

Appendix III: Evacuations

“The fires...forced the evacuation of more than 350,000 houses, most of them in San Diego County. With the area’s average household size of 2.6 people, that means the evacuation could encompass nearly 910,000 people.”

MSNBC, October 23, 2007

The 2007 fire siege in Southern California forced hundreds of thousands of residents to evacuate, triggered numerous road closures, and prompted school officials to cancel classes throughout the region.

Evacuees quickly filled all available hotel rooms, poured into shelters, pitched tents in parking lots, or slept in their cars. Many were able to stay with nearby friends or relatives.

Four days into the siege, the number of citizens displaced was estimated at nearly a million. Many major roads were closed, including Interstate-15 on October 22, and Interstate-5 on October 24. In San Diego County alone, the residents of at least 11 nursing homes were evacuated, and in Orange County, a jail housing 900 inmates required evacuation.

Overall, local agencies and residents conducted themselves in a safe, orderly manner, following the instructions of firefighters and law enforcement officials. Operating under “unified command,” most firefighting teams included local law enforcement personnel, giving them a crucial strategic perspective in addition to the tactical perspective of the fire commanders. The broader view gained through unified command, along with improved communication technologies, helped the massive evacuation process to run smoothly.

A vital component in any evacuation or emergency situation is communication. During the October fire siege, the Reverse 911 system was employed on a large scale, and was key to reaching thousands of citizens. Previous evacuation communications, such as those employed in the 2003 fire siege, depended on residents watching the news, listening to radio broadcasts or waiting for a personal visit from law enforcement officials giving evacuation orders. The Reverse 911 system contacted nearly 200,000 citizens with recorded phone messages relevant to their communities.



A volunteer sorts donations made to evacuees. Businesses, individuals and agencies were generous in their support of those who were displaced by the siege.