



JAMES A. NOYES, Director

April 14, 2004

# COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

*"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"*

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IN REPLY PLEASE

REFER TO FILE: **WR-2**

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: James A. Noyes  
Director of Public Works

David E. Janssen  
Chief Administrative Officer

Fire Chief P. Michael Freeman

### **STATUS REPORT OF SIMI, PADUA, AND VERDALE FIRES BOARD MOTION OF NOVEMBER 4, 2003**

As a followup to our January 5, 2004, Fire Status Report to your Board (attached) that addressed the November 4, 2003, Board motion, this report is the status on the last motion item regarding multiagency coordination to determine proactive measures that should be taken to further assist firefighters and other emergency personnel in preventing the spread of fire.

Most of the homes destroyed in the fires were in areas that predate many of the County's building and development standards in regards to fire protection. Public Works, the Fire Department, and the CAO's Office of Emergency Management will continue to work together to ensure new developments and communities seeking to rebuild homes destroyed by the fires incorporate into their development plans construction features, adequate water supply, and emergency equipment access to help prevent the spread of fire. The Fire Department will also continue to enforce fuel modification requirements in developed areas.

CS:mr

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Attach.

cc: Executive Office



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January 5, 2004

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: James A. Noyes  
Director of Public Works

### **FIRE STATUS REPORT SIMI, PADUA, AND VERDALE FIRES BOARD MOTION OF NOVEMBER 4, 2003, SYNOPSIS 79-B**

As directed by your Board, we are providing you with the following information:

#### Background

The Padua Fire, which started on October 21, 2003, burned approximately 10,500 acres, 7,400 acres of which were in the County of Los Angeles. In addition to U.S. Forest Service property, the fire directly impacts the City of Claremont and the unincorporated County community of Palmer Canyon. The fire destroyed 72 homes (17 in the City of Claremont and 55 in the unincorporated County). Public Works provided engineering advice for mudflow protection to ten residents in the fire area.

The Verdale Fire, which started on October 24, 2003, burned approximately 8,500 acres, 3,450 acres of which were in the County of Los Angeles. The fire directly impacts the unincorporated County community of Val Verde Park. No homes were destroyed in the County by this fire. Engineering advice for mudflow protection was provided to six residents.

The Simi Fire, which started on October 25, 2003, burned approximately 107,600 acres, 22,400 acres of which were in the County of Los Angeles. The fire directly impacts the unincorporated County community of Stevenson Ranch. No homes were destroyed in the County by this fire. Engineering advice for mudflow protection was provided to three residents.

### **Agreements with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Other Agencies**

For the Padua Fire area, Public Works, as local sponsor, executed a cost-sharing agreement with the NRCS for the construction of mudflow protection measures at Webb Sediment Placement Site and along Thompson Creek Channel. Public Works has determined that structural rather than revegetation measures are needed to provide mudflow protection to these facilities and downstream properties during winter rains. The total cost of these measures is approximately \$360,000. Under the agreement with NRCS, Public Works is eligible for reimbursement of up to 75 percent of the project cost. Public Works is also negotiating with the State Office of Emergency Services to receive reimbursement funds of up to 90 percent of Public Works' local share of the project cost. The net cost to Public Works for these protective measures is anticipated to be approximately \$10,000 based on a total project cost of \$360,000.

Public Works and the NRCS did not find any sites warranting construction of mudflow protection measures in the Simi and Verdale Fire areas. The existing flood and debris control facilities in these areas provide adequate protection to residents below the burned areas.

### **Identification of the Most Economical Means of Hillside Relandscaping**

The Los Angeles County Fire Department's Division of Forestry has made available to residents information on efficient firewise landscaping of hillside areas. The Division of Forestry distributed written materials and advice to the public at community meetings held in the City of Claremont in November 2003.

### **Best Possible Means to Reseed Fire Areas**

The County of Los Angeles Fire Department's Division of Forestry has determined that large scale reseeding to be unnecessary as a response in mitigating surface erosion of soils within the Simi, Verdale, and Padua fire perimeters. Specifically, the fires' low to moderate intensities, infrequent storms, current low night temperatures, high solar southerly exposures, dry ravel movement on steep slopes, and future high wind/low humidity events combine to severely reduce seed germination.

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The native wildland vegetation recently burned in the Padua, Simi, and Verdale fires is uniquely adapted to survive wildfires. Examination of the burned areas has shown soils were exposed to low and moderate heat intensities. Although the above-ground portions of previously existing chaparral plants have been burned, the root systems remain undamaged and able to resprout from their basal structures. With low intensity burns, the possibility of hydrophobic conditions is lessened and the "seed bank," the existing seed source within the soil, continues to be viable.

With increasing soil moisture during the winter and spring months, the native grasses and small herbaceous plants along with basal sprouting of larger chaparral species will continue to provide slope stabilization and begin to slow erosion. In the interim, erosion will best be managed by redirecting debris flows away from structures at risk with diversionary measures, such as K-rails, sandbags, and debris barriers.

### **Multi-Agency Coordination to Determine Additional Proactive Fire Prevention Measures**

The Office of Emergency Management is working with the Fire Department and Public Works on this item. A status report will be filed in 60 days.

PW:mr

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cc: Chief Administrative Office  
Executive Office  
County of Los Angeles Fire Department (David Leininger)