

# CDF NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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**RELEASE**  
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## **Record Breaking Fire Season Ends**

### **Higher Preparedness Levels Continue in San Diego County**

**Sacramento** – Declaring an end to the worst wildland fire season in the history of the state for acres burned and structures destroyed, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) will revert to winter staffing levels as of February 2, 2004 in all Southern California units. However, San Diego County will remain at a higher preparedness level due to continued wildfire threat because of extremely dry fuel conditions. This declares an end to a fire season that officially began in May of 2003 and continued well into the winter months of 2004. CDF continues to monitor conditions in Southern California and can reactivate fire fighting resources if conditions warrant.

“This is one fire season I will never forget,” said Jim Wright, Chief of Fire Protection. “Our firefighters faced hundreds of lightning-caused fires in the north, and devastating human-caused fires in the south. They battled the worst conditions I’ve seen in my 30-year career. And they showed remarkable courage and dedication. I’ve never been more proud of CDF firefighters than I am today.”

Fire Season 2003 will go down in history for the extraordinary damage to natural resources and property. Initial reports indicate that more than 400,000 acres burned on CDF jurisdiction throughout the state and more than one million acres burned in all fire jurisdictions combined. An estimated 5200 structures were destroyed this year, 3600+ were homes. Although CDF is still totaling the costs of fighting last year’s fires, the total is estimated at \$165 million.

“Of course, the worst of all,” said CDF Director Andrea Tuttle, “was the loss of life. This year 22 people died as a result of wildfires. All of us at CDF deeply feel that loss.”

In July of 2001 CDF recognized the severity of the bark beetle infestation in Southern California and began working with local and federal cooperators to remove standing dead trees and clear evacuation routes. It is because of cooperation of these agencies including the US Forest Service, the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, local law enforcement, Fire Safe Councils and

others, that thousands of people were safely evacuated in a matter of hours as fires approached their communities.

Many of these same agencies are now repairing the damage left behind by these fires. The resource management component of CDF is busy with rehabilitation and erosion prevention. Mudslides typically follow major fire damage. Therefore crews are busy with such tasks as clearing flood channels of debris, applying mulch to protect top soil, and shoring up some existing dikes.

“To live in California is to live with fire,” adds Director Tuttle. “We will have more wildland fires in the future and we will apply what we learned last season. CDF participates on Governor Schwarzenegger’s multi-agency Blue Ribbon Fire Commission. As part of the Commission, we are actively engaged in fact-finding to identify what worked last fire season, and what could be improved. The devastation of Fire Season 2003 was historically unprecedented. As destructive as it was, it provided impetus for CDF and our partners in the fire service to work even more efficiently together to protect lives and property in California.”

For more details on Fire Season 2003 visit the CDF website at [www.fire.ca.gov](http://www.fire.ca.gov)

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