



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COUNTY AGENCIES WARN OF HIGH RISK FOR 2007 FIRE SEASON, OUTLINE STEPS TAKEN TO MITIGATE DANGER

***Agencies take early action in response to high fire risk,
increased staffing, other measures already implemented***

SAN BERNARDINO — At the request of Third District Supervisor Dennis Hansberger, the San Bernardino County Fire Department and the Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST) today briefed the County Board of Supervisors on the heightened fire risk in the mountain regions caused by the prolonged drought and summarized steps taken early this year in preparation for the onset of fire season.

“We consider the San Bernardino Mountains to have been in a continuous fire season since 2006 because of the lack of rainfall,” said Assistant Chief Peter Brierty of the San Bernardino County Fire Department. “There is good news though. Over the last several years, the County has made considerable progress in making our mountain communities safer than ever. In cooperation with the National Resource Conservation Corps, County Contractors have removed hundreds of thousands of highly flammable dead trees killed by bark beetles. Millions of tons of fuels around homes and communities have been removed thanks to Federal grant money, MAST and the Fire Safe Councils. In addition, we’ve implemented several programs early this year to ensure we are prepared to minimize damage from any fires that may occur.”

In response to the increased fire risk this year, the County Fire Department, working with Cal Fire, the U.S. Forestry Service and other MAST agencies, has taken the following steps early in 2007:

- Met with local, state and federal agencies to coordinate mutual aide protocols in the event of a fire to ensure coordination between fire-fighting agencies
- Completed structure protection drills to train personnel and volunteers on safe and effective ways to protect homes and buildings from fire
- Completed wildland exercises designed to hone the skills of fire-fighting agencies in controlling and extinguishing forest fires

- The Board of Supervisors has funded full staffing at County Stations: seasonal fire fighters have been on staff since April 1; newly funded brush engines and patrols are currently in service; the communications center has been equipped with the resource ordering system
- MAST has updated its Structure Protection Plan and Evacuation Plan
- Implemented several programs through the County's Fire Prevention Program to reduce fire risk and increase preparedness, including: Land Use Services Department's Property Hazard Abatement Program notices have been sent to the valley and desert areas and mountain residents should receive their first notices by June this Week.
- Under the leadership of the USFS, the County is participating in a multi-agency Arson Investigation Program kicking off tomorrow.
- Open burning restrictions County wide are scheduled to begin June 18.
- In cooperation with the Sheriff's Department, the County Board of Supervisors initiated an aggressive anti-fireworks program netting over 20 tons of illegal fireworks and making numerous arrests.

Supervisor Hansberger commended the various firefighting agencies and citizen groups for the work they have done preparing San Bernardino County for a potentially dangerous fire season, and urged residents to do their part by clearing vegetation from their properties and taking other steps recommended by the experts.

"The brochures have been distributed. Read it, believe it, and take action," Supervisor Hansberger said. "We really can't protect properties that haven't taken the time to protect themselves."

During the 2003 fire season, the devastating Grand Prix and Old fires swept through the San Bernardino Mountains. Fire protection officials do not want a repeat. The Grand Prix fire, which burned out of control for two weeks in late October and early November that year, charred 66,894 acres, destroyed 136 structures, and damaged 71 structures. The Old Fire, which burned three weeks before it was contained, charred 91,281 acres, destroyed 1,003 structures and damaged seven structures.

ABOUT THE MOUNTAIN AREA SAFETY TASKFORCE

Formed in 2002, MAST is a coalition of local, state and federal government agencies, private companies and volunteer organizations in San Bernardino County that are concerned with public safety in the mountain areas of their respective jurisdictions. For more information about MAST, visit www.calmast.org.

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