



NEWS



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CalEarth, champion of inexpensive architecture for the poor, reopens this weekend

Marissa Gluck, Los Angeles Times

Posted: May 31, 2019, 8:00 am



The CalEarth campus in Hesperia explores the potential for building low-cost shelter using dirt as a primary material. The range of CalEarth structures runs from fully staged houses to rudimentary, domed emergency shelters constructed of stacked earth. (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)

Early on a warm Saturday morning about 80 miles northeast of downtown Los Angeles, intrepid visitors sat in their cars waiting for CalEarth to open. They had come to Hesperia to see the dome-shaped structures meant to serve as housing and emergency shelters — inexpensive and easy to build architecture, perhaps for the poor or for people displaced by earthquake, wildfire, wind or flood.

Unfortunately, the research institute's campus was closed. CalEarth had been shut down to the public since last December by the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** until the institute could build a fire road and make other improvements to comply with the county and city codes.

For advocates of sustainable design, the closure has quieted a longstanding voice in an increasingly important conversation. Founded in 1991 by Nader Khalili, the California Institute of Earth Art and Architecture has researched and developed solutions, including the SuperAdobe, a structure made with patented, long plastic bags filled with dirt from the building site and held in place with barbed wire. Khalili's ultimate aim was to empower refugees and the poor to build homes using minimal materials and without the need for highly skilled practitioners such as architects, engineers and contractors.

The institute ran a robust program of apprenticeships and workshops for people interested in the technique. Alumni, dispersed across the globe, have used the SuperAdobe technique to build in places as varied as Oman, Venezuela, Japan, Hungary and Sierra Leone. While the Hesperia campus was closed, the apprenticeships and workshops continued offsite in places like Italy and Mexico.

"It verified that CalEarth is not just the campus," said Nader's daughter Sheefteh Khalili, who has run the institute with her brother Dastan since their father's death in 2008. "The work has proliferated so much more expansively. The campus is just one part."

The structures on the CalEarth campus experiment with form and materials. Doors are sometimes constructed from wood pallets, light enters through colored glass bottles inserted into walls, windows are recycled PVC pipe. One has a large domed overhang that diverts water for places prone to flooding. Another one under construction will be underground.

The result is vaulted homes that have been compared to the homesteads on the "Star Wars" desert planet of Tatooine or the cozy cupolas of J.R.R. Tolkien's Hobbits.

"There is renewed interest in the dome. It's a primal form that is really resonant," said L.A. architect Daveed Kapoor. "The form is the essential shape of what homes used to be in every continent."

Nader Khalili, who taught at the Southern California Institute of Architecture and was a visiting scientist at NASA's Los Alamos National Laboratory, chose Hesperia because of the challenging conditions.

"The temperature is triple digits in the summer, single digits in the winter, we're near the San Andreas fault," Sheefteh Khalili said. The intense variation in weather serves as a stress test for the structures, which are designed to withstand extremes.

Dastan and Sheefteh have remained dedicated to advancing their father's legacy. "His vision was so pure, so clear." Sheefteh said. "It's about access and education and empowerment."

Which is why the closure has served as a crossroads for the institute.

The San Bernadino County Fire Department required CalEarth to complete a fire access road while the city of Hesperia added requirements including ADA accessible parking and a full sidewalk, curb and gutter on the east side of the campus. The road and ADA accessible parking have been completed, but the institute still needs to raise money for the sidewalk and gutter.

CalEarth launched a membership program for the first time in its history. According to Sheefteh Khalili, the remaining improvements will cost about \$112,000, and CalEarth has raised \$75,000 thus far. Because the fire road and ADA access was completed, CalEarth got the green light to reopen. The first open house since the closure is planned for Saturday.

The last major initiative the closure spurred is creating a set of standardized procedures for the International Code Council, an association that provides model codes for municipal governments to assess the safety and sustainability of structures around the globe.

The Khalilis hope that having a third party that can approve a procedure for testing and evaluating SuperAdobe will kickstart its adoption in the U.S., and provide a way for Hesperia and San Bernadino County to allow permitting for their buildings. For Kapoor, a standardized set of codes might make SuperAdobe more feasible in L.A., an idea he'd love to see realized. "It's a cheap house you build yourself but each one feels like a sacred space," he says. "It's simultaneously sacred and profane."

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-cal-earth-reopens-20190531-story.html>

CAR VS BIG RIG CRASH CLOSES THE HIGHWAY IN YUCCA VALLEY

Staff Writer, Z107.7 FM News

Posted: May 31, 2019



The driver of a Toyota passenger car suffered minor injuries when he and a big rig collided on Highway 62 in Yucca Valley Thursday afternoon.

About 5:45 p.m., Brandon Bahner, 27, of Yucca Valley was driving eastbound on the highway when for unknown reasons, Bahner crossed the center line into westbound lanes near Trojan Lane and collided with a tractor-trailer driven by Julian Orellana-Mendoza, 31, of Fresno.

Jay'e Jones at Strata Tattoo Lab told Z107.7 News that after the collision, the truck headed directly toward her building before the driver over-corrected, and the big rig skidded to a stop on the opposite curb, blocking eastbound lanes of traffic. Meanwhile, the Toyota was spinning from the collision and came to a rest in the westbound lanes.

Jones said Bahner was unconscious when she arrived, and his face had many abrasions, cuts and a bloody nose.

Brandon Bahner was taken to Desert Hospital in Palm Springs as a precaution. Julian Orellana-Mendoza was uninjured. It does not appear that alcohol or drugs were a factor in the crash.

The highway was closed down in both directions for almost two hours during the investigation.

While the highway was closed—at 6:22 p.m.—Audrey Burrel, 38, of Yucca Valley, drove past the cones blocking traffic because she wanted to go to Del Taco.

When she stopped her car, a deputy approached her to find out why she entered a restricted area.

At that time, Burrel drove forward and struck the deputy with her vehicle.

Fortunately, the deputy was uninjured.

Audrey Burrel was arrested for investigation of misdemeanor battery on a police officer, booked into the Morongo Basin Jail, cited and released about three hours later.

<http://z1077fm.com/car-versus-big-rig-crash-in-yucca-valley-results-in-minor-injuries/>

BIG RIG CRASH IN YUCCA VALLEY CLOSES HIGHWAY THURSDAY EVENING

Staff Writer, Z107.7 FM News

Posted: May 30, 2019

A crash involving a big rig and a car closed down Highway 62 in Yucca Valley for more than an hour Thursday evening. About 5:45 p.m., an empty semi-truck and a small passenger vehicle crashed near Trojan Lane. **County Fire** Captain David Bolesworth said the male driver of the passenger was taken to Desert Hospital in Palm Springs as a precaution. The driver of the big rig was not injured. The highway was re-opened about 7:30 p.m. The Sheriff's Department is investigating.

<http://z1077fm.com/big-rig-crash-in-yucca-valley-closes-highway-thursday-evening/>

Fatal crash involving semi and pickup truck reported on 15 Freeway in Cajon Pass

Staff Writer, Victor Valley News

Posted: May 30, 2019



Photo credit off_tyler29 via Instagram.

Cajon Pass, (VVNG.com) — One person was killed following a crash on the northbound 15 Freeway Thursday night.

The incident was reported at 7:53 p.m. between Highway 138 and Oak Hill Road, and involved a Turquoise colored semi and a white Ford F-150.

According to CHP logs, the white Ford pickup truck crashed into the center divider and then into the rear of the semi truck.

San Bernardino County Fire and the California Highway Patrol responded to the incident and located the single occupant of the Ford pinned inside.

Firefighters were able to free the person just before 8:30 p.m, but despite life-saving measures, the driver of the Ford was pronounced deceased.

The driver of the semi truck was transported to Desert Valley Hospital with minor injuries.

According to CHP incident logs, the number 1 and 2 lanes were blocked.

A SIG Alert was issued in the area for an expected duration of two hours.

This is a developing story, please check back for updates.

<https://www.vvng.com/fatal-crash-involving-semi-and-pickup-truck-reported-on-15-freeway-in-cajon-pass/>

How California's utilities plan to stop wildfires this year

Staff Writer, Inland News Today

Posted: May 30, 2019



Pacific Gas & Electric Co. employees work to fix downed power lines burned by wildfires in this aerial photograph taken above Santa Rosa, Calif., on Oct. 12, 2017.

SACRAMENTO--California's major utilities were approved to take extensive measures that, if all goes according to plan, will keep their power lines from sparking catastrophic wildfires.

The efforts include a controversial plan to cut power to potentially millions of homes and businesses when winds are strong and may knock down power lines this summer. The move comes after PG&E Corp.'s equipment ignited the deadliest fire in California history, killing 85 people and destroying an entire town in November. The costs of that blaze and prior ones proved so large that the utility giant ended up filing for bankruptcy in January. Here are the other measures the California Public Utilities Commission approved companies to take ahead of the wildfire season:

More shutoffs

The commission also cleared shut-off plans for Edison International's Southern California Edison and Sempra Energy's San Diego Gas & Electric. They'd cover smaller territories than the ones PG&E may carry out. The commission issued guidelines for these service disruptions, including using them only as a "last resort" and coordinating with state and local agencies.

People who live in high fire threat areas "should not count on getting a warning or having a reliable supply of electricity," the commission's president, Michael Picker, said during its meeting Thursday.

Tree trimmings

Utilities have always been required to trim the leaves and branches around their power lines, but California approved them to step up these efforts and clear the brush around thousands of miles of power lines that cross high fire threat areas.

Inspections, monitoring

They're also planning to keep a closer eye on their systems and the weather by, among other things, installation "weather stations" and high-definition cameras to monitor their grids. And they're increasing equipment inspections and repairs ahead of the wildfire season.

Hardening the grid

As part of their plans, utilities will have to take measures to "harden" their power grids, including replacing wooden poles, installing stronger, fire-resistant ones and covering power lines.

PG&E's plan alone may cost as much as \$2.3 billion. The commission hasn't approved the costs tied to the plans and said it'll review the expenses at a later date. (Source: Bloomberg)

<http://www.inlandnewstoday.com/story.php?s=54938>