



FEMA

Wildfire Mitigation Tested in Orange County, CA

Orange County, CA - On the morning of Sunday, March 11, 2007, fire erupted at Windy Ridge along the 241 Toll Road in Orange County.

Initial response was units dispatched from the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA), City of Anaheim Fire Department and City of Orange Fire Department. A Unified Incident Command was immediately established and provided coordination throughout the response. The strong winds continued to stoke the fire and pushed it toward Anaheim Hills and Orange, forcing the evacuation of 1,200 people. One home received moderate roof damage. The fire was fully contained by noon on Tuesday, March 13 after burning 2,036 acres and threatening hundreds of homes.

Mitigation measures paid off handsomely for Dave Blunk and his family. Mr. Blunk built his home three years ago and anticipated a fire “burning right up to my house.” The concrete and steel home was built to withstand wildfire, 100 MPH winds and earthquake.

“There is no wood in the construction of the house other than the fire treated plywood which was used under the roof tiles,” states Mr. Blunk, “the roof tiles are fire resistant and heavy to withstand high winds; eaves are enclosed, the vents covered with 1/8 in mesh; dual pane windows; stamped metal connectors throughout for wind and seismic strengthening and we overbuilt the foundation.”

In addition to all of the mitigation measures to the home, the Blunks installed a water line and connectors compatible with standard fire hoses.

Flames from the Windy Ridge fire roared up the hill and grew to forty feet in height. Flame links touched the house, the fire engulfed the house and moved on beyond. At the height of the inferno, firefighters took refuge in an enclosed courtyard. Firefighters used the Blunk’s fireline and water to augment their resources once the fire passed over the home. There was no damage to the house and the only evidence of the fire was scorched plants and ashes in the swimming pool. Dave Blunk estimates the special materials added 25% to the total cost of construction, however, it was money well spent to protect the multi-million dollar investment.

The Fire Prevention offices of both the City of Anaheim and the City of Orange have very effective fuel modification programs. The programs are designed to control the types, density and moisture content of plants – or fuel – in the wildland urban interface areas. By modifying the fuel around or close to homes, a defensible space is created which serves as a barrier for wildfire and allows space in which firefighters can work.

Training is a major component of effective fire prevention and mitigation. One of the tools used was a reference and resource guide, “Wildland/Residential Interface Pre-attack Information”, a field guide handbook developed specifically for responding fire personnel. “Our ability to quickly brief firefighters responding from as far away as Monterey was greatly enhanced by the use of this pre-attack information,” states Chief Roger Smith, Anaheim Fire Department.

The Windy Ridge fire put the Orange County Fire Prevention programs to the test.



Orange County, California



Quick Facts

- Year: **2007**
- Sector: **Public**
- Cost: **Amount Not Available**
- Primary Activity/Project: **Education/Outreach/Public Awareness**
- Primary Funding: **Local Sources**