



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: December 9, 2003

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: DEBRIS REMOVAL AND EROSION/FLOOD CONTROL TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE (District: All)
(Carryover Item from 12/2/03 (26))

SUMMARY:

Overview

On December 2, 2003 (26), the Board continued the item to December 9, 2003.

The magnitude of the Cedar and Paradise Fires created destruction and devastation unparalleled to any experienced in the history of the County of San Diego. For this reason, the County must act now to respond to the natural consequences of such a disaster including erosion, high flood risk, and extraordinary amounts of debris. This proactive stance on debris removal and erosion and flood control will protect the health, safety and welfare of the entire region and prevent further destruction of lives and property.

Recommendation(s)

VICE-CHAIRWOMAN DIANNE JACOB & SUPERVISOR BILL HORN:

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to provide debris removal and disposal for areas affected by the Cedar and Paradise Fires in San Diego County's unincorporated area to eliminate health and safety risks created by debris.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to aggressively pursue reimbursement for debris removal and disposal from appropriate State and Federal Agencies including the State of California Office of Emergency Services, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and private insurance providers.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to provide erosion control activities for San Diego County's unincorporated areas affected by the Cedar and Paradise Fires to prevent mudflow and to protect lives and property from major flooding.
4. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to aggressively pursue reimbursement for erosion control activities from appropriate State and Federal Agencies including the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the State of California Office of Emergency Services (OES), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

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Fiscal Impact

If approved, private property debris removal would result in a current year cost of approximately \$7,500,000. It is anticipated that the cost may be recoverable through federal and state reimbursement and insurance collection.

Erosion control would result in \$4,000,000 current year cost. It is anticipated that 75% may be federally reimbursable from FEMA and/or the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and 25% may be state reimbursed.

BACKGROUND:

Debris Removal

Burned homes and their contents have created several health and safety risks. Immediate risks include exposure to household hazardous waste, electronic waste and debris, and inhalation hazards such as ash and asbestos. Pools and other structural debris, combined with rains that have already begun, provide conditions favorable to rodent and mosquito infestation. In addition to human health risks from the burned residences, there is an imminent mudflow risk, and a related environmental risk posed by material being discharged by rain into the County's water bodies.

Immediate threats to health and safety prompted swift, responsive action by the County. The County formally declared a State of Emergency on October 28, 2003; by October 29th the County acted to assist property owners to begin removal of thousands of animal carcasses; by November 1st the County opened Local Assistance Centers in three locations to provide "one stop shops" for fire victims; by November 4th the County offered free removal of vehicles; and provided free erosion control materials and consultations by November 6th. Moreover, several household hazardous waste events were scheduled in the affected areas.

It is now critical to public health and safety that all ash and debris of burned homes in the disaster area created by the Cedar and Paradise Fires be promptly removed, and the resulting hazardous materials and debris be properly disposed of to further eliminate risk to public health and safety.

While private property debris placed curbside is currently eligible for removal and reimbursement, much of the private property in the backcountry that was most severely affected by the recent fires is isolated and rural. Homes are often on private roads a great distance from public right-of-way, with many on steep embankments. Homeowners do not have the option of simply pushing debris to the curb. In Cuyamaca, for example, there is one County maintained road with a maze of private roads terracing the hillsides above and below. In most areas, there are no curbs or sidewalks. An accumulation of debris in roadways creates hazards for motorists and emergency vehicles.

Without the County's immediate assistance and supervision of the debris removal, hazardous conditions will be created. People will be forced to attempt ash and hazardous materials removal with improper equipment for long distances over rugged terrain, leading

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to a serious risk of airborne contaminants and falling debris. It is likely that many people will simply be unable to remove large amounts of debris from their property and the imminent rainfall will result in ash and debris flow down barren hillsides into watersheds and roadways. Trees compromised by fire will be swept away in the mudflow. In these conditions, without vegetation to control erosion, one-half inch of rain has the equivalent effect of four inches of rain under normal circumstances. Erosion control activities will be prohibitively impaired until debris is removed. Consequently, limiting intervention to only removal of debris from the public right-of-way will result in an imminent threat to the health and safety of the public.

It is critical that the County of San Diego act now and concurrently pursue reimbursement from State and Federal agencies. While the County has requested the funding to accomplish this task, there is no indication that FEMA, the California Office of Emergency Services or other agencies will provide immediate funding. There is a precedent for FEMA funding debris removal. FEMA funded the removal of debris from private properties after fire struck Oakland Hills, California in 1991 and Shasta County, California in 1999.

The County of San Diego must manage debris removal from private property to avoid risk to the health and safety of our residents. Many residents, such as seniors on fixed incomes, cannot afford insurance, let alone the cost to remove fire debris. County oversight is necessary to ensure the vast area of San Diego County affected by the fire can become safe as soon as possible, fire victims can begin to rebuild, and the area can recover economically from this disaster.

Erosion Control

On October 31, 2003, the County of San Diego signed a consultant contract with GeoSyntec for post fire erosion/flood control risk assessment. On November 17, 2003, the County spent more than \$1 million on materials and installation contracts to address erosion/flood control protection efforts.

GeoSyntec has worked with inspection teams from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to identify high priority erosion/flood emergency protective measures necessary to mitigate the immediate threat to public health and safety from debris flows, mudflows and flooding resulting from the Cedar and Paradise Fires.

High-risk residential areas throughout the County have been identified such as parts of Lakeside, Harbison Canyon, Lake Wohlford, Woods Valley Road, San Diego Country Estates, Peutz Valley, and Wildcat Canyon. Additional funding is required for emergency protective measures including placement of sand/gravel bags and silt fences; check dams in streams; K-rail barriers to protect structures; fiber rolls on slopes; erosion control blankets; hydro-mulching and seeding of slopes; debris basins; and culvert entrance protections.

San Diego County's rainy season is upon us. Many thousands of hours of hand labor are required to install many of the protective measures that need to be applied. The proposed action will provide the best chance to complete emergency protective measures before significant rain events occur that present threats to public health and safety.

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This work would normally be eligible for the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Emergency Watershed Protection Program Funding, and the County of San Diego has already filed applications for cost reimbursement. NRCS is holding the processing of the County's funding applications until the USDA receives a congressional appropriation for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program. Congressional action may not occur for several more days or weeks. Several efforts, including the County of San Diego's legislative advocates, are working to assure work the County must start now is reimbursable under the Emergency Watershed Protection Program. It is possible that FEMA can cover the costs of erosion/flood control work should NRCS not cover it, but neither agency has provided assurances to date.

The magnitude of the Cedar and Paradise Fires created destruction and devastation unparalleled to any experienced in the history of the County of San Diego. For this reason, the County must act now to respond to the natural consequences of such a disaster including erosion, high flood risk, and extraordinary amounts of debris. This proactive stance on debris removal and erosion and flood control will protect the health, safety and welfare of the entire region and prevent further destruction of lives and property.

Respectfully submitted,

DIANNE JACOB
Vice-Chairwoman

BILL HORN
Supervisor, Fifth District

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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

CONCURRENCE(S)

COUNTY COUNSEL REVIEW	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
Written disclosure per County Charter §1000.1 required?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
COUNTY TECHNOLOGY OFFICE	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

Other Concurrence(s):

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:

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