

Office of
The City Attorney
City of San Diego

MEMORANDUM

(619) 533-5500

DATE: October 22, 2007
TO: Mayor Jerry Sanders
FROM: Michael J. Aguirre, City Attorney
SUBJECT: Voluntary Evacuation

Given the current unprecedented wildfire condition which is exacerbated by Santa Ana conditions and the number of people and homes impacted by the fires, it is respectfully submitted that a voluntary evacuation plan of the entire City be immediately implemented.

A voluntary evacuation plan consistent with current local, state and federal policies should be considered for the following reasons:

1. Remove Citizens From Harm's Way

Weather reports as of the date of this memo predict that "a strong Santa Ana condition will continue to bring very windy, dry and hot weather with a critical fire hazard through Tuesday. The strongest winds will be through and below mountain canyons and passes today and Tuesday. Weaker offshore flow will maintain very warm and locally windy conditions Wednesday. Gradually cooler Thursday and Friday as high pressure and offshore flow weaken."¹

The probable future route of the fire is of foremost concern in determining which areas to evacuate first. The probable route of the fire can best be predicted by referring to weather forecasts. The westerly off-shore Santa Ana winds are forecasted to remain high through today and tomorrow, and diminishing Wednesday. By Wednesday evening and Thursday, on-shore flow is expected to resume. If the Cedar Fire is any example, the fire could shift and take an easterly direction. The foreseeability of this factor should be considered in implementing a voluntary evacuation plan.

¹ National Weather Service Forecast Office, October 22, 2007,
www.wrh.noaa.gov/sgx/displa_special_product_versions.php?sid=SGX&pil=AFD.

2. Access routes may be unavailable, making future evacuation impossible

Minimizing the impact of traffic congestions by implementing a planned and scheduled evacuation. The north and east access routes out of San Diego may be in jeopardy of full utilization due to closures from the fire. A planned voluntary evacuation would lessen congestion on the access routes if this process was considered now rather than delayed which may result in a massive exodus if the current situation continues.

3. Limit Citizens' Exposure to Hazardous Air Quality and its Adverse Health Impacts

Wildfire smoke is composed of Particulate Matter [PM], gases, and water vapor. One of the biggest health concerns of smoke comes from PM. Most of the PM produced in wildland fire is respirable; that is, it is small enough to pass through the upper respiratory system and enter deep into the lungs. Respirable particles can cause a number of health problems, including illnesses such as bronchitis. Particles can also aggravate existing heart and lung diseases, such as congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (emphysema and chronic bronchitis), and asthma. Exposure to smoke may also depress the ability to fight lung infection.²

In the event that you choose to implement a voluntary evacuation plan, we recommend you contact the cities of Yuma, Phoenix, Tucson, Flagstaff, and Riverside to coordinate a location(s) to house evacuees. The City Attorney's Office stands ready to assist in any way our services can best be utilized during this emergency.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Aguirre
City Attorney

² San Diego County Air Pollution Control District *Wildfire Natural Events Action Plan for San Diego County* May 2005