



DIANNE JACOB
VICE CHAIRWOMAN
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: November 5, 2004

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: Calling for an Independent Investigation into the San Diego County October Fires

SUMMARY:

Overview

On Sunday morning, October 26th, the San Diego region witnessed three separate fires, one of which grew into the worst fire in state history. A disastrous combination of weather conditions, tinder-dry vegetation, and lack of fire-fighting resources somehow turned what may have been manageable fires into more than 384,289 acres of charred territory, claiming the lives of 15 residents, one firefighter, and 2,407 homes. How did this happen? What could have been different? How can we keep this kind of catastrophe from ever happening again? These are questions that San Diego County residents are asking—and they deserve answers.

Recommendation(s)

VICE CHAIRWOMAN JACOB:

1. Request that the Board of Supervisors call on Governor-elect Schwarzenegger to launch an independent investigation into the October Fires, which would include experts not directly involved in the fires.
2. Request that this investigation include, but not be limited to: inquiries of local, state, and federal agencies, as well as officials who were in positions of authority; an analysis of response issues, communications and resource limitations; and other factors related to these devastating fires.
3. Request that the investigation's mission include finding answers to the following questions regarding the Cedar Fire:
 - a. Why was the Cedar Fire not contained within the first few hours on the evening of Saturday, October 25th?
 - b. Why was the San Diego region without adequate fire fighting equipment when the Cedar Fire started, especially when the region was under a red flag weather alert due to Santa Ana wind conditions?
 - c. Why did it take more than 12 hours to release the San Diego regions' own fire fighting equipment from other parts of the state?

- d. Why did it take so long for military and other available fire fighting support to respond?
 - e. Why were not residents notified to evacuate in a timely manner?
4. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to communicate this request to the Governor-elect of California.

Fiscal Impact

There are no fiscal impacts associated with this recommendation.

Business Impact Statement

N/A

Advisory Board Statement

N/A

BACKGROUND:

On Sunday morning, October 26, 2003, thousands of San Diego County residents awoke to an eerie sight: a thick, almost apocalyptic orange glow outside their windows. What some initially thought was a brilliant sunrise turned out to be the first signs of the worst fires in California's history. The Cedar Fire eventually claimed 14 lives, 2,232 homes, and left 281,298 acres of ash and soot in its wake. Two other fires, the Paradise Fire and the Otay Fire, charred another 100,000 acres, 175 homes, and claimed two lives.

The October Fires were bravely battled by over 3,000 firefighters from fire agencies throughout California, Arizona, and Nevada. One courageous firefighter from Novato, California, Steve Rucker, eventually lost his own life in the line of duty. We are extremely grateful for the superior job done by line firefighters against overwhelming odds, and are incredibly fortunate to have such heroes in our midst.

Today's action requests that the Board of Supervisors ask Governor-elect Schwarzenegger to launch an independent investigation into every aspect of communications, decisions, and actions taken (or not taken) by the various agencies involved in addressing the October Fires. It also asks for experts who were in no way involved in the fires to be included in the investigation and analysis. The goal is to find answers to San Diegans' questions, learn from the mistakes made in this fire, and to correct policies, procedures and practices in order to prevent a catastrophe of this magnitude from ever happening again.

I urge your support.

Respectfully submitted,

DIANNE JACOB
Vice Chairwoman
Supervisor, Second District

AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

CONCURRENCE(S)

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| COUNTY COUNSEL REVIEW | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | |
| Written Disclosure per County Charter
Section 1000.1 Required | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| GROUP/AGENCY FINANCE DIRECTOR | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
| CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
| Requires Four Votes | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| GROUP/AGENCY INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
| COUNTY TECHNOLOGY OFFICE | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
| DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |

Other Concurrence(s):

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Second Supervisorial District

CONTACT PERSON(S): Chimene Adams 531-5522