

DATE ISSUED: August 6, 2004

REPORT NO. 04-186

ATTENTION: Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee  
Agenda of August 11, 2004

SUBJECT: Cedar Fire After Action Report

### SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE COMMITTEE OR THE CITY COUNCIL.

### BACKGROUND

The firestorms which occurred in San Diego County in October, 2003, were the worst in County history and second statewide only to the Oakland Hills Fire of 1991 in terms of damage. The fires began in the area southwest of Julian on Saturday, October 25, 2003. On Sunday, October 26<sup>th</sup>, the temperature was 89°; humidity was 7%, with Santa Ana winds. These hot, dry winds were a major factor in the unpredictable behavior and rapid progression of the fires. It is estimated that the Cedar Fire burned 80,000 acres in 10 hours, which equates to two acres per second.

There were three major fire fronts: Cedar, Paradise and Otay. The Cedar Fire burned 273,246 acres, claimed the lives of 14 civilians and one firefighter and destroyed 2,820 structures. The Paradise Fire charred 56,700 acres and resulted in two civilian fatalities, with 413 structures destroyed. The Otay Fire consumed 46,291 acres and destroyed six structures. In the City of San Diego, it is estimated that 28,676 acres were burned and fortunately there were no fire deaths.

The magnitude of the firestorms and their devastating effect upon life and property county-wide highlighted a number of issues and deficiencies, as well as lessons learned

from which to prepare for the future. San Diego Fire-Rescue Department has prepared the attached After Action Report to document its response efforts during the Cedar Fire.

## DISCUSSION

The After Action Report focuses on operational and support activities and analyzes overall effectiveness. Each of the areas covered in the report notes what worked well, issues of concern, lessons learned and recommended actions. Some of the major findings center on the following and continue to be a challenge:

- Staffing shortages
- State and federal assets were unavailable
- Insufficient number of reserve apparatus, outdated fleet
- No multi-casualty or aerial firefighting capability
- Inadequate supply of equipment and personal protective equipment
- Lack of training, particularly in the area of incident support teams
- Department Operations Center lacked sufficient space, resources and security
- Public Information did not include a media plan/Joint Information Center (JIC)
- Lack of local and regional coordination

All of the recommendations contained in the report have been listed in a spreadsheet format. This spreadsheet identifies and prioritizes each recommendation, identifies whether its resolution is currently in progress and whether additional resources are necessary to complete it. These recommendations will be integrated into the Department's Senior Management Staff Initiatives, which delineate goals and priorities for each of the Department's divisions. A number of accomplishments have been made however. Some of these include:

- Purchased equipment such as web gear, fire shelters, wildland hose packs, VHF portable radios, battery re-conditioners/charging units, medical equipment for ambulances, and technology for Department Operations Center (DOC)
- Ordered additional rigs which include seven wildland, four quints for improved water delivery, one hazardous materials, one heavy rescue and two light and air
- Increased shelf stock for brush gear and turnouts
- Outfitted additional ready reserve engines
- Established agreements with local vendors for short notice rentals of fire apparatus and support vehicles
- Installed "Behave" fire prediction software on all battalion headquarter computers
- Developing pre-incident plans for wildland/urban interface areas
- Outfitting DOC to a full state-of readiness
- Identified qualified incident management support staff for DOC
- Provided training in the areas of mass-casualty, wildland/urban interface firefighting, and strike team leader, and delivered the first of ten incident command system classes
- Established Community Emergency Support Teams (CERT)

- Implemented full-time Fire-Rescue Helicopter Program
- Applying for grants and pursuing donations to purchase equipment, multi-casualty trailers and other Department needs
- Developed a GIS fire hazard severity classification mapping system
- Developed and distributed citywide a guide to Canyon Fire Safety brochure

San Diego Fire-Rescue Department has committed itself to extract whatever lessons can be learned from the Cedar Fire and apply that knowledge to the improvement of its all-risk planning, preparedness, response and recovery efforts within existing resources.

Respectfully submitted,

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Jeff Bowman  
Fire Chief

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P. Lamont Ewell  
City Manager

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Note: The attachment is not available in electronic format. A copy is available for review in the Office of the City Clerk.

Attachment:

1. Cedar Fire After Action Report