taken by the County to reduce the risk of another devastating fire.

Fuel Management

In its August 2003 report, the San Diego Wildland Task Force agreed that fuel or vegetation management is the single most effective tool available to mitigate fires. The build-up of fuel greatly affected the intensity and speed of the recent fires contributing to the loss of lives and property. Prescribed burning, thinning, weed abatement, brushing and clearing, and fire breaks are principle methods of fuel management that the County could utilize to lessen the strength of another catastrophic fire.

In spite of the enormous number of acres consumed in the recent firestorm, the acreage that remains at risk of wildfire is approximately three times the acreage burned. Therefore, fuel management remains a critical issue.

Access

One of the greatest challenges that firefighters faced during the recent fires was not having adequate access to fight the fire and prevent it from spreading from one structure to the next. In many cases, home sites were difficult to reach and a secondary access was not provided. We need to make sure that there is safe access not only for emergency vehicles but egress for those trying to evacuate at the same time.

Defensive Land Use Design

The County needs to look at not only how homes are constructed, but also where they are located in order to provide a more defensible area. The location of a structure on a particular parcel can affect the outcome of a wildfire threat.

Structures should be built away from ridge tops, canyons, and steep slopes. Many of the homes lost in the recent fires were built on slopes and directly on ridges above canyons. It is known that during a fire, canyons trap heat, intensifying the combustion of fuels within the canyon.

Reasonable fire safety conditions for developments should be reviewed and established that lessen the severity of the wildland/urban interface hazard in an area, including location of roads, homes, parks and recreation sites within a subdivision.

Defensible Space Around Structures

The County Fire Chiefs' Association and the wildlife agencies, i.e., California Department of Fish & Game (CDFG) and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 1997. This MOU allows private landowners to

SUBJECT: PROTECTING LIVES AND PROPERTY FROM FIRE IN THE UNINCORPORATED AREA (District: All)

comply with a Fire Marshal's Order, without being subject to enforcement under the Endangered Species Act. I am recommending that the local Fire Protection Agencies aggressively exercise their authority to require brush management such as clearing and brushing as deemed necessary and appropriate, without County limits.

Defensible space is an area around a structure where vegetation is treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire toward the structure. Inadequate clearance around structures has been repeatedly identified as a major factor in the destruction of homes in wildfires. The reduced volume of fuel results in a reduction in fire intensity, allowing fire fighters to remain with the structure during a wildfire.

Building Code

Many structural and decorative features can contribute significantly to the susceptibility of a building to fire. During the building permit process, certain construction related conditions could be applied to residential, commercial and industrial uses. Current building procedures and requirements need to be reviewed and recommendations made to address concerns related to fire safety including, roofs, siding, windows, attic and crawl space vents, wood decks, fire sprinklers, LPG tanks and fuel tanks and miscellaneous structures such as barns, storage buildings and pump houses.

San Diego County must continue to provide regional leadership in wildland fire prevention and mitigation efforts while strengthening fire suppression capabilities. This can be accomplished, in part, by upgrading regulatory codes, ordinances, policies and standards as they relate to fire.

Respectfully submitted,



DIANNE JACOB
Vice-Chairwoman

SUBJECT: PROTECTING LIVES AND PROPERTY FROM FIRE IN THE UNINCORPORATED AREA (District: All)

AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

CONCURRENCE(S)

COUNTY COUNSEL REVIEW	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
Written disclosure per County Charter §1000.1 required?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
GROUP/AGENCY FINANCE DIRECTOR	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Requires Four Votes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
GROUP/AGENCY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
COUNTY TECHNOLOGY OFFICE	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

Other Concurrence(s):

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:

CONTACT PERSON(S):

Name
Jeff Collins & Darren Gretler

Phone
(619)531-5522

Fax

Mail Station

E-mail

Name

Phone

Fax

Mail Station

E-mail