

Orange County Fire Authority

After Action Report Freeway Complex Fire

November 15, 2008



A report to the
Orange County Fire Authority
Board of Directors

FREEWAY COMPLEX FIRE

AFTER ACTION REPORT



November 15, 2008

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Foreword

On November 15, 2008, our communities were impacted by what ultimately became one of the largest wildland fires ever to strike Orange County. The Freeway Fire, which started in the City of Corona on the border of Riverside and Orange Counties, was driven by fierce Santa Ana winds. It spread quickly on a massive fire front, causing widespread damage in the cities of Yorba Linda, Anaheim, and Corona, as well as to Chino Hills State Park. The fire merged with a second one-the Landfill Fire, that had started in the Carbon Canyon area. This caused further damage in the City of Brea and community of Olinda Village, ultimately threatening Chino Valley and driving into Los Angeles County, where it menaced the City of Diamond Bar. Miraculously, no lives were lost or major injuries occurred during this wildland/urban conflagration. However, 381 structures belonging to residents of all impacted jurisdictions were damaged or destroyed by these fires.

The Freeway Complex Fire tasked our fire and law enforcement personnel to extremes. They courageously fought to protect lives and as many homes as possible that were lying in the path of this fast moving firestorm. Ultimately, thousands of homes were saved. I am extremely proud of the heroic work of our fire and law enforcement personnel, the coordination among the many jurisdictions threatened by the fire, and the gallant efforts of hundreds of residents during and after this disaster.

Many of the homes saved were the result of fire-resistant construction features that had been put in place in recent years. The majority of the homes claimed by the fire were built prior to the newer wildland urban interface building requirements. In most cases, these homes succumbed to fires caused by the intrusion of embers driven by fierce winds. Like paper confetti thrown into a fan, these embers rained down on our communities well ahead of the fire.

This was not the first time a fast moving wildfire burned through these communities. In 1980, driven by Santa Ana winds, the Owl Fire (October 28, 1980) and the Carbon Fire (November 16, 1980) burned in the same areas. The difference 28 years later, with regard to structures taken by the fire, is the number of homes now located within this historic fire corridor.

As with any disaster, the lessons learned from this event will help better prepare our communities for the future as we collectively confront the all-too-frequent occurrence of these destructive “mega-fires.” The Orange County Fire Authority’s and my own renewed commitment is to (1) find additional measures we can implement to better protect our communities from these types of fires, (2) work continually toward enhancing our local capabilities to respond to major incidents of this type, and (3) find new ways for the residents in our communities to help.

Respectfully,



*Chip Prather
Fire Chief*



Executive Summary

In what has become a year-round occurrence for California firefighters, the 2008 fire season was one of the worst in the state's history—scorching roughly 1.4 million acres. It began in May when dry lightning storms in Northern California sparked over two thousand wildfires. In the fall of 2008, wildland fires threatened Southern California when the Santa Ana winds battered the region.

As the winds raised the temperature and lowered the humidity, the first of several significant wildland-urban interface fires began on October 12, 2008: the Marek Fire. Occurring in the Lakeview Terrace area of Los Angeles County, this fire consumed nearly 5,000 acres, destroyed 40 homes, and damaged 9 others. Then on October 13, the Sesnon Fire began in the Porter Ranch community of Los Angeles County. By the time it was contained, almost 15,000 acres had been scorched and 26 residences had been damaged or destroyed.

The fire siege continued in November as the Santa Ana winds returned. A moderate wind event had been forecasted for November 13–15 in the Southern California region. On the evening of November 13 at approximately 6:00 p.m., an unattended campfire sparked a blaze that was driven by 70 mph winds into the cities of Montecito and Santa Barbara. Known as the Tea Fire, it consumed nearly 2,000 acres and over 230 homes, as well as evacuating nearly 9,000 residents.

On November 14 at 10:29 p.m., only one day later, the fast-moving Sayre Fire broke out in Los Angeles County. Driven by 60 mph Santa Ana winds, it ripped through the northern San Fernando Valley burning all in its path. By the time the fire was controlled, 11,262 acres had been seared and more than 600 structures had been destroyed, including 480 mobile homes at the Oakridge Mobile Home Park. The *Los Angeles Times* called it “the worst loss of homes due to fire in the city of Los Angeles” and reported it “appeared to be the largest number of housing units lost to fire in the city of Los Angeles, surpassing the 484 residences destroyed in the 1961 Bel Air Fire.”¹

Due to extreme weather conditions and increased fire activity, the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) implemented an emergency staffing pattern on November 15. Additional resources—including one Type 3 strike team, a second helicopter, and increased personnel on engine companies located in the wildland interface areas—were put in place for the third day of strong Santa Ana winds.

On Saturday, November 15 at 9:01 a.m., the Corona Fire Department received the initial report of a vegetation fire at the westbound 91 Freeway and Green River: the Freeway Fire. Within minutes, the OCFA began receiving reports of the fire at its Emergency Command Center. Driven by hot Santa Ana winds in excess of 60 mph, combined with 8 percent humidity and long-range spotting of one mile or greater, this fire would cause the most catastrophic loss of homes in Orange County since the Laguna Fire in 1993.

The Freeway Fire marched quickly to the west and through the Green River Homes community, spotting far ahead of the main fire. From the onset, it was apparent this would become a rapidly spreading and significant conflagration. One hour after it was reported, erratic winds drove the fire

¹ Tami Abdollah and Howard Blume. November 16, 2008. *Schwarzenegger calls for review after Sylmar tragedy as blazes rage on*, Los Angeles Times. Accessed <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/valley/la-me-firemain17-2008nov17.0,2305426.story> on January 14, 2009.

in several directions, including north into the Chino Hills State Park, south across the 91 Freeway towards the City of Anaheim, and west into the hills of Yorba Linda. The fire then turned to the northwest, impacting the communities of Carbon Canyon and Diamond Bar.

At 10:43 a.m. on November 15, the OCFA Emergency Command Center received a report of a second fire: the Landfill Fire. This one was located in the area of the Olinda Alpha Landfill, near Valencia Avenue and Carbon Canyon. Fanned by the wind, it spread quickly toward the cities of Brea and Diamond Bar and the 57 Freeway. Borrowing resources from the Freeway Fire, the OCFA and the Brea Fire Department dispatched crews to fight the new threat. Around 5:30 p.m. on November 16, the decision was made to merge the Landfill Fire and the Freeway Fire into a Complex, due to their geographical proximity. By merging the two into the Freeway Complex Fire, it allowed for the sharing of incident management and logistical support and provided a single base of operations for continuity and efficiency.

The Freeway Complex Fire was contained on November 19, 2008, at 7:00 a.m. after consuming over 30,000 acres and impacting six cities in four counties. This was the largest fire in Orange County, since the Green River Fire in 1948. During the final stages of the fire, control lines were secured and aggressive restoration action and recovery efforts were initiated to protect burned areas from flooding and debris flows due to the winter rains.

The fire burned 30,305 acres and damaged or destroyed over 381 homes, commercial structures, and out-buildings. Numerous vehicles, city parks, and sensitive ecological areas in the Chino Hills State Park and the Santa Ana River riparian area were also damaged or destroyed. The impact to residents and businesses from smoke exposure or damage, as well as the economic impact, is difficult to calculate.

To date, the cost for fighting the Freeway Complex Fire is approximately \$16.1 million. As a result of the Local Government Fiscal Responsibility Agreement made between OCFA, CAL FIRE, and FEMA/OES, the OCFA will be responsible for a percentage of the cost of fighting the fire on the first day. After reimbursement is received from federal and state resources, the OCFA cost share responsibility is approximately \$33,000.

Thankfully, no deaths or serious injuries to residents or firefighters were attributed to the fire; however, 14 firefighters suffered minor injuries. At its height, the Freeway Complex Fire forced as many as 40,000 people from their homes across the four impacted counties: Orange, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino.

A unified command and strong coordination between fire and law enforcement was the key to evacuating large numbers of residents and animals in the path of this rapidly burning fire. The efforts of firefighters and citizens and the existing fire prevention measures—those requiring defensible space, non-combustible roofs, fuel modification zones, and ignition resistant construction—were the major factors in saving hundreds of homes.

Ultimately, over 3,800 personnel from more than 260 fire agencies—with over 650 fire engines—were assigned to the incident. The Brea Police Department, which was tasked with large-scale evacuations over a widespread area as well as traffic and crowd control, received assistance from various Southern California law enforcement agencies. Approximately 375 officers from 19 local police agencies, along with deputies from the Orange County Sheriff's Department, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Riverside County Sheriff's Department, and the Department of

Homeland Security responded to the call. The incident was managed by a unified command structure, which included the OCFA, Los Angeles County Fire Department, CAL FIRE, Corona Fire Department, Brea Fire Department, Anaheim Fire Department, Chino Valley Fire District, and the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

While the Freeway Complex Fire presented the OCFA with several difficult challenges, other factors contributed to its complexity. These included several years of drought that increased available dead fuels and lowered live fuel moistures resulting in intense fire behavior and burning conditions. The two fires—the Freeway and the Landfill—started less than two hours apart and placed a great demand on emergency response resources. The topography and the east-west alignment of the Santa Ana Canyon—together with offshore winds—resulted in extremely rapid fire spread, long-range spotting due to flying embers, large-scale evacuations, and the difficult task of deploying resources to protect lives and property over a broad and unpredictable area.

A number of the conclusions in this After Action Report point to things that went well such as OCFA's advance planning and additional staffing for the extreme weather conditions throughout the region. Additionally, OCFA's ongoing fire prevention efforts contributed directly to saving thousands of homes, by providing firefighters with defensible space to protect threatened structures. Other conclusions illustrate areas that can be improved or should be reviewed for follow-up action with the appropriate agency or policy group.

The recommendations contained in this report are intended to help the OCFA better prepare for this type of disastrous wildland fire in the future and improve local capability and surge capacity where possible. Some of these recommendations will require further study, review, and cost analysis to determine the feasibility of implementation. Others are no cost items to implement, or require follow-up action with the appropriate agency or group.



Historical Information

The Santa Ana Canyon has an extensive wildland fire history. The canyon's geographical location plays a major role in directing wildland fire into Orange County. Since 1980, the Santa Ana Canyon area has experienced 25 separate wildland fires, burning a total of 82,734 acres with the events ranging from 1 to 19,986 acres. Until the recent Freeway Complex Fire, the most notable and devastating events have been the 1980 Carbon Canyon Fire (14,613 acres), the 1980 Owl Fire (18,332 acres), the 1982 Gypsum Fire (19,986 acres), and the 2006 Sierra Peak Fire (10,506 acres).

The Santa Ana Canyon's steep topography and east-west alignment serve as a wind funnel. The geography increases the wind's speed and magnifies the effects of fire on the available fuel bed, contributing to the rapid rate of fire spread. Additionally, the encroachment of civilization into the wildland-urban interface (WUI) enhances the severity of wildland fires during Santa Ana wind conditions. The frequency of fire in this area has allowed non-native vegetation of volatile grass, weeds, and shrubs to become the dominant fuel type.

One particular fire of interest is the 1980 Owl Fire—given that several parallels can be drawn between it and the Freeway Fire. The weather, fuel conditions, and point of origin of the two were jarringly similar. Both fires began as Southern California was experiencing Santa Ana wind conditions. The forecast for the Owl Fire was for continued strong, dry winds blowing 15 to 50 mph with gusts to 60 mph. At the start of the Freeway Fire, wind speeds were sustained at 43 mph with gusts of 61 mph and extremely low humidity. The Owl Fire began on October 28, 1980, at 1:47 a.m. near Highway 71 and Prado Dam in Riverside County. The Freeway Fire started in nearly the same area on the north side of the 91 Freeway at Green River. Both fires, fanned by strong Santa Ana winds and fed by dry fuels, quickly burned into Chino Hills and marched west into Orange County.

The Santa Ana Canyon's steep topography and east-west alignment serve as a wind funnel—increasing the wind's speed and contributing to the rate of fire spread.

Initial Response

The Owl Fire After Action Report states, "The first arriving fire unit on scene reported the fire at five acres in size moving out." The fire's radio traffic was being monitored then by what was known as the Orange County Fire Department's Emergency Command Center. "Although the fire was over two miles away from the Orange County line, all who heard the report on conditions knew the potential that existed: historically, Orange County seems to be the recipient of major wildland fires that start outside its boundaries." Immediately, plans were put into effect to place resources ahead of the Owl Fire's arrival into Yorba Linda.

Familiar with the area's fire history, OCFA Battalion Chief Reeder ordered two Type 1 engine strike teams to stage at Fire Station 53 in Yorba Linda in anticipation that the Freeway Fire would eventually reach the City. However, after hearing requests for resources in Corona, the two strike teams responded to the 91 Freeway and Green River. Prior to arriving on scene, Chief Reeder also ordered fire attack aircraft.

Fire Behavior

As the 1980 Owl Fire's progress was monitored, it became obvious "this was a major fire and that it was spotting as much as a half-mile ahead of itself" and "thick volumes of smoke obscured the actual location of the fire line, further hampering firefighting efforts." Reports from the fire crews on the fire line "showed that the fire was gaining momentum and consuming at least 1,000 acres per hour. At 3:30 a.m. there was little doubt that no amount of effort would stop this blaze before it reached the highly populated areas of Orange County: this fire was going to hit the extreme eastern edge of Yorba Linda very, very hard."

This same extreme fire behavior was observed during the 2008 Freeway Complex Fire. The strong winds kept the thick column of smoke from rising. Instead, it stayed close to the ground, making it extremely difficult to see the fire's perimeter and progression. OCFA Helicopter 41 reported seeing spot fires from one to one and a half miles ahead of the fire front. These same winds pushed the Freeway Complex Fire at an incredible rate of spread. **Historical Information – Map 1** shows over 10,000 acres were consumed in the first 12 hours—roughly 14 acres per minute. That's nearly the length of 14 football fields every 60 seconds.

The Freeway Complex Fire consumed over 10,000 acres in the first 12 hours—roughly 14 acres per minute. That's nearly the length of 14 football fields every 60 seconds.

Divided Fronts

The Owl Fire divided into two distinct fire fronts primarily due to wind and topography. One burned in a northwesterly direction into "Aliso Canyon in a largely uninhabited area, and never became a major problem." The second and main fire front continued towards Orange County, pushed by 50 mph winds.

The Freeway Fire also traveled in two different directions. One front headed in the direction of Chino Hills State Park, the cities of Yorba Linda and Chino Hills, and the community of Sleepy Hollow in Carbon Canyon. The other followed the Santa Ana River, crossed the 91 Freeway, and moved into the City of Anaheim.

Staging Areas

To prepare for the fire front's arrival, resources dispatched to the Owl Fire were staged in eastern Yorba Linda. "As the fire ate its way towards Yorba Linda, strike teams began positioning themselves along streets in the interface area ... all of this complicated by smoky conditions so severe that it caused smoke detectors in many homes to activate." The fire arrived battering the area at the east end of La Palma Avenue and Esperanza Road and along the east side of Dominguez Ranch Road at about 11:00 a.m. This was nearly nine hours after the start of the fire. In 1980, these roads formed the eastern border of Yorba Linda. "Firefighters, along with residents that had elected to remain behind to hose down their roofs, were hit with a blinding gale of choking smoke and showers of burning embers."

By comparison, during the Freeway Fire, resources were ordered to stage at Station 53 located within the eastern border of Yorba Linda in anticipation of the threat. At about 10:00 a.m., the fire was burning near the river bottom along the Green River Golf Course. At 10:08 a.m., OCFA

Helicopter 41 reported a large spot fire one mile ahead of the main fire front. Immediately, additional engine strike teams, aircraft, and helicopters were ordered to augment the resources protecting the city. Additional orders were given at 10:20 a.m. to notify the Brea Police Department to begin evacuations in the area of Brush Canyon. The OCFA Emergency Command Center also telephoned the Yorba Linda City Manager. A message was left notifying him that the fire was now heading toward his city and would arrive in 30 minutes. At 10:39 a.m.—31 minutes later, the fire was threatening the communities of Big Horn and Evening Breeze. This occurred approximately 90 minutes after the start of the fire and less than 30 minutes since the report of the spot fire. The first structure fire was reported at 10:58 a.m. on Merryweather Circle—about three miles from the point of origin.

Fire Containment

The Owl Fire was 100 percent contained on October 30, 1980, at 5:00 a.m. after burning 18,832 acres and destroying 3 homes. Over 136 engines and 790 firefighters, along with 4 helicopters, battled the fire for two days to bring it under control. The Owl Fire After Action Report credits the subsiding winds for the ability of firefighters to stop the progression of the fire. Refer to the **Owl Fire After Action Report** at <http://www.ocfamedia.org/uploads/PDF/ofaar.pdf> for more details.

The Freeway Complex Fire was declared under control on November 19, 2008, at 7:00 a.m. after consuming 30,305 acres and destroying 187 homes. More than 650 engines and 3,800 firefighters, with 17 helicopters and 12 air tankers, succeeded in keeping the loss of homes from being much worse.

Although the number of acres consumed is very different for each fire, what is rather striking is the final “footprint” or fire perimeter of both fires. **Historical Information – Map 2**, both followed the geographical contours as they were driven by the strong winds through the Santa Ana Canyon, resulting in nearly identical burn perimeters.

More than 650 engines and 3,800 firefighters, with 17 helicopters and 12 air tankers were assigned to the Freeway Complex Fire.

Summary

Traditionally, the fire season in Southern California has been from May through September. Over the past 15 years, a trend has emerged where Orange County—and Southern California—has experienced some of its most devastating wildfires from October through April. In fact, two major fires in Orange County in the past six years have occurred in February: the 2006 Sierra Fire and the 2002 Green Fire. Another occurred in March: the 2007 Windy Ridge Fire. Most recently, the Santiago Fire occurred in October 2007.

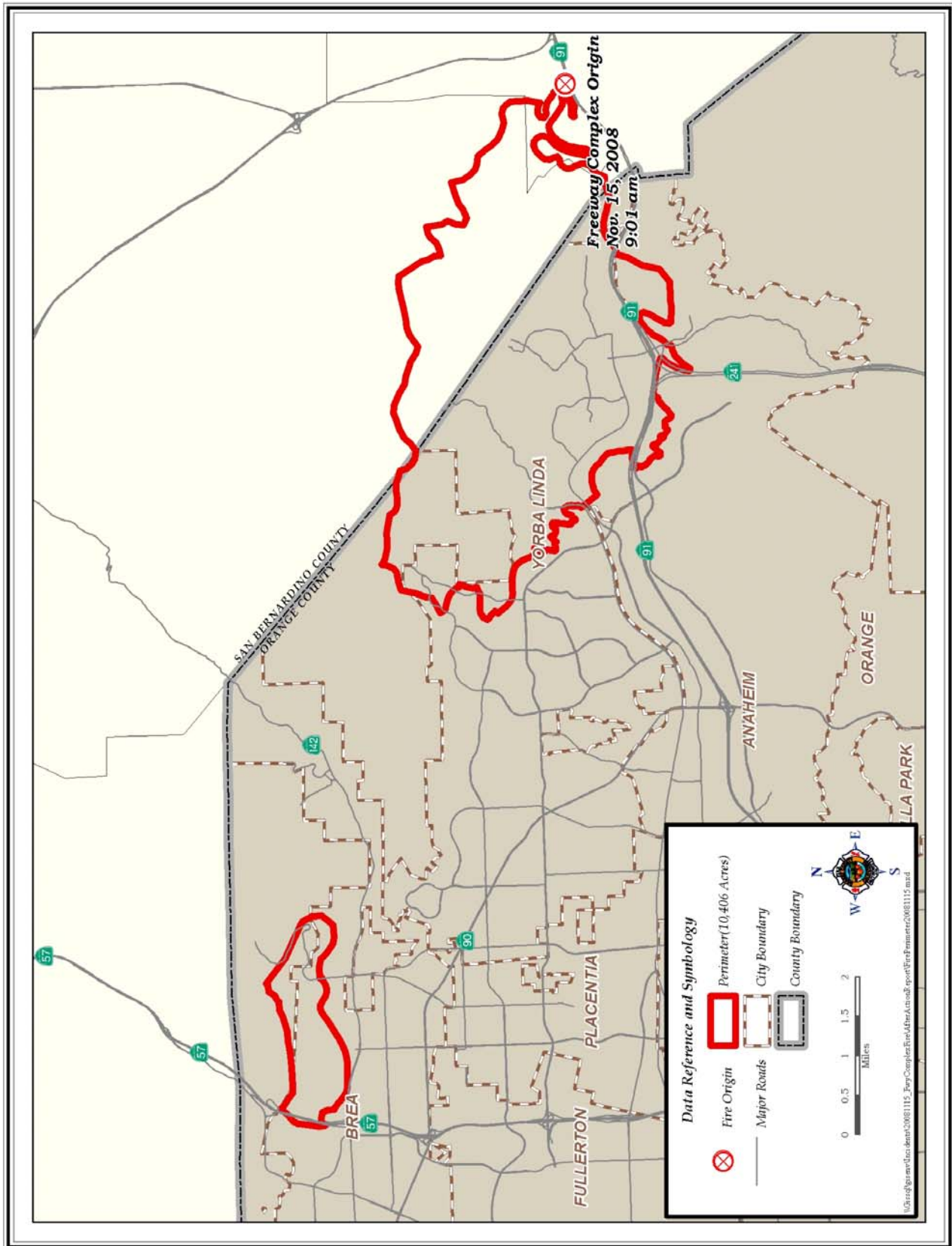
In the two-month period of October and November 2008, Southern California experienced several significant wind events sparking multiple wildfires. Five of these became major incidents resulting in thousands of acres burned, numerous homes destroyed, and countless people displaced. These fires shared several common denominators, including (1) Santa Ana winds; (2) competition for resources due to multiple, simultaneous fire activity throughout Southern California; and (3) wildland fire occurrence late or outside the traditional fire season.

Over the past 60 years, Orange County has experienced a number of major wildland fire disasters. Table 1: Sixty-Year Major Fire History—Orange County, lists selected Orange County wildland fires that covered large geographic areas, burned out of control for an extended period of time, and/or resulted in extraordinary property loss—homes, businesses, and valuable watershed. The Freeway Complex Fire was the largest wildland fire in terms of acreage—over 30,305 acres—the OCFA has faced in the past 40 years. The fire was one of the most challenging and complex due to the rapid rate of spread, wildland-urban interface (WUI) encroachment, vast evacuations, and sustained Santa Ana winds.

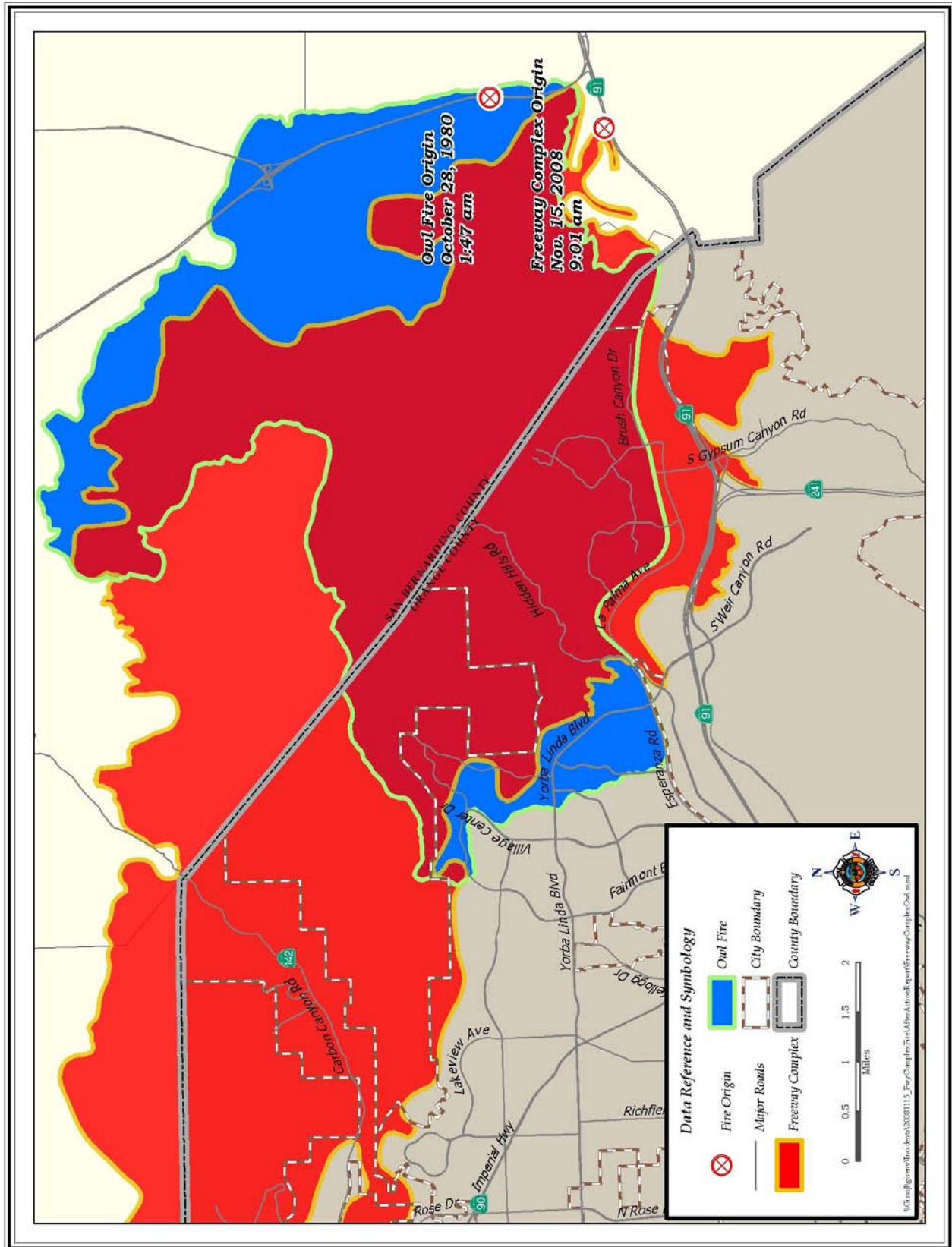
Table 1: Sixty-Year Major Fire History—Orange County

| INCIDENT YEAR | INCIDENT NAME | ACRES CLAIMED | COUNTY(IES) INVOLVED |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---|
| 1948 | Green River | 53,079 | Orange |
| 1958 | Steward | 69,444 | Orange/San Diego |
| 1967 | Paseo Grande | 51,075 | Orange/Riverside |
| 1980 | Indian | 28,408 | Orange/Riverside |
| 1980 | Owl | 18,332 | Orange/Riverside |
| 1982 | Gypsum | 19,986 | Orange |
| 1993 | Laguna | 16,682 | Orange |
| 1993 | Ortega | 21,010 | Orange |
| 2007 | Santiago | 28,517 | Orange |
| 2008 | Freeway | 30,305 | Orange/Riverside/San Bernardino/Los Angeles |

Historical Information – Map 1
Freeway Complex Fire—12-Hour Perimeter 11-15-08 9:00 p.m.



Historical Information – Map 2 Owl Fire and Freeway Complex Fire—Fire Perimeter Overlay



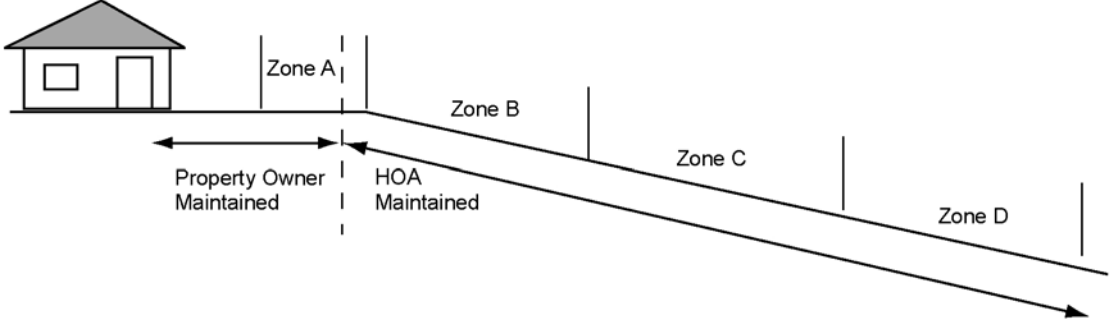
Fire Prevention

Land use planning and fire prevention play a key role in reducing the wildfire threat to communities in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). To adequately protect communities in WUI areas, a combination of brush clearance measures, ignition resistant construction of structures, and community preparedness and participation is necessary.

Brush Clearance

In 1979, Orange County adopted “fuel modification” provisions for new developments to protect homes in the WUI. The OCFA has enforced these requirements ever since. The provisions and requirements are also included in the local ordinances of the 22 cities protected by OCFA. Homes constructed in Yorba Linda since 1980 are most likely protected by a fuel modification program.

Table 2: OCFA Fuel Modification Program



| ZONE | REQUIREMENTS | PURPOSE |
|------|--|---|
| A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 feet wide and on level ground • Landscaped with approved plants • No combustible construction permitted | Limits direct flame impingement on structures and deflects radiant heat |
| B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 50 feet wide • Irrigated and landscaped with approved plants | Slows fire and reduces intensity |
| C/D* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 50 feet wide for each zone • All dead and dying materials are removed • Native vegetation thinned 50% in Zone C and 30% in Zone D | Slows fire and reduces intensity |

*Some older areas may *only* have a Zone C.

The fuel modification program for OCFA communities requires the creation of a minimum of 170 feet of irrigated and non-irrigated zones and setbacks. Landscaping should include a selection of appropriate plant palettes for each zone. This is unlike State law that requires 100 feet of clearance—or to the property line if 100 feet is not available.

The OCFA fuel modification program also differs from State law by containing provisions to ensure adequate space is available to protect structures before building permits are issued. If 170

feet is not available, the landowner must either (1) obtain dedicated, legal off-site easements from the adjacent property owner or (2) mitigate the lack of defensible space with construction features that can withstand the anticipated radiant heat. Requirements for on-going maintenance are also included in the property deed and/or homeowner association by-laws.

Homes constructed in the WUI prior to 1980 are required to maintain “defensible space” between the home and the property line separating it from the WUI. Defensible space is less prescriptive than fuel modification and consists of thinning vegetation and ensuring tree branches are not within ten feet of chimneys.

Although fuel modification and defensible space provisions are typically applied at the perimeter of a development—the “edge” of the WUI, homes on or near interior slopes are also at risk. The vegetation in these areas should also be managed to reduce the risk of home loss from fires.



Arrow pointing to an overgrown interior slope prior to the Freeway Complex Fire



Arrow pointing to the same slope after the Freeway Complex Fire showing the tragic loss of homes along the ridge

The provisions for fuel modification and defensible space have evolved over the past 30 years. Although proven effective in protecting communities during wildfire incidents, the provisions are not without implementation challenges. The most significant of these is maintenance.

Maintenance of Brush Clearance

The OCFA does not have a formal WUI inspection program. As a result, if areas are not properly maintained and irrigated by the responsible landowner, overgrowth and/or plant death may occur. OCFA staff attempts to identify the worst cases and work with landowners to restore the land to an approved condition. In Yorba Linda, this is complicated since most fuel modification areas are on individual properties managed by a single homeowner. This is unlike most of Orange County where fuel modification zones are owned and maintained by a homeowners’ association.

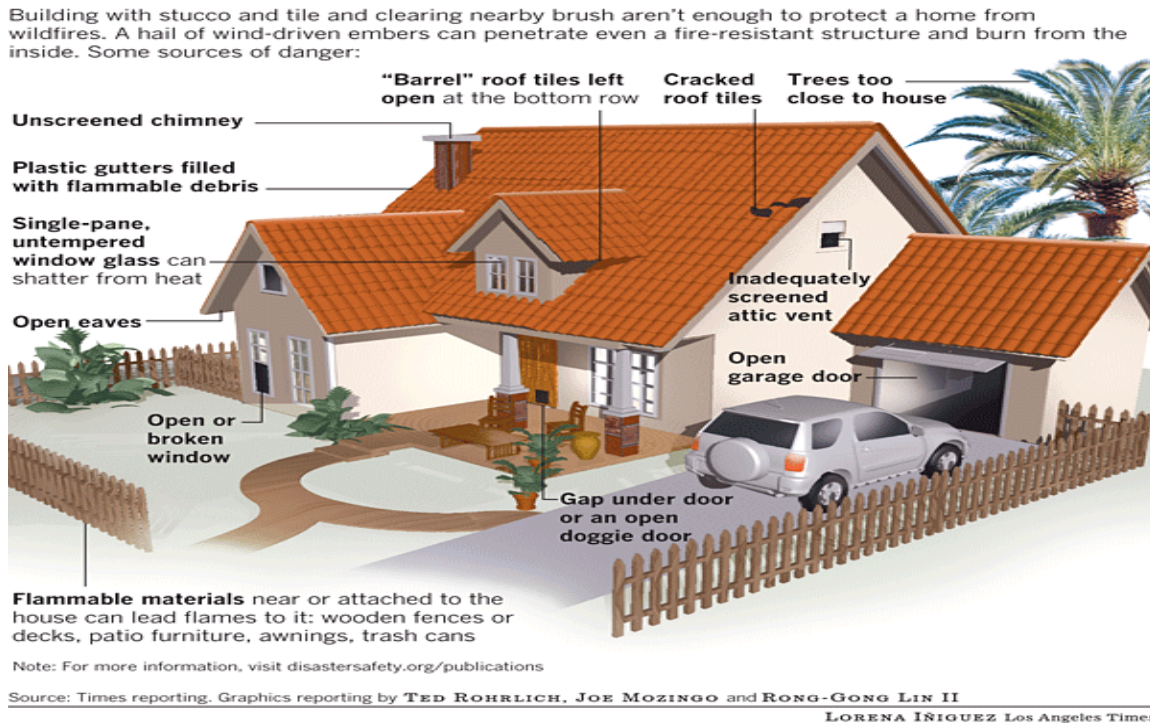
Despite the lack of a formal program, OCFA determined both the 2007 and 2008 fire seasons posed a significant enough risk to revise priorities and put efforts toward mitigation of this risk. Due to the severity of drought conditions and anticipated fire activity in 2008, the OCFA conducted inspections of all WUI properties in its jurisdiction. In Yorba Linda, the OCFA inspected the 589 parcels that are part of the defensible space program: homes/neighborhoods developed before 1979. The OCFA found only 16 out of compliance with minimum requirements

for defensible space. Additionally, 794 fuel modification parcels were inspected to ensure they were in “substantial compliance” with provisions of the post-1979 formal fuel modification program requirements. Of those inspected, 325 needed some type of corrective action. Prior to the start of the Freeway Fire, all but 25 had met the minimum requirements.

Ignition Resistant Construction

Properly established and maintained brush clearance is typically very effective in protecting homes from direct flame impingement and radiant heat. However, it does not provide additional protection from ember intrusion. Homes must be constructed to withstand ignition from embers that land on homes or enter through attics and other openings.

Illustration 1: How Fire-Resistant Homes Can Burn



The damaged or destroyed homes in Yorba Linda had many of the more traditional features that protect homes from flames and radiant heat. In some cases, these features are also effective in protecting homes from embers. However, in a wind driven fire storm, additional protection is necessary.

Following the disastrous 1993 Laguna Beach Fire, the Orange County Board of Supervisors commissioned a report to assess the damage and make recommendations to minimize the impact of future wildfires. The subsequent report, written in 1995, contained development requirements, including water supply, street design, brush clearance—current fuel modification provisions were found adequate, and construction features to “harden homes” from wildfire.

These requirements became effective January 1, 1996, as local amendments to the California building and fire codes that went into effect that date. The application of the requirements was limited to those County areas and cities that chose to adopt the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones mapped by CAL FIRE. Although Yorba Linda chose not to adopt the CAL FIRE maps, the

City Council did adopt and apply the local amendments in designated areas, referred to as Special Fire Protection Areas (SFPA).

Recently, the California legislature determined homes were not adequately protected since structure losses from wildfire continues to grow. Pursuant to that finding, the legislature charged the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) to take action to reduce the impact of future fires. The OSFM worked with stakeholders and University of California (UC) Berkley’s fire lab to develop new “ignition resistant” building standards and material testing criteria. These standards—which dictate construction methods for roofs, eaves, vents, walls, doors, windows, and patio covers and decks—apply to all homes constructed in “Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones” or locally designated wildland-urban interface areas, beginning in January 2008.

Homes must be constructed to withstand ignition from embers that land on homes or enter through attics and other openings.

Orange County has not received the final Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone designation maps for adoption by the City of Yorba Linda. The County anticipates the maps will be released later in 2008. In the interim, the regulations are applicable in the SFPA adopted by the City in 1996. Many construction requirements of that 1996 ordinance are similar to the new statewide standards. Notably, improvements relative to application and protection of walls and vents were made to the new provisions. **Fire Prevention – Table 4** shows a comparison of OCFA’s current requirements to the regulations adopted by the State Building Standards Commission in 2006, effective in 2008.

Access and Water for Firefighting

Brush clearance and “hardened”—ignition resistant—homes go far to increase the chances for a home’s survival from a wind-driven WUI fire. However, intervention by firefighters is often necessary in saving a home determined to be defensible. Thus, emergency access and water availability play an integral part in aiding firefighters in these efforts.

OCFA’s Planning and Development Services Section reviews all plans for new development to ensure adequate access and water supply is provided in accordance with the City-adopted Fire Code. Like all California jurisdictions, State law requires Yorba Linda to adopt the California Fire Code (CFC). The City adopted the 2007 edition in that same year.

Local amendments present in the CFC since 1996 require 28-foot wide roadways in high fire hazard areas, as well as a minimum of two ways into all communities with 150 or more homes.

The CFC also requires all structures to be within a specified distance to an “approved” water supply. An “approved” water supply can be defined by the adopting jurisdiction, or the jurisdiction may choose to adopt the water supply provisions found in Appendix B of the CFC. At OCFA’s recommendation, Yorba Linda adopted the Appendix B provisions. One table specifies the water supply, known as “fire flow,” based on the square footage of the structure and the construction type. Fire flow is comprised of the flow volume (gallons per minute [gpm]), residual pressure (pounds per square inch [psi]), and duration of flow (in hours). Another table indicates the number of fire hydrants that must supply this fire flow and their spacing relative to protected structures. (See the **OCFA Fire Master Plans for Commercial and Residential Development** at <http://www.ocfa.org/uploads/pdf/guideb09.pdf> for additional CFC details.)

Using these tables, a typical street with homes not exceeding 3,600 square feet would be protected by hydrants that deliver 1,500 gpm each for a minimum of 2 hours at 20 psi residual pressure. For homes between 3,600 and 4,800 square feet, hydrants must deliver 1,750 gpm for 2 hours at 20 psi residual pressure. Locally adopted amendments require hydrant spacing of 300 feet along the street.



Getting water for structure protection

During the Freeway Fire, the demand for water by the structure protection engines exceeded the available supply. Areas of Yorba Linda, such as Hidden Hills, had loss of water pressure during which firefighters had to shuttle water from other areas. As defensible space and ignition construction have been studied over the years, so to have been the water needs in the WUI. New standards have been drafted and are available for local adoption.

Fire “Losses” and “Saves”

Although 117 homes were destroyed and another 77 were damaged—as well as 27 out-buildings and 22 vehicles, **Table 3** below shows the losses were a small percentage of the structures and vehicles threatened within the fire perimeter/evacuation zone. This was due to a combination of brush clearance, home construction, and aggressive firefighting.

Table 3: Fire Losses and Structures Saved Within the City of Yorba Linda

| Category | Residential | | Commercial/Industrial | | Other | |
|--------------------|---|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------|
| | Total No. | Percentage of Total (%) | Total No. | Percentage of Total (%) | Vehicles | Out-Buildings |
| Threatened | 9,525 | 100.00 | 126 | 100.00 | N/A | N/A |
| Destroyed | 117 | 1.22 | 0 | 0.00 | 45 | 10 |
| Damaged | 77 | .80 | 2 | 1.59 | 22 | 27 |
| Saved* | 9,331 | 97.96 | 124 | 98.00 | NA | NA |
| Dollar Loss | Structures: \$84,361,455 Contents: \$39,989,500 Total: \$124,350,955 | | | | | |

*Does not include damaged structures considered as partial “saves.” Based on OCFA Fire Incident Reporting Data.

An assessment of homes destroyed or damaged indicates they were victims of ember intrusion rather than direct flame impingement—suggesting brush clearance was adequate. The exceptions were instances where embers ignited one home and then burned the homes on either side in “cluster burns,” which continued until firefighters stopped the spread.

Although the burned homes were somewhat “hardened” to embers, the construction was not adequate for the conditions presented with this fire. Embers entered homes—mainly through attics—as they penetrated roofs through the ends of barrel-shaped clay tiles, loose flashing at roof/wall interfaces, grooves at roof valleys, and combustible rain gutters—particularly those containing plant debris. Embers also entered attics through unprotected eaves and attic vents.

Several homes were lost to embers gathering under unprotected—exposed wood underside—balconies or wooden decks and patio covers. Once these ignited, the flames burned through walls and entered homes.

Notably, all the homes damaged or destroyed were constructed prior to 1996. Thus, they were not protected by the CFC provisions required by the City’s ordinance for WUI areas. However, the homes in Casino Ridge met the requirements of the 1996 ordinance. They were also protected by a relatively new fuel modification program. Firefighters stated they were able to focus resources and efforts on other areas of the city as this community was developed to withstand a wildfire with little firefighting intervention.

Challenges

The application of (1) ignition resistant construction requirements and (2) brush maintenance requirements are both critical to the survivability of homes subjected to intense heat and ember intrusion—even those located hundreds of feet from the interface. Although proven effective in protecting communities during wildfire incidents, these requirements are not without implementation challenges. The most significant are:



Fire front approaching the Casino Ridge community

Maintenance of Fuel Modifications

Fuel modification requirements in communities developed after 1980 and brush clearance measures in those developed prior to 1980 must be maintained to be effective. Currently, OCFA does not have a formal inspection and enforcement program to ensure the over 14,000 parcels and lots are adequately maintained. As a result, areas can become overgrown and, in some instances, irrigation can be lacking due to cost or poor maintenance of water lines. OCFA staff attempts to identify the worst cases and work with landowners to restore the land to an approved condition. Due to the lack of penalties for failure to comply, sometimes several parcels/lots remain out of compliance for several years. This presents a hazard to community homes and adjoining lands.

The most significant challenge is protecting the areas established prior to current fuel modification and construction requirements.

Application of Construction Requirements

Applying ignition resistant construction requirements is critical to the survivability of homes subjected to ember intrusion both at the interface and within a few hundred feet of the interface. Maps depicting impact areas must be locally adopted. This process is often controversial, since the development community typically expresses concern over rising costs, real estate disclosure, and insurance premiums. As a result, areas needing protection—based on topography, fuels, weather, and fire history—are often left unmapped due to local action/inaction.

Existing Communities

The most significant challenge is protecting the areas established prior to current fuel modification and construction requirements. The pre-1980 established areas lack adequate brush clearance, and

some have home lots that are too small to create adequate defensible space on the property. Homeowners often cannot obtain permission for off-site clearance from neighbors or government entities. Environmental restrictions also hinder the ability to create defensible space. State and Federal agencies have conflicting missions with the fire service relative to control of native vegetation, although this was not the case during the 2008 inspection cycle.



Casino Ridge area of Yorba Linda with current fuel modifications and construction requirements

**Fire Prevention – Table 4
Comparison of Current OCFA Requirements and New State Regulations**

| California Building Code Requirements for “Hardening Homes” *Indicates more restrictive requirement if not equivalent. | |
|---|---|
| Former Yorba Linda Ordinance (January 1996–January 2008) | New State Code (July 2008) |
| Applies to structures located in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones and Special Fire Protection Areas that are within 100 feet of fuel modification zones. Most provisions apply only to structures having an exposed side. Exposed side is defined as an exterior wall of a structure within 100 feet of the fuel modification zone. | Applies to all structures located in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones and locally designated Wildland Fire Areas. All exterior sides—not just the exposed sides—shall meet the requirements of Chapter 7A.* |
| Exterior Wall: Exposed side of exterior wall shall be of non-combustible construction or 1-hour fire-resistive construction for the exterior portion. | Exterior Wall: Shall be of approved non-combustible or ignition resistant material or heavy timber. |
| Glazed Openings: Shall be multi-glazed with at least two panes. | Glazed Openings: Shall be tempered glass or glass block or have a fire resistive rating of not less than 20 minutes.* |
| Doors: Shall be minimum 1 3/8 inches thick solid core or metal non-combustible. | Doors: Shall be non-combustible or solid core or 20-minutes rated. |
| Attic Vents: Not allowed on exposed sides. Other sides must be protected by metal louvers and 1/4-inch mesh corrosion-resistant metal screen. Vents shall not exceed 144 sq. inch per opening.* | Attic Vents: Shall be covered with 1/4-inch corrosion-resistant metal screen; no size limit. |
| Eave or Cornice Vents: Not allowed on exposed sides. | Eave or Cornice Vents: Prohibited unless they can resist the intrusion of flame and burning embers into the attic. |
| Roof Valley: Flashing shall not be less than 26 gauge galvanized sheet installed over a 36-inch under layment consisting of one layer of No. 72 ASTM cap sheet running the full length of valley. | Roof Valley: Flashing shall not be less than 26 gauge galvanized sheet installed over a 36-inch under layment consisting of one layer of No. 72 ASTM cap sheet running the full length of valley. |
| Roof Gutters: Shall be provided with means to prevent accumulation of leaves and debris. | Roof Gutters: Shall be provided with means to prevent accumulation of leaves and debris. |
| Roof Assembly: New construction and reconstruction shall be fire retardant Class A roof assembly. | Roof Assembly: New construction and reconstruction shall be fire retardant Class A roof assembly. |
| Skylights: Shall have a non-combustible frame with dual glazing of heat strengthened or fully tempered glass or 3-rated assembly.* | Skylights: No requirements |
| Roof Covering: Where roof profile allows a space between roof covering and roof deck, the space shall be fire stopped with approved material or have one layer of No. 72 ASTM cap sheet installed over the combustible decking. | Roof Covering: Where roof profile allows a space between roof covering and roof deck the space shall be fire stopped with approved material or have one layer of No. 72 ASTM cap sheet installed over the combustible decking. |
| Decking: Those on exposed side to be 1-hour rated, non-combustible or heavy timber. | Decking: Specific requirement for decking surface shall be of ignition resistant material, heavy timber, or non-combustible material. |
| INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK | Ignition resistant material definition provided: Tested according to ASTM 84 for 30 minutes. |
| INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK | Flame spread less than 25 with evidence of no progressive combustion. |

Advance Planning

Although a Red Flag Warning was not in effect for Orange County on November 15, 2008, it was in other Southern California counties. Due to these warnings, CAL FIRE requested a special staffing pattern be implemented across the region. The OCFA asked CAL FIRE to approve the staffing enhancements for implementation on November 14, 2008. The following staffing pattern was approved by CAL FIRE and in place the morning of November 15:

- One Type 3 strike team with four-person staffing—five engines and a Chief Officer
- The staffing of a second helicopter
- The increased staffing of five engine companies in the wildland interface areas—from three firefighters each to four—referred to as the “Grey Book” stations
- An additional fire dispatcher at the Emergency Command Center

A conference call with CAL FIRE, USFS, and multiple county fire agencies was conducted at 9:00 a.m., November 15. OCFA’s Assistant Chief Kramer and Division Chief Fleming, the OCFA Duty Officer, attended the meeting. A briefing on the status of the Tea and Sayre fires was provided, as well as current weather for Orange and other counties. The forecast for Orange County did not include a Fire Weather Watch or Red Flag Warning. In fact, the predicted winds for the local area were supposed to be relatively light—diminishing by 2:00 p.m. that day. OCFA routinely monitors weather forecasts and takes appropriate action. When extreme winds and red-flag conditions do exist, the OCFA implements procedures established by Operations SOP 209.13, *Extreme Weather Plan Winds/Red Flag & Rain/Floods*.

As a cooperating member of the California Fire and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid Plan, the OCFA committed three strike teams of engines out-of-county prior to the start of the Freeway Fire. The mutual aid system is founded on the principle of neighbor helping neighbor. When an emergency overwhelms an agency’s ability to manage it on its own, other fire departments voluntarily provide resources, if possible. The system allows for an orderly escalation and distribution of resources.

Additionally, neighboring Orange County MetroNet fire agencies had committed four strike teams of engines to the Tea and Sayre fires, including an OES engine strike team. A total of 35 fire engines and 7 strike team leaders from the OCFA and other County fire agencies were assigned to fires outside the County at the start of the Freeway Fire.

As OCFA resources are committed on a mutual aid response, personnel are recalled to staff relief engines to ensure adequate station coverage. All OCFA stations vacated due to the deployment of units outside the County were covered either through the use of backfill (ten engines) or by the on-coming shift personnel (five engines). **Table 5** shows the commitment of strike teams on November 14, 2008, by the OCFA and MetroNet Out-of-County Strike Teams.

Table 5: OCFA and MetroNet Out-of-County Strike Teams
November 14, 2008

| Fire | Strike Team | Day/Time Committed |
|-------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Tea | ORC Strike Team 9328C and XOR Strike Team 1421A and 1422A | November 13, 2008 |
| Tea | OES Strike Team 1830C, including one OCFA engine (OES-E303), as part of OES Type 1 strike team (1830C) | November 13, 2008, 11:47 p.m. |
| Tea | ORC Strike Team 1400A | November 14, 2008, 3:55 a.m. |
| Sayre | ORC Strike Team 1402A | November 15, 2008, 12:40 a.m. |
| Sayre | XOR Strike Team 1423A | November 15, 2008 |

Pre-planning for emergency events is routine for the OCFA. Operational plans exist or are under development for many high-risk areas. A few weeks prior to the Freeway Complex Fire, a tabletop exercise was conducted to bring stakeholder agencies (OCFA, LACO, Corona Fire Department, CAL FIRE RRU/BDU, San Bernardino CFD, Chino Valley IFD, Anaheim Fire Department, Orange Fire Department, USFS, and South Operations) together. The goal was to develop and review operational plans for the wildland-urban interface area along the 91 Freeway corridor. The exercise provided chief officers the opportunity to consider a variety of events to better understand fire progression and fire spread potential. Decision trigger points and a course of action were also developed for each event. This tabletop exercise proved to be highly beneficial; some of the first responding chief officers to the Freeway Fire had been exercise participants.

One trigger point and its course of action was demonstrated through by OCFA Battalion 2 while en-route to the fire. Based upon the radio traffic from the initial attack crews, Battalion 2 ordered two strike teams to report to OCFA Station 53 in east Yorba Linda. This was done to get ahead of the fire and place additional engines into Yorba Linda, which was in the direct path of the rapidly advancing fire from Corona.

When the Department Operation Center opened at 11:30 a.m., the call back of off-duty personnel was initiated to get all available relief and surge apparatus in-service.

As the request for resources at the fire increased, the OCFA needed to begin staffing uncovered fire stations, relief, and surge apparatus. When the Department Operation Center (DOC) opened at 11:30 a.m., staff was tasked to initiate the call back of off-duty personnel and to get all available relief and surge apparatus in-service as soon as possible. Battalion Manpower Coordinators were organized to handle the hundreds of telephone calls necessary to meet this goal. The majority of necessary staffing was achieved within eight hours. By 10:00 p.m. November 15, all critical staffing needs had been met.

On Sunday, November 16—with continued Santa Ana winds along with multiple fires burning in Southern California and the potential for area resource drawdown—the Duty Officer ordered all suppression personnel be held on duty. This action increased manpower available to staff emergency apparatus from normal daily staffing of 253 personnel to 462 suppression personnel. By noon on Sunday, all personnel who were not required were released.

Freeway Complex Fire – November 2008

In addition to the extra engines that were staffed by full-time firefighters, OCFA reserve firefighters staffed ten patrols, three squads, four water tenders, one helicopter support unit, and five engines. These units were assigned to stand-alone Reserve Stations 3, 11, 14, and 16 and combination Station 23. The staffing level in the Emergency Command Center (ECC) was augmented with two additional dispatchers and one additional dispatch supervisor. One Division Chief and two Staff Captains were recalled to begin staffing the DOC.

The advance planning accomplished early Friday, November 14, prior to the Freeway Fire and the following staffing actions proved to be key in OCFA's ability to engage the fire. As the fire rapidly spread into neighborhoods in east Yorba Linda and Anaheim Hills, the OCFA was still able to sustain response coverage for other portions of its service area.



Emergency crews from throughout the state respond to the request for mutual aid



Incident Narrative

Summary

The following is a chronological perspective of the firefighting efforts that took place in the cities of Corona, Yorba Linda, Anaheim, Brea, Chino Hills, and Diamond Bar on November 15 through 19, 2008. The event is now known as the Freeway Complex Fire. This report is as accurate and complete as possible. Since the specifics of this incident are complex and it occurred so rapidly, the actions of every fire company, the events that took place in every community, or the circumstances that surrounded every loss cannot be described in detail. Personnel from all ranks and assignments were interviewed, hundreds of documents were reviewed, and several hundred radio transmissions were listened to in the development of this narrative.

Though it started as a wildland urban interface fire, the Freeway Complex Fire quickly became an urban conflagration. Destroyed structures included 203 residences, 2 commercial structures (one in Yorba Linda and one in Brea), and 17 out-buildings. Damaged structures included 117 residences, 6 commercial structures, and 36 out-buildings. In total, 30,305 acres of watershed were consumed across six cities and four counties. Suppression costs exceeded \$16.1 million, and property loss has been estimated at nearly \$150 million.

Preplanning

The Freeway Complex Fire occurred in a designated mutual threat zone. The original vegetation fire in this jurisdictionally contiguous area received initial attack responses from multiple agencies, including the OCFA (ORC), Corona Fire (COR), Anaheim Fire (ANA), CAL FIRE, and the United States Forest Service (USFS). The high degree of coordination behind this emergency response was not accidental. Three weeks prior to the incident, a tabletop exercise scenario was conducted with these and other area responders. Predicted fire spread, values at risk, operational trigger points, communications, and other related issues were discussed and modeled. This tabletop exercise was greatly responsible for some of the quick decision making behind early resource ordering, including additional engine strike teams and aircraft.

The Freeway Complex Fire destroyed or damaged approximately 320 residences, 8 commercial structures, and 53 out-buildings.

Based upon the predicted weather patterns, which included strong Santa Ana winds and low humidity for the weekend, the OCFA had placed a special staffing pattern into effect on Friday, November 14, 2008. To prepare for the weather pattern, the OCFA had one Type 3 engine strike team (ORU 9329C), consisting of five wildland engines and a Chief Officer (Hawkins), staged at the OCFA Regional Fire Operations and Training Center (RFOTC). In addition to ORC Helicopter 41 (HC41) that was already on duty, ORC Helicopter 241 (HC241) was staffed with a pilot and crew chief. Also, five fire engines located at stations near wildland areas were up-staffed from three firefighters to four. An additional dispatcher was also added to the Emergency Command Center (ECC).

A day earlier, on November 13, ten engines from the OCFA (ORC Strike Team 1400A and ORU Strike Team 9328C) were sent to the Tea Fire in Santa Barbara County. In addition, the Office of

Emergency Services (OES) engine strike team based in Orange County was activated. It was sent to the Tea Fire along with three Type 1 engine strike teams from non-OCFA fire departments in Orange County. At 12:40 a.m. on November 15, five additional OCFA engines (ORC Strike Team 1402A) were sent to the Sayre Fire in Los Angeles County. Prior to the start of the Freeway Fire, all vacancies created within OCFA fire stations by these deployments were filled.

Day 1 - November 15, 2008

At 9:01 a.m. on November 15, the Corona Fire Department (COR) received reports of a vegetation fire on the north side of the 91 Freeway, east of Green River Drive. COR Dispatch sent units, including a Battalion Chief (COR B3 [Samuels]) and three engines (COR BR1, BR3, and E2).

At 9:03 a.m., the OCFA ECC received the first of many 911 calls reporting the same fire along the north side of the westbound 91 Freeway east of Green River Drive. The first caller reported the fire to be approximately one-half acre but building rapidly. Subsequent calls gave varying descriptions and locations, indicating to the dispatchers the fire was moving rapidly west along the freeway toward the Green River Golf Course. **Incident Narrative – Map 3** shows the point of origin of the Freeway Complex Fire

The ECC entered a *High Watershed Dispatch* into the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system at 9:07 a.m., sending units to the fire's reported location. This initial dispatch was comprised of the following:

- One Division Chief (ORC D5 [Fleming])
- Three Battalion Chiefs (ORC B2 [Reeder], ORC B3 [Aubrey], and ANA B1 [Pilar])
- Seven, single increment engines (ORC E10, E15, E53, and E832 and ANA E8, E9, and E10)
- One ORU Strike Team 9329C (ORC B27 [Hawkins]; ORC E247, E250, E307, E318, and E339)
- Two hand crews (ORC Crew 1 and Reserve Crew 18)
- Three helicopters (ORC HC41 and HC241; OCSD Duke)
- Two patrols (ORC P10 and P32)
- One fire bulldozer (ORC Dozer 2)
- Three water tenders (ORC W7, W10, and W16)

In **Table 6**, Freemont Canyon RAWS indicated responding personnel had to contend with mild temperatures of 75°F, low relative humidity of 8 percent, and strong east/northeast winds sustained at 43 mph, gusting up to 61 mph. Winds were higher than expected based on the recent National Weather Service (NWS) predictions and morning briefing on statewide fire conditions.



Freemont Canyon RAWS

Table 6: Freemont Canyon RAWs—Santa Ana Mountains

| Time | Temperature (°F) | Wind Speed/Gust Speed (mph) | Relative Humidity (%) |
|-------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 9 a.m. | 75 | 43/61 | 8 |
| 3 p.m. | 80 | 25 /45 | 7 |

ORC Battalion 2 (Reeder) was on the initial dispatch and, while responding to the fire, was monitoring the radio traffic of the COR units already on the scene. At 9:19 a.m., Battalion Chief Reeder relayed to the ECC that COR units were on scene and reporting an immediate threat to structures. Battalion Chief Reeder requested two Type 1 engine strike teams—ten engines and two Chief Officers—stage at OCFA Station 53 in Yorba Linda; this anticipated the fire’s possible move into Orange County. He also requested fixed wing aircraft—air tankers—be dispatched.

The first order for air tankers was placed at 9:19 a.m. They were dispatched at 9:35 a.m. and arrived over the fire at 10:10 a.m.

The order for aircraft was placed by the OCFA ECC to the CAL FIRE Perris ECC; however, the order was not immediately filled. Shortly before 9:12 a.m., COR Dispatch contacted CAL FIRE Perris ECC and discussed the need for ground resources and a helicopter. Air tankers were not ordered by COR Battalion 3 (Samuels) when the initial equipment request was made. When Chief Reeder’s order was delivered to CAL FIRE Perris ECC, there was some confusion regarding the actual need for fixed wing aircraft. More calls between COR Dispatch and CAL FIRE Perris ECC resulted in confirmation for the air tanker request only after COR E5 was reported to be surrounded by fire. The air tankers were dispatched at 9:35 a.m. out of San Bernardino Airport. The first air tanker arrived at 10:10 a.m.

A minute after Battalion Chief Reeder made his requests, Anaheim Fire Engine 10 (ANA E10) reported COR was on scene. Approximately one acre of grass was burning along the north side of the 91 Freeway. At 9:21 a.m., two strike teams from OCFA were dispatched to stage at Fire Station 53. ORC Strike Team 1403A included ORC Battalion 44 (Cruz) and ORC E8, E23, E34, E35, and E53. ORC Strike Team 1404A included ORC Battalion 7 (Whitaker) and ORC E27, E31, E38, E55, and E826. While en-route to Station 53, the strike team leaders heard the requests for immediate need resources and diverted to the City of Corona with the hope to help stop the fire there. This decision left the original request unfilled—to have two strike teams stage at ORC Station 53.



Palm trees show how strong the wind blew during the fire

COR Battalion 3 (Samuels) arrived on scene about the same time and assumed the Freeway Fire Incident Command. This information was provided to the ECC at 9:23 a.m. and was relayed to responding units. ANA Battalion 1 (Pillar) arrived a few minutes later and was assigned Structure Protection Group (SPG) responsibility. Around 9:30 a.m., Pillar placed an order to the Incident Commander for three additional engine strike teams—15 engines.

Firefighting resources arriving on scene experienced Santa Ana winds blowing between 40 to 60 mph. Homes located on Penny Royal Drive and Feather River Road in Corona were identified by ORC Battalion 2 (Reeder) as immediately threatened. Units on scene attempted to take tactical positions to best facilitate structure protection. Incident Commander Samuels faced a rapidly escalating wind-driven wildland fire that was extending into a nearby residential neighborhood. With limited resources on scene, he directed a flanking attack on the wildland fire. With assistance coming from CAL FIRE – Riverside County, the United States Forest Service (USFS), and Orange County, the opportunity for control was hopeful.

Approximately 9:27 a.m., a tragedy almost occurred when COR E5 became surrounded by fire and experienced a burn-over event. When the Freeway Fire began, COR E5 was on scene of a medical aid in a neighborhood less than a mile away. Once COR E5 cleared the medical call, it contacted COR Dispatch and was assigned to the fire. COR E5 chose to access the fire from a service road between the fire origin and the threatened homes. This decision put COR E5 in a dangerous position between the main fire and the threatened homes, with unburned vegetation between the crew and the fast moving head. Within minutes, the COR E5 Captain radioed they were being overrun by fire and were unable to escape. COR BR1, supported by multiple water drops from ORC HC41 and HC241, rescued the trapped firefighters and averted a tragedy. This event resulted in minor burns and smoke inhalation to two firefighters assigned to COR E5. **Incident Narrative – Map 4** is a map showing the near miss entrapment.

By 9:30 a.m., CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Deyo arrived on scene and briefly spoke with the Incident Commander. He also met with CAL FIRE Battalion Chief McBride, who had been sent to the fire as the CAL FIRE Agency Representative. Chief Deyo was directed to assume the role of Operations Section Chief for the Freeway Fire. Subsequently, he conducted a reconnaissance of the fire and established control objectives.

During Chief Deyo's reconnaissance, radio communication problems between agencies on two different radio systems became critical. CAL FIRE was operating on the statewide VHF frequencies, while COR, Anaheim Fire, and OCFA units were operating on their 800 MHz radios. Operating on a single compatible radio system is the safest and most preferred communication methodology. ANA Battalion 1 (Pilar) provided Chief Deyo with an 800 MHz portable radio, enabling him to communicate with other command-level personnel. Later that day, Orange County Communications (OCC) was asked to initiate a patch between the VHF and the 800 MHz systems to establish one common command frequency.



Aerial view of the fire's path along the Green River Golf Course and homes bordering the Santa Ana River riparian.

Around 9:30 a.m., the OCFA ECC became the Central Ordering Point for the fire. This was done to ensure all resource orders for personnel, supplies, and equipment were properly placed and tracked. The effectiveness of the central ordering point is crucial to the success of the fire control efforts. As the need grew, resource orders were entered into the Regional Ordering Support System (ROSS), which allowed access to firefighting and support resources from multiple regions in Southern California.

Shortly after assuming the Central Ordering Point responsibility, an order for additional aircraft was placed to South OPS. Orders for engine strike teams, hand crews, and bulldozers would soon follow. A recent change in the resource ordering rules, which was a result of lessons learned in the 2007 fire siege, allowed for 5 engine strike teams—25 engines—to be directly requested from neighboring mutual aid regions. These 25 engines from the CAL FIRE – Riverside County immediately responded without processing delays. Around 10:30 a.m., the first of these strike teams arrived at the fire. The others arrived around noon.

The first ORC fire engine arrived in Corona and moved into the fire area at 9:23 a.m. The fire was uncontrolled and unpredictable. In response, ORC Battalion 3 (Aubrey) directed ORC E27—assigned to ORC Strike Team 1404A—to take independent action upon arrival. Indicating the fire was moving rapidly, the threat to structures was such that individual company officers had to rely on their situation to dictate tactics and operational priorities. This is a departure from desired and normal command and control strategy, but it necessary when confronted with a wide and rapidly progressing fire front. For the next 30 minutes, resources responding into Corona were directed into the threatened residential areas between the fire origin and the Green River Golf Course.



OCFA helicopter makes a water drop over fire

The fire was bordered by a golf course, an active river, and a multi-lane freeway. All set up the best potential containment opportunity for the Freeway Fire. Unfortunately, at 10:00 a.m., a spot fire was reported west of the Green River Golf Course. Hand crews and bulldozers were staged nearby and quickly encircled the spot, containing it to a small area. At 10:08 a.m., while returning to the golf course to pick up a load of water, ORC HC241 noticed another spot fire west of the golf course, approximately 1.1 miles from the nearest burning structure. In less time than it took for HC241 to snorkel a load of water from the golf course pond—about 45 seconds, this spot fire, coupled with the topography and the wind, headed at high speed for the City of Yorba Linda. HC241 attempted to slow the fire by dropping its load of water, but the impact was negligible. When interviewed, a helicopter crew member described the water drop as “a thimble of water in a firestorm.” **Incident Narrative – Maps 5 and 6** are maps showing the multiple spot fires caused by erratic fire behavior.

ORC Division 5 (Fleming) arrived on the scene at 10:05 a.m. and proceeded to establish a unified command with Chief Officers from COR, CAL FIRE, Anaheim Fire, and Chino Valley Independent Fire District. The location of this initial command post, established at 10:12 a.m., was at the Jack in the Box parking lot at Crest Ridge and Green River Drive, Corona.

The BNSF railcars left on tracks were not threatened by fire and did not contain any hazardous cargo.

While firefighters were working near the railroad right-of-way, Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad was requested to stop all rail traffic through the fire area as a safety precaution. The outcome of the request inadvertently resulted in several railcars being abandoned on the tracks, prompting concerns from citizens and firefighters that some railcars may have been carrying hazardous materials. OCFA Safety Officer Hutnyan was sent to the area and tasked to examine the situation. He quickly determined the railcars were not directly threatened by fire and, in fact, did not have hazardous cargo. The railcars were eventually removed from the area by BNSF employees.

At 10:10 a.m., Air Attack and the first fixed wing air tanker were reported to be flying over the fire. This began the coordinated air assault to protect homes along the wildland interface. It also began establishing perimeter control lines to help direct the fire's spread away from other inhabited areas. Air assets would prove to be critical in establishing these control lines and protecting firefighters and threatened structures. In total, 17 firefighting helicopters flew approximately 108 hours and dropped in excess of 278,357 gallons of water. Twelve fixed wing air tankers and four lead airplanes fueled and re-supplied out of Hemet Ryan and San Bernardino Air Bases, flew approximately 110 hours and dropped 308,435 gallons of retardant on the fire. This figure includes the work of Tanker 910 (DC-10 aircraft). It made ten drops—eight on November 15 and two on November 16—in the Yorba Linda/Chino Hills area for a total of 109,445 gallons of retardant.

At 10:20 a.m., ORC Battalion 2 (Reeder) reported the fire would reach the city limits of Yorba Linda within 30 minutes. Recognizing the threat to Yorba Linda, Battalion Chief Reeder placed an immediate need request for four more Type 1 engine strike teams—20 engines and 4 Chief Officers—to stage at OCFA Station 53 in the City of Yorba Linda. He also requested the Brea Police Department and the City of Yorba Linda be notified of the impending arrival of the fire. They were to start evacuations. Battalion Chief Reeder predicted the fire would impact homes located in the Brush Canyon community within map page 741 grids E4, F4, and G5 (Thomas Brothers 2009 Edition). The ECC made contact with the Brea Police Department and City staff shortly thereafter.

Although a collaborative decision, the responsibility for evacuation is statutorily a law enforcement function. This allows fire departments to focus on control efforts. The number of citizens who evacuated at any one time in any single area of the City is unknown; however, nearly

9,000 dwellings were impacted in Yorba Linda by the evacuation order as a result of the Freeway Complex Fire. At the height of the firefight, an estimated 24,000 citizens of Yorba Linda were evacuated or kept from returning to their homes due to safety concerns.



Evacuations Underway

At the onset of the evacuation, traffic gridlocked in some areas as emergency apparatus tried to enter the neighborhoods while residents tried to exit. The Brea Police Department and other assisting law

enforcement agencies took control of the traffic flow, which helped firefighters gain access to threatened homes. In any firefighting effort, rescue is the first priority. However, in this case, resident self-evacuation was in effect assuring rescue from an active fire front would be minimized. Notably, with such an expansive and escalating evacuation boundary, the residents stayed calm and followed evacuation directions. Throughout the morning, reports of orderly—but slow—evacuations were relayed to the ECC.

ORC Assistant Chief 2 (Kramer) responded to the fire at 10:23 a.m. Assistant Chief Kramer assumed the role of ORC Incident Commander as part of the unified command. The responsibility of the Operation Section Chief position for the Freeway Complex Fire was assigned to ORC Battalion 2 (Reeder). To provide strong leadership and incident management, the fire area was divided into manageable geographical and functional areas of responsibility. The highest level of these responsibilities were branches, of which two were initially established for the Freeway Complex Fire. Branch I was the Yorba Linda Branch assigned to ORC Division 5 (Fleming) and included all structure threats in Yorba Linda. Within the Branch, smaller geographical divisions and functional groups were established. Several Structure Protection Groups were tasked first to protect those homes at the greatest threat of burning and second, wherever possible, to extinguish already established fires in structures, vehicles, and vegetation. **Incident Narrative – Map 7** shows a map of the Freeway Complex Fire Branch and Division boundaries.

Branch II was assigned to CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Deyo, who initially had been assigned Operations Section Chief when the fire was in Corona. Branch II included the wildfire control efforts that eventually burned through the Chino Hills State Park. This front raced into the City of Chino Hills through Tonner and Carbon Canyons to the Los Angeles County line—burning into the city limits of Diamond Bar. Divisions Y and Z were established within Branch II. The primary objective focused on establishing perimeter control to minimize the spread of the fire. Battalion Chief Deyo also faced the challenge of ensuring firefighting efforts were continuing in Corona, while trying to release as many resources back to Orange County.

With the fire burning out of Aliso Canyon and backing into Brush Canyon, it now headed toward Big Horn Mountain Way, Blue Ridge Drive, Merryweather Circle, Evening Breeze Drive, Pine Meadow Way, Camino de Bryant, Kodiak Mountain Drive, and Brush Canyon Drive. Any available fire units were moved to these and other threatened neighborhoods. The Operation Section Chief (Reeder) placed a call to the ECC ordering 20 engine strike teams—100 engines—of various configurations. Orange City Division Chief Eichoff assumed the Yorba Linda Structure Protection Group from ORC Battalion 3 (Aubrey), who was assigned to assist Branch I. Division Chief Eichoff recognized the community of Hidden Hills was going to be overrun by the fire and instructed unassigned units to move there.

With the fire advancing into the City of Yorba Linda, the Operations Section Chief ordered an additional 20 engine strike teams—100 engines and 20 Chief Officers.

At 10:43 a.m., a 911 caller reported a second fire to the ECC. This one was burning near the Olinda Alpha Landfill, located off Valencia Avenue near Carbon Canyon. The Brea Fire Department (BRE) confirmed they were responding to a fire reported near the landfill. The OCFA sent a modified high watershed dispatch response, including:

- Two Battalion Chiefs (ORC B23 [Phillips] and B8 [Wells])

- Four engines (ORC E47, E62, E223, and E817)
- One medic unit (ORC M26)
- Two patrols (ORC P23 and P26)

The same wind that was driving the Freeway Fire into Yorba Linda was now pushing the new fire through the east through the City of Brea toward Diamond Bar and the 57 Freeway. Brea Fire units arrived on scene at 10:49 a.m. and reported a one-acre fire moving quickly. ORC Battalion 8 (Wells) arrived on scene at 10:55 a.m. He reported the fire in Brea was two to three acres adjacent to the Olinda Alpha Landfill. He also reported there was a direct threat to structures and ordered three Type 1 engine strike teams—15 engines—and air support. Battalion Chief Wells assumed the Landfill Fire Incident Command and initiated communications with BRE units.

Within minutes, Battalion Chief Wells made contact with BRE Battalion Chief Montoya. A unified command, along with three structure protection groups, was established for the Landfill Fire. Additionally, units were assigned to begin perimeter control efforts. The highest concern was the Landfill Fire would eventually cross the 57 Freeway and destroy the homes west of it. The command post was subsequently moved to Brea Fire Station 3 at the intersection of Lambert Road and Kraemer Boulevard.

About 10:50 a.m., ORC Wildland 1 (Ewan) arrived at the Freeway Fire. To gauge the direction and speed of the wildland fire, he attempted to flank it and get far enough in front to predict its path. Ewan later reported he was unable to drive fast enough to keep up with the fire spread, which at times was estimated to be over 1,000 acres per hour. Motorists driving west on the 91 Freeway reported that at speeds of 50 mph, they were unable to stay ahead of the fire's main body.

The first two strike teams into Yorba Linda, XOR ST1424A (Espinoza) and XOR ST1425A (Hirsch), arrived about 10:56 a.m. They deployed along Alpine Lane, Big Horn Mountain Way, and Blue Ridge Drive. Facing fires driven by wind gusts up to 70 mph, these two strike teams and dozens of others moved from neighborhood to neighborhood throughout the day and into the night.

The Freeway Fire crossed the city limits of Yorba Linda at 10:58 a.m., destroying its first of hundreds of homes in Orange County. After racing through Brush Canyon, the fire burned the residence at 27185 Merryweather Circle before fire crews were able to mount a defense. At the same time, ORC HC241 reported seeing small fires in the area of the Black Gold Country Club. This was several miles downwind from the main body of the Freeway Fire and upwind from the Landfill Fire. Due to the location of the fires, HC241 reported these as new fires, not spot fires from either the Freeway Fire or the Landfill Fire. With a water drop from HC241, golf course personnel were able to contain the small spots with garden hoses. **Incident Narrative – Map 8** shows a map of the first homes impacted by the Freeway Fire in Yorba Linda.

At the same time, the ECC received multiple reports of a fire on the hillside below the Robert Diemer Water Filtration Plant. ORC E9, E37, and E61 and Staff 2 were deployed to that location. ORC E61 arrived at 11:13 a.m. and reported that this appeared to be a new vegetation fire. In less than 30 minutes, the units on scene were able to get the fire under control. These units were then redeployed to the Freeway Fire.

In Branch II, CAL FIRE Division Chief Toups was assigned Division Y at 11:30 a.m. Chief Toups was tasked to determine where control lines could be established and how firing operations might

be used to provide containment. Highway 71 was to be a key holding point, wanting to keep the fire south of Aliso Canyon. By noon, the wind had pushed the fire well past Aliso Canyon, heading for Chino Hills State Park and the thousands of acres of vegetation that would subsequently be consumed before any control was attained.

The fire moved through residential neighborhoods from Brush Canyon to the San Antonio neighborhood—a 5.5 mile span in less than five hours.

As the fire progressed into Yorba Linda and grew to be a threat to more neighborhoods, the unified command also grew. The unified command for the Freeway Fire now included representatives from OCFA, CAL FIRE, Corona Fire, Chino Valley Independent Fire District, Anaheim Fire, and the Brea Police Department.

The unified incident commanders established initial control objectives, which were to hold the fire east of Aliso Canyon and Yorba Linda Boulevard, south of North Ridge Trail, and north of the 91 Freeway. Initial objectives also were to evacuate east of Yorba Linda Boulevard and La Palma Avenue and to establish a Chino Hills State Park Contingency Plan.

In Yorba Linda, decorative vegetation, palm trees, and even ground cover on center medians served to fuel the fire's progression. Embers were driven into attic vents, underneath roof tiles, and into any unprotected openings. Firefighters employed a firefighting tactic known as "bump and run"—moving from home to home and street to street after knocking down visible fire. Dispatchers continued to relay reported structure threats to the Operations Section Chief, and available units were deployed.



Ember shower in advance of flame front.

With every major incident or disaster, the OCFA Department Operations Center (DOC) is activated. The DOC supports the needs and demands of the incident, directs the recall of personnel, coordinates the backfill of apparatus, and monitors other operational needs. At 11:30 a.m., ORC Division 3 (Robinson), who had assumed the Duty Officer assignment from Chief Fleming, arrived at the ECC. The DOC was activated and staffed by noon. Once opened and staffed, incident communications and incident ordering was moved into the DOC. As soon as was possible, Fire Management Activity Grants (FMAG) were submitted to the State of California Office of Emergency Services (OES) for each fire. Both were subsequently approved, thereby establishing reimbursement criteria for the cost of fighting the fires.

A primary function of the DOC was to ensure available relief apparatus were staffed and made available for emergency response and/or station coverage. The paramedic engine reconfiguration procedure was implemented. Twelve advanced life support (ALS) paramedic engine companies were divided and then reconfigured to either (1) a basic life support (BLS) engine company or (2) a paramedic assessment engine company (PAU), plus six paramedic vans. This allowed for more engines to be deployed, while maintaining ALS medical coverage in the unaffected areas.

Department manpower coordinators (MPC) were organized and directed to hire personnel for all un-staffed apparatus. During the incident, 36 relief/surge engine companies and a truck company were staffed and placed into service. Some of these units were sent to the incident, and others were used to provide station coverage. While searching for relief apparatus, several engine companies thought to be in reserve were discovered to have been placed into service by off-duty personnel. They were self-dispatched to the Freeway Fire. This was done outside the normal command and control systems. Personnel on these units injected themselves into the firefight without checking in with fire ground commanders or notifying them where they were operating. Some units also lacked proper communication equipment. These actions created serious personnel safety and fireground accountability concerns.

Critical decisions were made by the assigned Duty Officer regarding coverage of empty OCFA fire stations. Given the continued weather and an uncertainty as to the causes of the Freeway and Landfill fires—both of which were burning in the most northern portions of Orange County and directly upwind from structures—a conservative coverage pattern was maintained for all remaining OCFA response areas. All reserve companies were staffed, dispatch criteria was modified for selected call types, and surge apparatus was outfitted for service.

As the fire moved into Yorba Linda, the Incident Command Post (ICP) was relocated to Yorba Linda Regional Park. A Logistic Section Chief, ORC Battalion 13 (Runnestrand), was dispatched to the park to begin the establishment of a formal base camp. Later, the location and size of this park was determined to not be well suited to handle the necessary long-term logistical needs of an incident this size. The base camp was relocated to Irvine Regional Park at midnight the first day. This facility, better suited to support a large incident, was within a reasonable travel distance to the fire. Branch V was considered too remote to be adequately supported from the base, so a spike camp was established.



Palm tree ignites by flying embers.

By 11:30 a.m., ORU Strike Team 9329C – Hawkins had been released from the Corona area and was fully engaged in Box Canyon. As the fire moved toward the Hidden Hills community, these engines and others protected homes along Foxtail Drive and Via Lomas de Yorba. Because the fire had moved into the area so quickly and without warning, residents in these areas were trying to evacuate while firefighting resources were attempting to gain access. It soon became evident the residents were in significant danger from the fire. The Brea Police Department was called to expedite the evacuation. Reports were also received that fire was impacting homes near Los Monteros

and Los Adornos. ORC Patrol 23 reported to the Incident Commander that the Archstone Apartments located at River Bend and Cross Creek Roads were also immediately threatened. The fire continued its rapid and uncontrollable assault on multiple fronts. **Incident Narrative – Map 9** shows a map of the Freeway Fire progression into the Hidden Hills community.

At approximately 11:45 a.m., several units were deployed into the Savi Ranch commercial district. The units followed up on numerous reports of automatic fire alarms and also extinguished fires that had moved into the trees and ornamental vegetation. Flying embers found openings and combustible material at several of the businesses. These fires were extinguished as they were found. For the next several hours, units were committed to the area to ensure commercial losses were kept to a minimum.

In Brea, at the Landfill Fire, additional structure protection groups (SPG) were established. Brea Battalion 2 (Wood) was assigned the Kraemer SPG and given engine resources (XOR ST 1427A) to protect the homes surrounding Brea Fire Station 3. Brea Engine 2 reported the fire was within 200 yards of Brea-Olinda High School, and a request was made to the Brea Police Department to close Wildcat Way to all public traffic. In Brea, four homes were destroyed; six others damaged. The Brea Olinda School District sustained major damage around its high school campus, including the loss of several secondary buildings at Brea Canyon High School. **Incident Narrative – Map 10** shows a map indicating the perimeter of the Freeway and Landfill Fires.

Los Angeles County Fire Department Assistant Chief Watson and Deputy Chief Bryant arrived at the Landfill Fire command post. They discussed their concern that the north flank of the fire presented a threat to the Tonner Canyon, Diamond Bar, La Habra, and Hacienda Heights communities. With limited available resources, Battalion Chiefs Wells and Montoya asked if Los Angeles County Fire Department would be able to provide tactical support to those communities.

Battalion Chiefs Montoya and Wells reorganized the Landfill Fire firefighting effort. They created two branches and four structure protection groups. Single increment initial attack resources were formed into a strike team to better coordinate firefighting efforts and fire ground accountability (ORC Strike Team 1406A [Brice]). During this meeting, Battalion Chief Reeder contacted Battalion Chief Wells and advised of the anticipated merging of the Freeway Fire and the Landfill Fire sometime that evening. The decision would ultimately be made to manage the two fires as a Complex, and establish the Landfill Fire as Branch III of the Freeway Complex Fire.



A Yorba Linda neighborhood as the fire consumed the hills nearby.

The unified incident commanders determined an Incident Management Team (IMT) would be required to assist in this emerging disaster. CAL FIRE IMT 6 was on standby in Riverside County and was activated at noon. Team members began to arrive at 1:00 p.m., with the team ultimately assuming full command of the fire at 7:00 p.m. on November 15.

The strong Santa Ana winds did not allow smoke from this massive fire to rise—rather, it created a shearing effect. This resulted in a thick, gray blanket of smoke cutting off aerial views and lowering the ground level visibility to just a few feet in front of firefighters. ORC Battalion 15 (Boyle), responding as part of CAL FIRE IMT 6, was assigned to provide an update on the fire

location and progression. Due to the smoke conditions and continued rapid rate of fire spread, Chief Boyle was unable to provide this valuable intelligence to the command team and commented, “It seemed like the fire was everywhere.”

The main body of the Freeway Fire was preceded by a broad ember shower distributed by the Santa Ana wind.

The main body of the Freeway Fire was preceded by a broad ember shower distributed by the Santa Ana winds. Embers crossed the 91 Freeway into Anaheim Hills at 12:46 p.m. The Helicopter Coordinator (HELCO) reported the fire was well established within the vegetation south of the 91 Freeway. Wind driven, the fire flashed toward several residential streets in Anaheim, including Rimwood Road, Canyon Vista Drive, Larkwood Street, South Morningstar Drive, and Laurel Tree Drive. The fire reached East Whitewater Drive and the Cascade Apartments at approximately 1 p.m. Overall, the City of Anaheim sustained loss or damage to 25 single-family homes and 60 apartment units.

MetroNet Dispatch received 911 at 12:46 p.m. as the fire jumped the 91 Freeway. First reports questioned if this was a spot fire from the Freeway Fire or a new fire within the City of Anaheim. Initial attack resources were dispatched apart from the command and control of the Freeway Complex Fire. This limited the resources available for deployment into Yorba Linda as Anaheim Fire worked to control the new threat. Eventually, this fire would be identified as Branch IV in the fire organization, but was frequently referred to as the Anaheim Branch.

The fire’s potentially devastating impact on Anaheim homes and businesses required the incident command’s immediate attention. This historical fire corridor was well-known. Had the fire in Anaheim escaped containment, one flank potentially could have followed the path and eventually matched the destruction of the 1967 Paseo Grande Fire. This could have extended fire through Anaheim Hills and into the cities of Villa Park, Orange, and Tustin—devastating the communities of Orange Park Acres, Santiago Hills, and Cowan Heights.

To minimize the threat, most of the helicopters operating on the Freeway Fire were directed to concentrate control efforts on the Anaheim side of the 91 Freeway. Dozens of water drops were made and—in combination with the efforts of the assigned ground units—containment was achieved. **Incident Narrative – Map 11** shows a map of the spot fire across the 91 Freeway into the City of Anaheim.

By 1:00 p.m., the fire was well established in the Yorba Linda community of Hidden Hills. Fire engines (ORC Strike Team 1403A), a Patrol/CAFS task force led by ORC Battalion 22 (Antrim), along with Water Tenders 16 and 40, and engines from Anaheim engaged in the fight. Fire units encountered low or no water pressure on Hidden Hills Road, Mission Hills Lane, High Tree Circle, Fairwood Circle, Green Crest Drive, Skyridge Drive, and other streets. With homes burning on multiple streets and no



Firefighters fill a Water Tender at a lower elevation to take to engines fighting fires at higher elevations due to the lack of hydrant pressure.

water, strike team leaders directed engine companies to move to areas that had available water. However, because the Patrol/CAFS task force was supported by the water tenders, it was able to effectively operate with less water than that required by an engine. Unfortunately, due to rapidly diminishing water pressures, even the water tenders were driven further down the hill to be refilled. These resources remained in the Hidden Hills community to protect houses that had not burned and to ensure extinguished homes did not rekindle. The availability and use of the CAFS was a direct result of recommendations made in the 2007 Santiago Fire After Action Report.

The water supply issue was reported to the Yorba Linda Water District (YLWD) through the City of Yorba Linda EOC at approximately 2:00 p.m. YLWD personnel responded to the area and were able to make adjustments to improve the water delivery in several areas. Due to the fire threat, water district personnel were unable to access the Santiago booster pump station. When YLWD personnel were initially able to make access to the pump station, they determined there had been sufficient heat to cause the pump station for the Santiago Reservoir to automatically shut down.



Daytime seems like night under extreme smoke conditions.

Once this occurred, the continued water use eventually drained the Santiago Reservoir responsible for supplying water to the Hidden Hills and other nearby communities. YLWD personnel spent several hours completing repairs. They worked into the night and the next day to ensure a steady supply of water.

The water supply for this area was further impaired—unknowingly—by fire suppression units and some of their fire control tactics. Faced with multiple structures fully involved in fire, many engines resorted to the use of master streams to contain the fire spread. This meant a single fire engine could have pumped more than 1,000 gpm. On some streets, multiple master

streams were used. This limited water availability for engines arriving later. Additionally, the 4-inch diameter hose lines that were laid in the street to supply engines physically blocked later arriving units' access to neighborhood streets. These tactics were modified, and the master streams were shut down. Water tenders were also deployed into the impacted areas to help mitigate the water deficit.

In Branch II, plans were also underway to contain the fast-moving brush fire. Retardant drops from air tankers were directed along South Ridge Trail. They had a minimal effect, and the wind pushed the fire into Chino Hills State Park. A contingency plan was enacted in the likely case the fire would reach the community of Chino Hills. The Chino Hills Structure Protection Group was established, but it was not staffed until later that evening when more resources were available. The immediate goal was to keep the fire within the boundaries of South Ridge Trail, Water Canyon Ridge, and Slaughter Canyon. This plan was subsequently supported with the use of engines, bulldozers, hand crews, and aircraft.

Reports of the Landfill Fire crossing the 57 Freeway at Lambert Road east of State College Avenue were received at 1:21 p.m. A request was made to the California Highway Patrol (CHP) to close the freeway due to smoke and fire conditions. The fire was actively spotting in multiple directions, and on-scene resources moved from neighborhood to neighborhood protecting

structures. By this time, Los Angeles County (LACO) Fire ground and air resources had been moved into to reinforce the Tonner Canyon flank. These resources would eventually be used to support the contingency and control objectives for Branch V. LACO helicopters were used to suppress and contain the fire north of Brea Olinda High School and the neighborhoods west of the 57 Freeway.

At 1:30 p.m., homes adjacent to the Eastside Community Park located on Heatheridge Drive and Hidden Hills Road were reported to be burning. ORC Strike Team 1404A (Whitaker) and XOR Strike Team 1425A (Hirsch) had at least five, fully involved structures on Heatheridge Drive. Fifteen minutes later and a mile away, homes in the Village Center area on Willow Tree Lane, Ridge Park Drive, Juniper Avenue, Alder Avenue, and Deodar Drive were burning.

ORC strike teams assigned to the Tea Fire in Santa Barbara County and the Sayre Fire in Los Angeles County were reassigned to the Freeway Fire. ORC Strike Team 1400A (Valenzuela) arrived around 2:00 p.m. and joined the other units already engaged in Yorba Linda. ORC Strike Team 1402A (Kinoshita) returned at 4:30 p.m. ORU Strike Team 9328C (McCoy) was released late that evening from the Tea Fire and arrived sometime around midnight, the first day.

The three Orange County MetroNet strike teams (XOR) were also released from Tea and Sayre Fires and reassigned to the Freeway Fire. XOR Strike Team 1421A (Head) arrived about 3:45 p.m. and began working in the Anaheim Hills area. XOR Strike Team 1422A (Duncan) arrived at 3:30 p.m. and was assigned to structure protection in the community of San Antonio. XOR Strike Team 1423A (Thomas) started working in the Fairmont area soon after arriving at 4:45 p.m.



Aerial view of the fire's aftermath on a neighborhood in east Yorba Linda

A critical point in time for the Freeway Complex Fire was 2:30 p.m. No less than 15 homes were simultaneously burning on Juniper Avenue, Deodar Drive, and other streets in the San Antonio community. By this time, sufficient strike teams had arrived to allow a switch from the “bump and run tactic” to a more offensive “anchor and hold strategy.” This ensured damage and loss of homes would be minimized.

At 2:30 p.m., Branch II (Deyo) and Division Y (Toups) met with Branch I resources in the San Antonio community. With numerous homes

threatened, strike teams were requested to provide structure protection. By this time, several out-of-county strike teams had reported to the fire. As many strike teams as possible were directed into the area between Village Center Drive and San Antonio Road. **Incident Narrative – Map 12** shows a map of the Freeway Fire impacting the San Antonio community.

By 3:00 p.m., the weather began to change in favor of the fire control efforts. The temperature remained in the mid-70s and the relative humidity at 7 percent. However, the change in sustained wind speed to below 40 mph—sometimes as low as 10 mph in some areas—began to make the greatest difference. The advancing structure loss was stopped within the San Antonio neighborhood. Although a positive sign for fire ground commanders, the threat to—and the loss

of—structures did not end. Over the next several hours, dozens of new fires were reported, or fires thought to be extinguished rekindled within communities along the Freeway Complex Fire’s path. Fire crews returned hours later to streets previously thought clear of fire, only to find multiple homes burning anew. Many of these latent fires occurred from embers intruding into concealed spaces within homes and smoldering undetected.

The change in sustained wind speed to below 40 mph—sometimes as low as 10 mph in some areas—began to make the greatest difference.

A reconnaissance flight was conducted for the Landfill Fire at approximately 3:00 p.m., and a decision was made to change strategy from a defensive posture to an aggressive offensive tactic. This resulted in controlling the spread of the fire and keeping it from repeatedly jumping the 57 Freeway and spreading uncontrolled into residential neighborhoods. The Landfill Fire would ultimately result in the loss of four homes and damage to six others. The Brea Canyon and Brea Olinda High Schools also sustained fire damage and 980 acres of vegetation were burned.

Sometime between 4:00 and 4:30 p.m., the fire in Branch II that was burning down slope against the wind into Yorba Linda became realigned with the topography and wind. Numerous spot fires were reported at Condor Ridge. Control efforts with retardant drops proved unsuccessful, and at 4:45 p.m., the fire continued driving westward into Telegraph Canyon.

Around 5:00 p.m., a second spot fire was reported on the south side of the 91 Freeway at Coal Canyon. ORC Superintendent 1 (Hanson) led an aggressive ground effort with bulldozers and handcrews to contain the new threat. Containing this fire closed the back door and kept the Freeway Complex Fire from reaching Sierra Peak and making the run at Windy Ridge, which could have threatened additional communities.

By 5:30 p.m., the wildland fire was continuing to move through Upper Waterman Canyon at an incredible rate. Within minutes, another tragic outcome was narrowly avoided. Earlier in the day, CAL FIRE Crew Strike Team 9387G was assigned to this area in Branch II. The crew buses were parked in an unburned area of San Juan Hill located in Upper Waterman Canyon. As the fire burned across the canyon, the crew buses were going to be overrun. The crew bus drivers took tried to relocate their vehicles ahead of the quickly approaching front. Orders were given for all personnel to seek safety by entering the already burned area—known as “entering the black.” Eight of the inmate crew members inadvertently took off through the unburned fuel—known as “the green.” Two firefighters assigned to CAL FIRE Strike Team 9410C were sent to retrieve and direct them into a safe area. After the fire front passed, all personnel were accounted for. No injuries were sustained, but the two crew buses sustained minor damage from being so close to the flames.

The decision to merge the Landfill and Freeway Fires into a Complex occurred between 5:00 and 5:30 p.m. A complex is comprised of two or more fires in a geographically adjacent area. When implemented, managing an incident as a complex allows for shared incident management and logistical support with a central base of operations for continuity



Cityscape of Yorba Linda during the first night

and efficiency. As the fire grew, the branch assignments expanded to accommodate the vast boundary of the fire. The Landfill Fire was subsequently identified as Branch III and assigned to BRE Battalion 1 (Montoya) and ORC Battalion 8 (Wells). Branch IV was established when the fire subsequently jumped the 91 Freeway and moved into the City of Anaheim. This branch was also referred to as the Anaheim Branch. With the addition of LACO to the unified command, Branch V was later identified to include parts of Tonner Canyon and the City of Diamond Bar. Additional control objectives were established including keeping the fire east of the 57 Freeway and south of the City of Diamond Bar. LACO units would establish in this area to help make a stand.

At 5:50 p.m., Incident Command received a request from YLWD personnel to provide engines to assist with water supply problems. Three engines—ORG E2, STA E2, and GGVE5—were assigned and were able to sustain water availability by pumping water from one supply grid of the system to another. These engines pumped through the night until the YLWD brought in a high-volume portable pump to take over for fire engines. According to the YLWD After Action Report, the water shortage was primarily caused by fail-safe actions of pumping equipment and the high demand on the system caused by firefighting efforts. These two situations resulted in a complete emptying of the Santiago Reservoir.

By 7:00 p.m., firefighters were advancing into all neighborhoods affected by the Freeway Complex Fire. Strike teams from all over Southern California were still arriving to help. CAL FIRE IMT 6 officially took responsibility for the management of the Freeway Complex Fire. Formal briefings were taking place, and logistical needs such as food and water were supplied to personnel. Fuel as ordered for vehicles that had been at working all day. A unified communication plan was initiated resulting in significant radio communication improvement by the following morning.

At an earlier briefing for the Landfill Fire, the Freeway Fire was predicted to burn into Carbon Canyon and make a direct run at the community of Olinda Village. Olinda Village sits in a confluence of canyon sides creating a “bowl” where residents have built homes, businesses, a church, and a school. Olinda Village is heavily lined with pine, eucalyptus, and a variety of ornamental vegetation. The Hollydale Mobile Estates is a large mobile home park where many village residents live.

At 8:30 p.m. on this first day, a strike team of engines—ORC Strike Team 1405A (Brown)—was assigned to the Olinda Village area. He developed control objectives to keep the fire south of Carbon Canyon Road, east of the eastern most boundary of Olinda Village, west of Copo de Oro, and north of Verbena Lane. Tactical priorities included the protection of the Hollydale Mobile Estates and the Carbon Canyon Christian High School. A special emphasis was placed on protecting the power lines along Carbon Canyon Road—as these supplied the main power to Olinda Village and the water supply pumps for the area.

At the same time, in Branch II, the perimeter control efforts remained active. The fire continued to burn on multiple fronts through canyons aligned with the wind. The Rolling M Ranch presented a new structure protection challenge. Two crew strike teams and a Chino Hills engine were assigned to this area. Other strike teams of bulldozers and hand crews were working to build a control line at Bane Canyon. However, at 9:00 p.m., the fire was spotted one-fourth of a mile away in Slaughter Canyon. The plan was abandoned. By midnight, the Freeway Complex Fire had reached

the City of Chino Hills and was burning behind homes located near Butterfield Road and the Los Serranos Golf and Country Club. **Incident Narrative – Map 13** is a map of the local canyons. On November 16 around 2:00 a.m., the wind direction shifted from off-shore to a sustained on-shore direction. This was reported by personnel at Olinda Village and Branch II in Aliso Canyon. At 3:30 a.m., the Freeway Complex Fire had progressed through the Chino Hills State Park into Telegraph Canyon. It then had moved into the Carbon Canyon area. Highly erratic burning conditions were seen with flame heights reported up to 50 feet and visibility at near zero. **Incident Narrative – Map 14** shows a fire progression map of the Freeway Fire advancing into Olinda Village.

As the Freeway Complex Fire moved toward the Olinda Village area, an evacuation plan was implemented. Engines were moved to protect structures as the fire was burning directly into the Hollydale Mobile Estates. Largely due to the significant amount of preparation made by engine crews earlier in the day, the flame front was repelled and the community of Olinda Village was spared significant loss. One mobile home in Hollydale and a home on Olinda Drive were destroyed. By 7:00 a.m. on November 16, the threat to Olinda Village had passed.

The wind shift had an impact on fire control actions in the Chino Hills area. At 3:00 a.m., the fire burned freely near the upper end of Aliso Canyon. Branch II ordered evacuations of hundreds of homes south of Soquel Canyon and west of Highway 71. An extensive firing operation was conducted as part of the structure protection effort. Fifteen engines worked until sunrise to ensure there were no losses. Another large firing operation from Euclid to Carbon Canyon Road was completed by 9:00 a.m.

Chief Toups (Division Y) was relocating Branch II resources into the Sleepy Hollow area off Carbon Canyon Road when he encountered engines assigned to Branch V. These local government engines had just completed a firing operation around homes bordering the Saint Joseph's Hill of Hope off Carbon Canyon Road in what they called a structure protection effort. Chief Toups asked the Strike Team Leader to cease from any additional firing as the wind direction and terrain were not properly aligned for this type of operation. The reason given for the firing operation was structure protection, but the unintended consequence was to create a condition which drew the main body of the Freeway Complex Fire deeper into Tonner Canyon. Once established within the canyon, the fire would be aligned and head toward the Los Angeles County line and the city limits of Diamond Bar. **Incident Narrative – Map 15** shows a map of the Freeway Fire progressing into Tonner Canyon.



Smoke column rising through the inversion layer

Day 2 - November 16, 2008

The Freeway Complex Fire was battled through the day on November 16. Aircraft, bulldozers, hand crews, and engine companies worked throughout the day to establish a control perimeter

around the fire. By midnight on that second day, the goal was achieved. Overhaul and line improvement continued over the next couple of days.

The re-population of evacuated areas was a priority for Incident Command. Residents of areas that were not under mandatory evacuation were allowed to return to their homes at their choosing. Those under a mandatory evacuation order had to wait until a determination was made that the threat was fully abated. After conducting an aerial reconnaissance of the Complex, Incident Commanders decided at 3:00 p.m. on November 16 that most areas under the evacuation order could be repopulated. OCFA Occupant Liaison personnel assisted homeowners in gaining access to homes to recover personal property and by listening to and answering questions.

Days 3-5, November 17-19, 2008

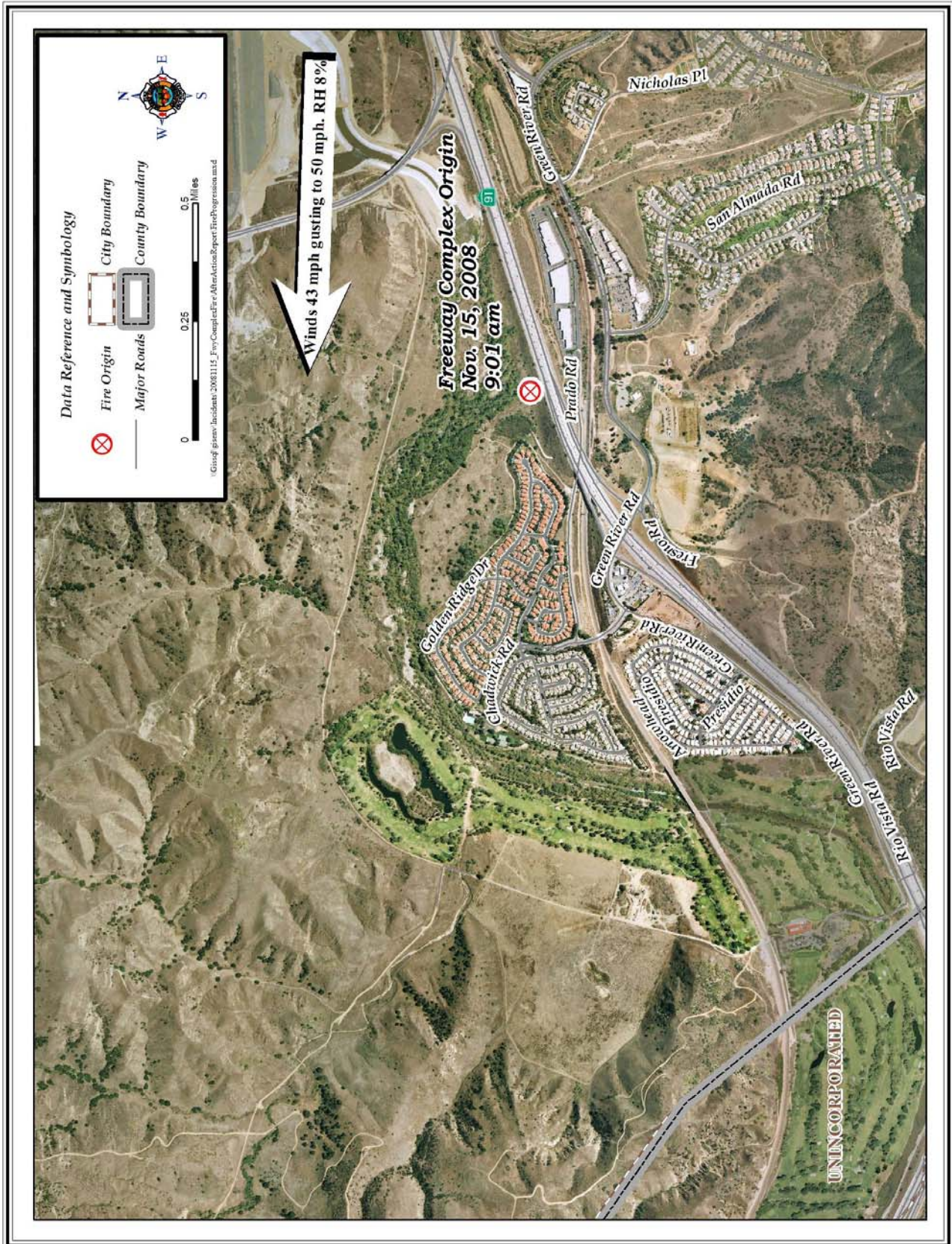
Neighborhoods that had been impacted by the fire had fire companies assigned to ensure burned homes were properly overhauled and no new fires would occur as a result of hidden or smoldering embers. Neighborhoods, homes, and cars that were not burned—but may have received a covering of fire retardant—were washed to minimize damage.

On November 19, 2008, at 7:00 a.m., the Freeway Complex Fire was declared to be fully contained. At its peak, more than 3,800 firefighting and support personnel were assigned to the incident. More than 360 structures were destroyed or damaged, and over 30,000 acres of valuable watershed were consumed. The extinguishment effort for the incident is estimated to cost \$16.1 million, with property loss exceeding \$150 million. Injuries were few and relatively minor. Most importantly, no lives were lost to either civilians or firefighters.



The fire contained; damage assessment begins in a Yorba Linda neighborhood

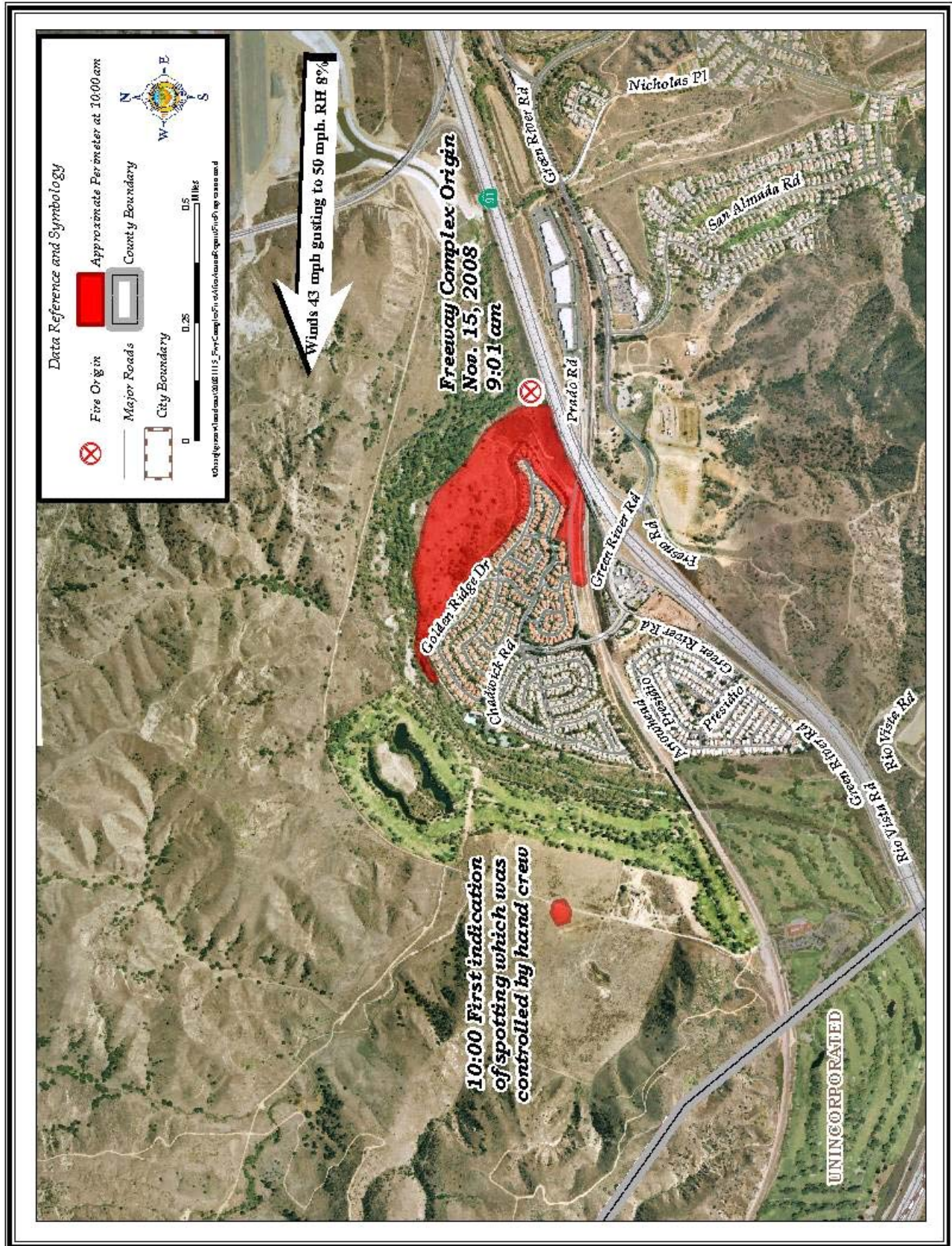
Incident Narrative – Map 3
Freeway Complex Fire—Origin 9:01 a.m.



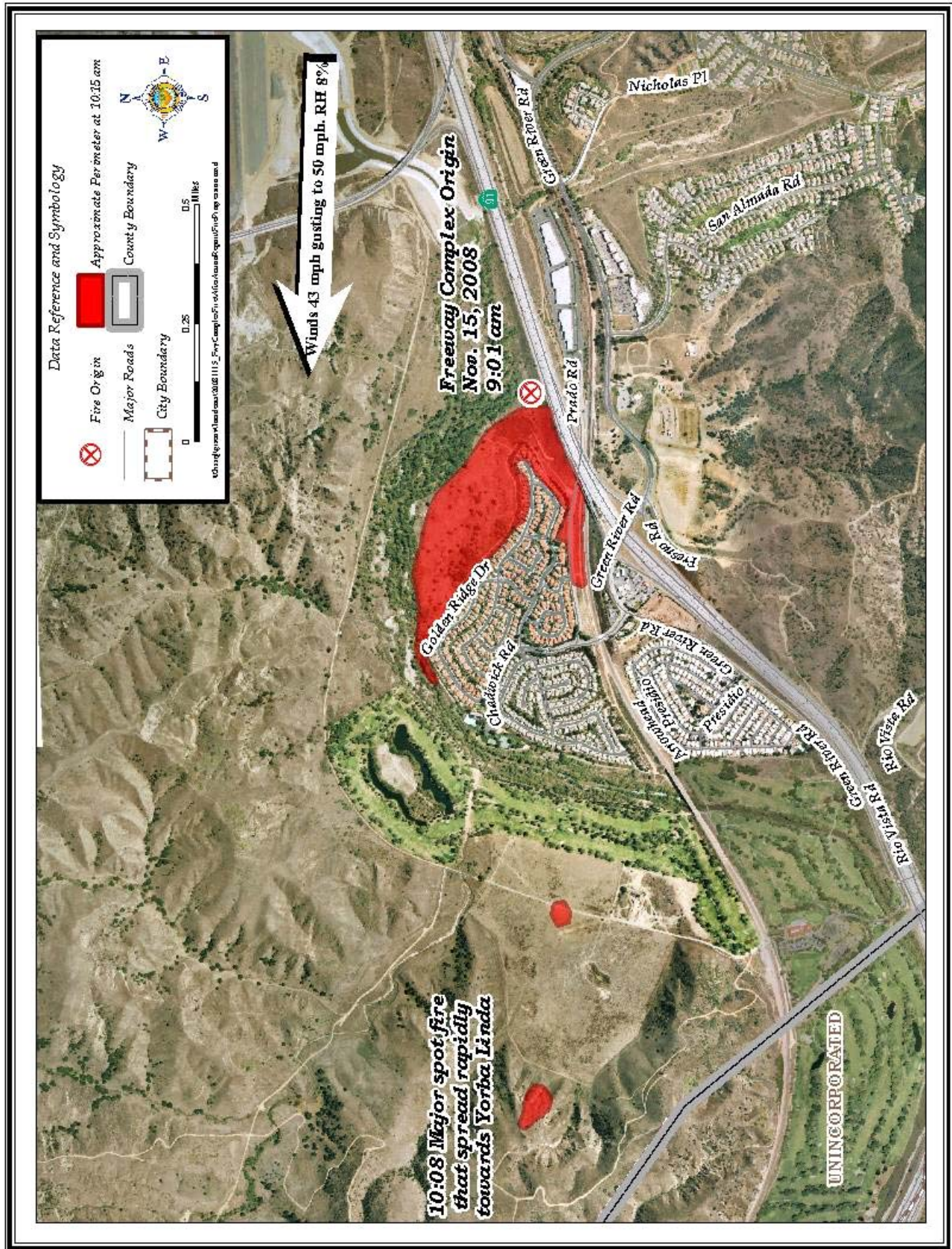
Incident Narrative – Map 4
Corona Fire Engine 5—Near Miss Entrapment



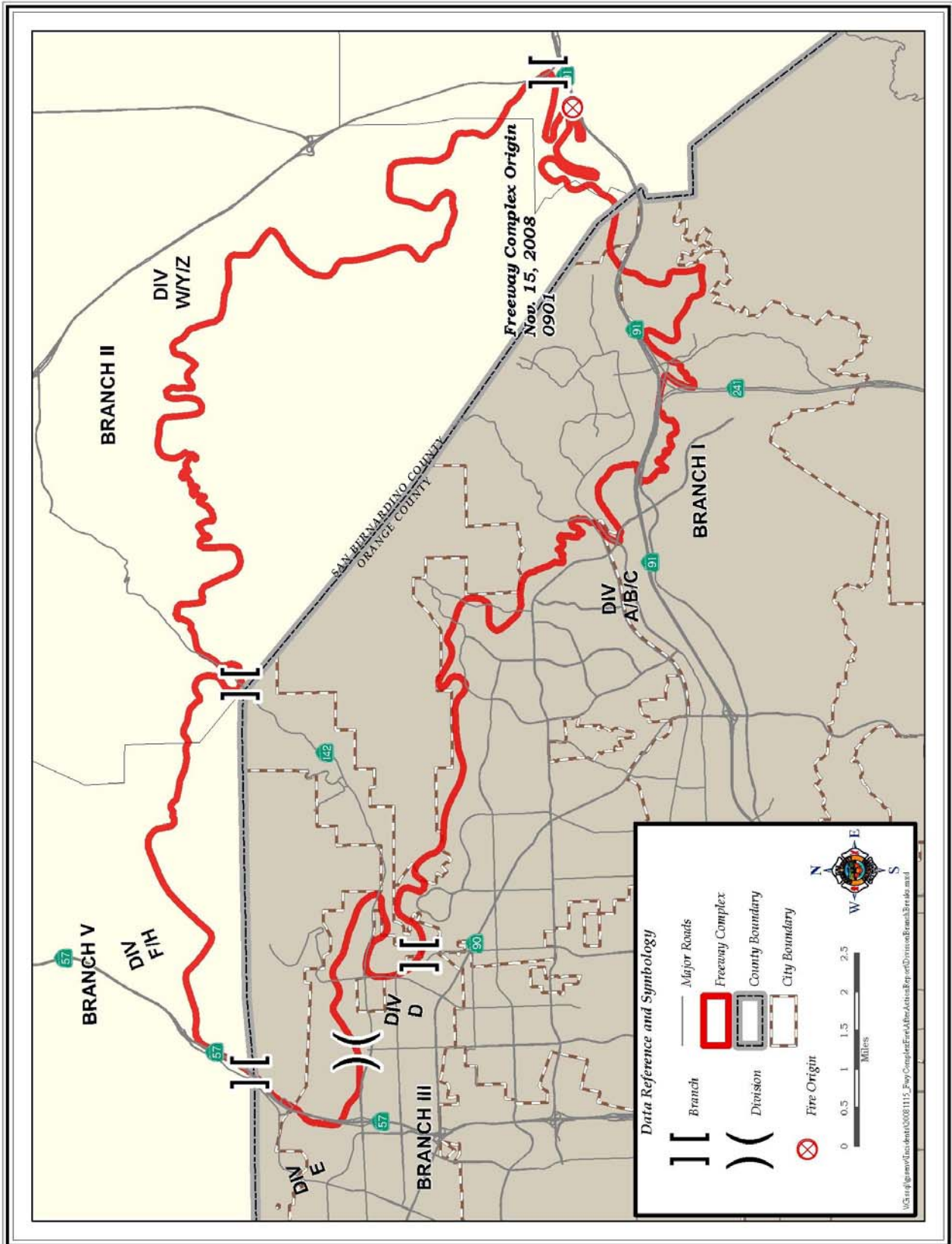
Incident Narrative – Map 5
First Indication of Spotting—10:00 a.m.



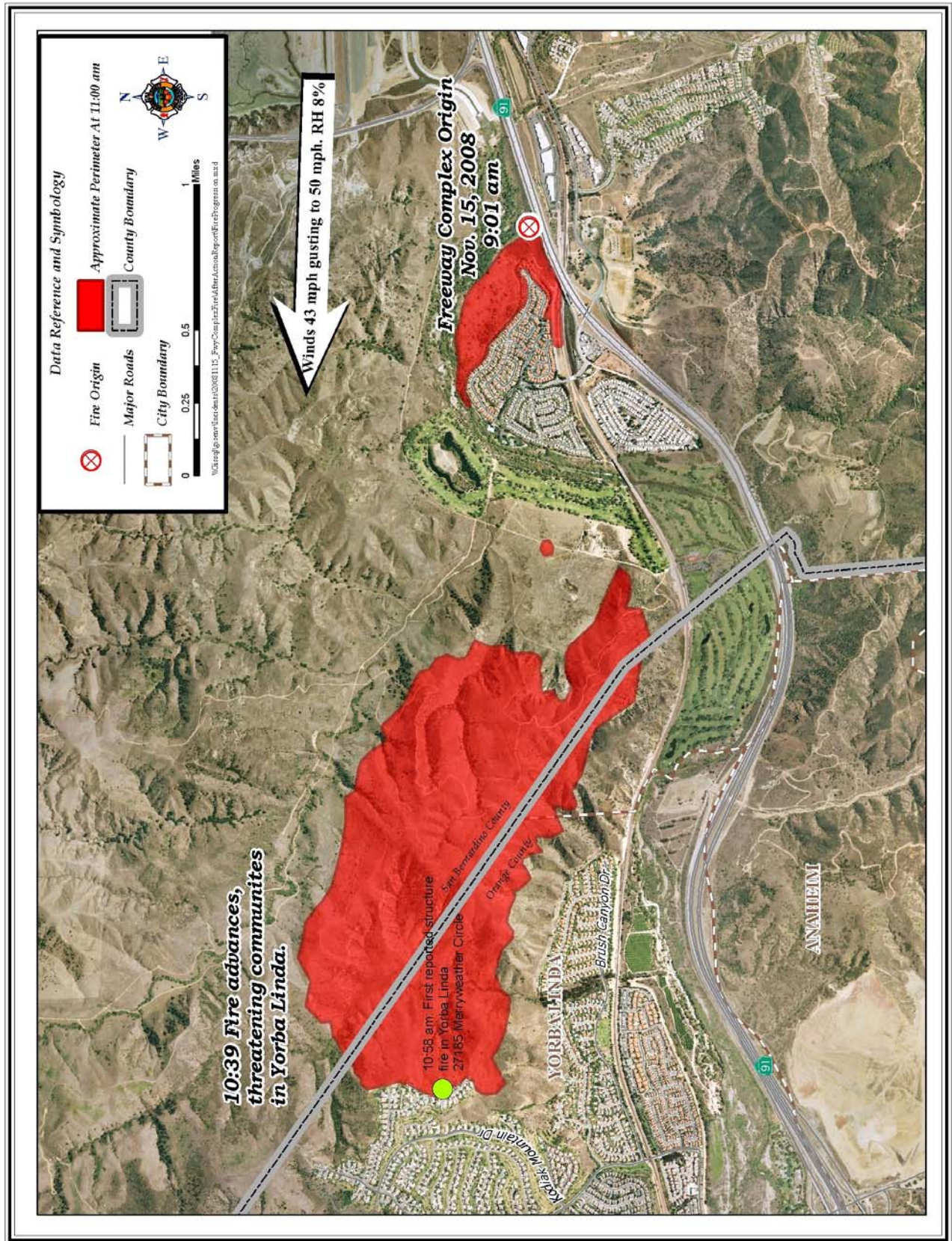
Incident Narrative – Map 6
Second Spot Sighted—10:08 a.m.



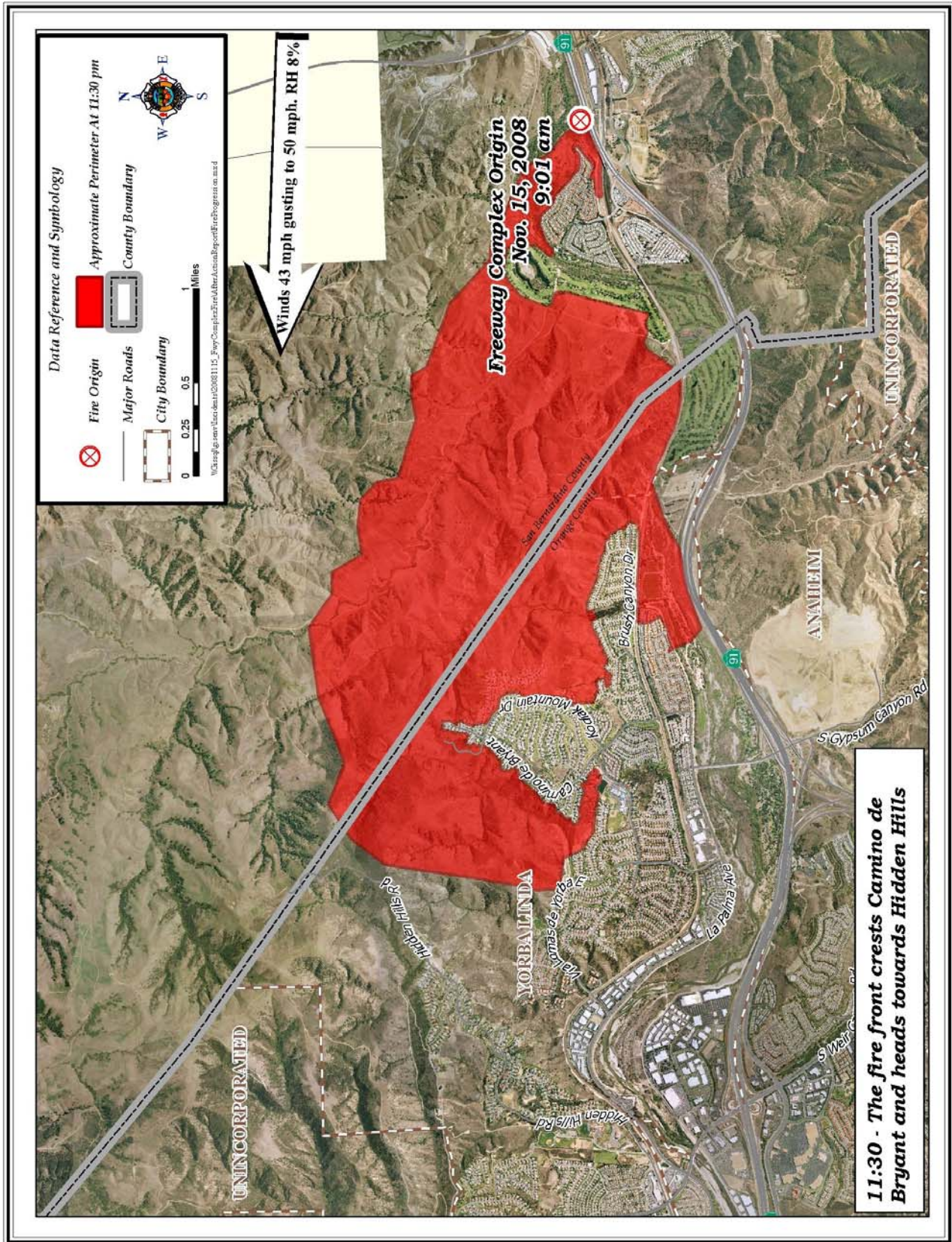
Incident Narrative – Map 7
Freeway Complex Fire—Branch and Division Map



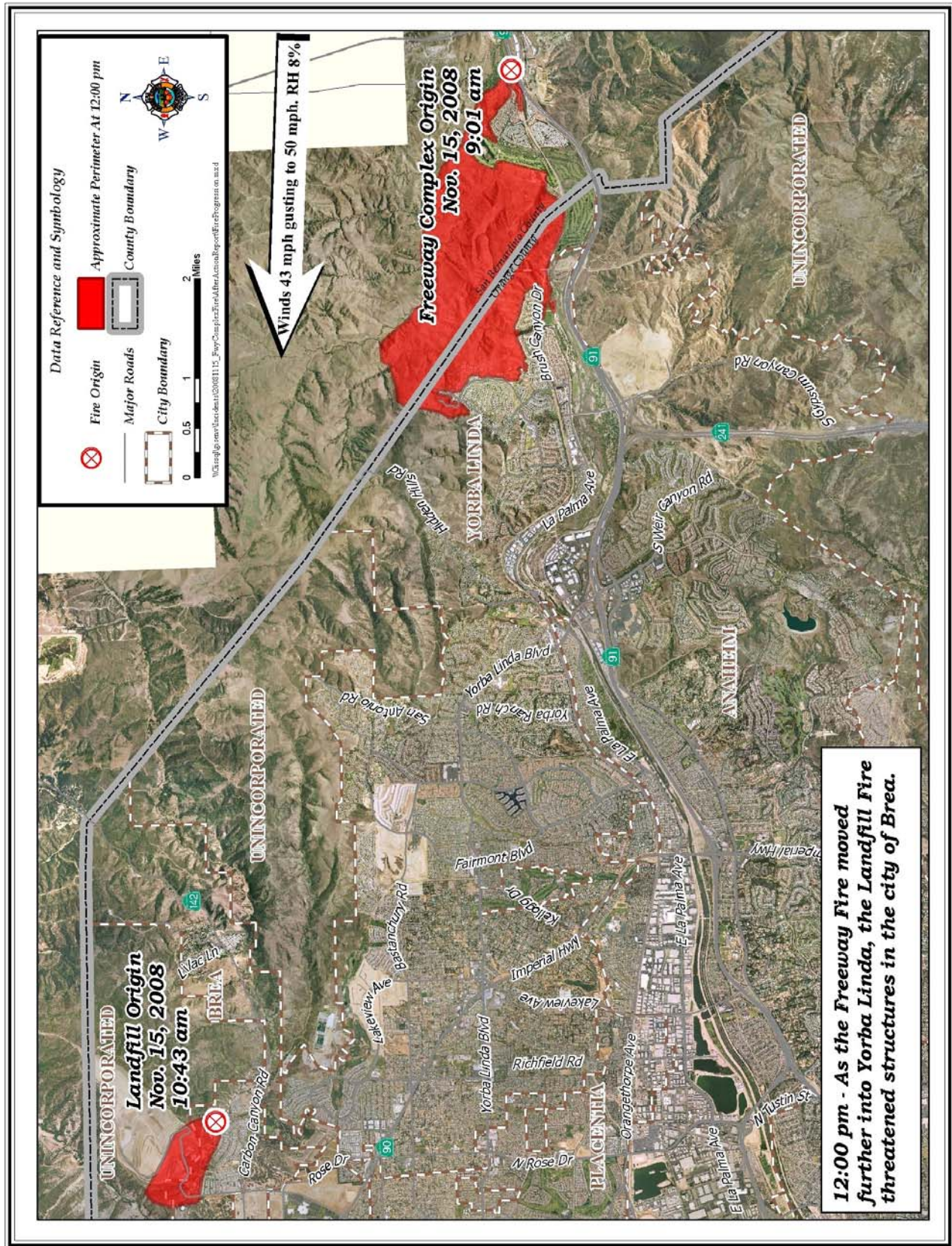
Incident Narrative – Map 8
Freeway Fire Reaches Structures in Yorba Linda—10:39 a.m.



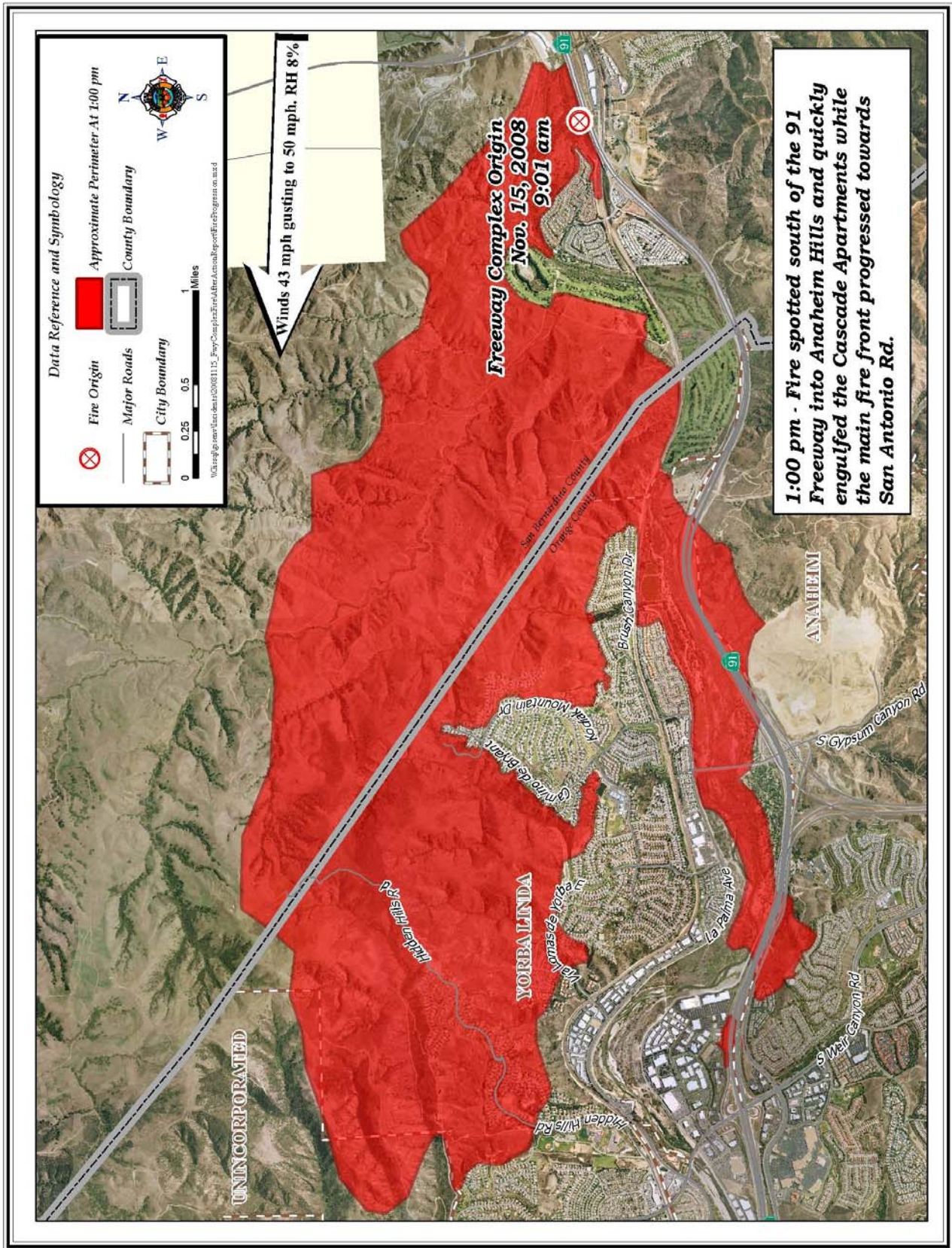
Incident Narrative – Map 9
Freeway Fire Moves Towards Hidden Hills—11:30 a.m.



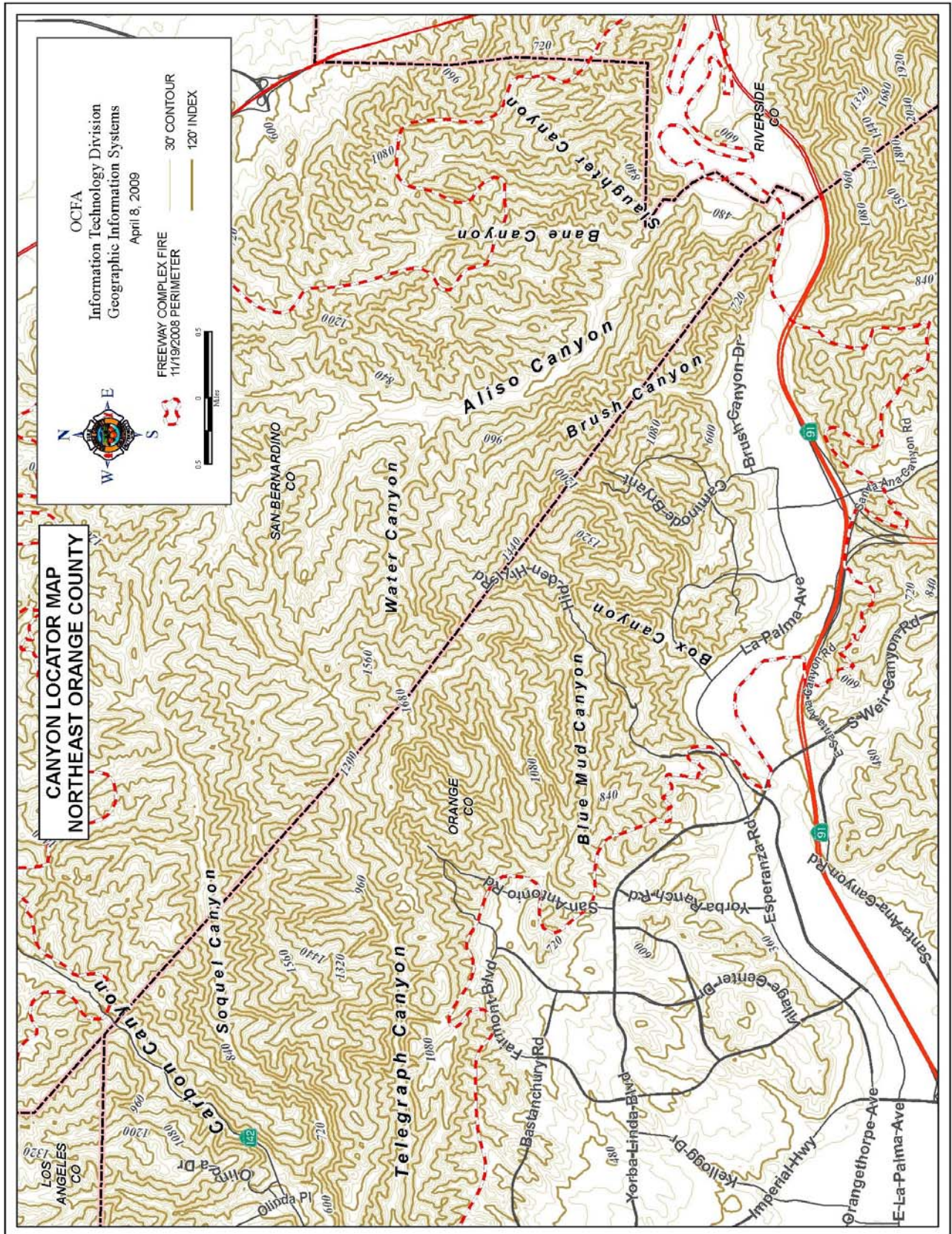
Incident Narrative – Map 10
Perimeter of the Freeway and Landfill Fires—12:00 p.m.



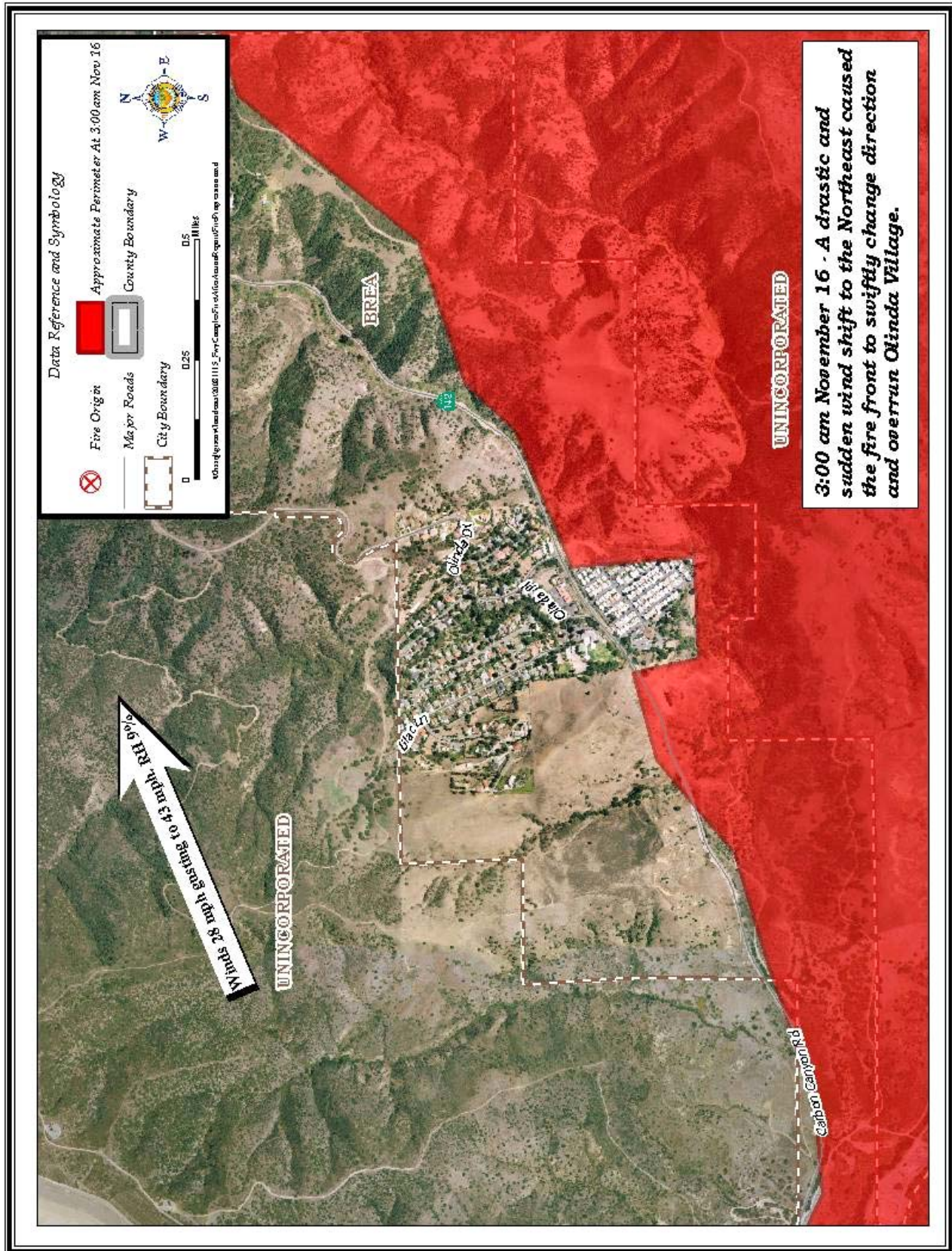
Incident Narrative – Map 11
Freeway Fire Spots Across the 91 Freeway into Anaheim—1:00 p.m.



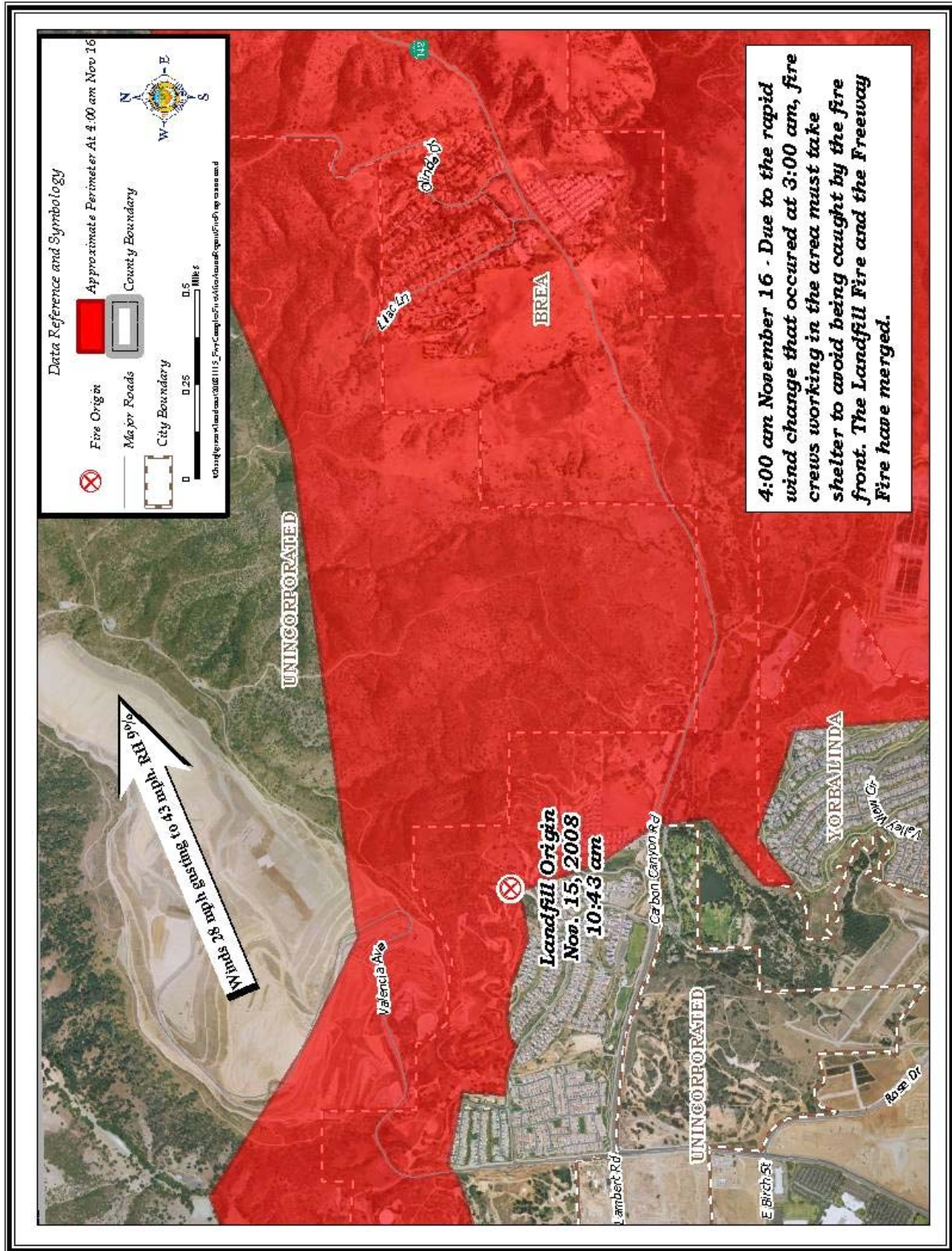
Incident Narrative – Map 13 Canyon Locator



Incident Narrative – Map 14
Freeway Fire Reaches Olinda Village—3:00 a.m.



Incident Narrative – Map 15
Freeway Fire Moves Towards Tonner Canyon—4:00 a.m.





Notification, Evacuation, and Repopulation

The first indication that residents of the City of Yorba Linda were about to be seriously threatened by the Freeway Fire came at approximately 10:20 a.m. on November 15. After estimating the fire's rate of spread, OCFA Battalion 2 Chief (Reeder) projected the fire would impact the community of Brush Canyon within 30 minutes. He directed the OCFA ECC to notify the Yorba Linda City Manager and advise the Brea Police Department to begin mandatory evacuations of the Brush Canyon area. At 10:22 a.m., Brea Police began evacuations of the eastern portion of Yorba Linda (Thomas Brothers Map page 741, grids E4, F4, and G5).

Ten minutes later, at 10:32 a.m., the Freeway Fire threatened the neighborhood of Big Horn Mountain Way in Yorba Linda. At 10:39 a.m., ORC Helicopter 41 confirmed homes on Bighorn Mountain Way, Blue Ridge Drive, and Evening Breeze Drive were under direct threat. Nineteen minutes later, the first of hundreds of homes lost in Yorba Linda burned on Merryweather Circle.

Although a collaborative decision, the responsibility for evacuation is statutorily a law enforcement function, which allows the fire department to focus on fire control efforts. Brea Police had a Supervisor assigned to the Unified Command early in the incident. One of their primary responsibilities was the rapid assembly of officers to meet the evacuation needs of this fast-moving fire. The Orange County EOC After Action Report estimates the evacuation orders impacted over 9,000 dwellings in the City of Yorba Linda. During the height of the fight, and estimated 24,000 citizens were evacuated or kept from returning to their homes in the City of Yorba Linda. The City of Anaheim began evacuations when the Freeway Fire crossed the 91 Freeway. A few miles away, the City of Brea initiated evacuations in residential areas in the path of the Landfill Fire. These extensive evacuation demands put a strain on local law enforcement, requiring mutual aid resources from agencies across the County to assist with evacuation needs. Refer to <http://www.ocfamedia.org/uploads/PDF/fcfaarybl.pdf> for the **City of Yorba Linda After Action Report** for additional details.

Traffic gridlocked as evacuating residents and incoming emergency apparatus tried to access the same neighborhood streets. Officers at the various roadblocks and checkpoints took action to remedy the congestion—enabling fire apparatus to access the most impacted neighborhoods.

The weekend and mid-morning timing of the Freeway Fire were major factors complicating the evacuation. Since the Freeway Fire occurred on a Saturday—instead of a weekday—more residents were home, instead of at work or school. Notably, even with such a large and escalating evacuation boundary, the majority of residents remained calm and followed evacuation orders. Although slow, reports were received during the morning that evacuations were orderly and without incident.

Law enforcement agencies possess the legal authority to conduct evacuations of populated areas. However, even when a mandatory evacuation is declared, law enforcement does not have the legal authority to force residents from their homes. Officers may restrict the return of residents once they leave their property. Determining when and where to evacuate is often difficult since each evacuation decision brings with it a set of risks and rewards. The greatest risk to permitting residents to remain with their homes is the potential threat to safety.

Evacuation of residents is one of the challenges created by a wildland-urban interface fire. The Freeway Fire spread so rapidly emergency responders could only estimate the direction and the time of impact to a given neighborhood. Within minutes of ignition, spotting was reported one mile downwind from the main body. Although a fire's rate of spread is typically measured in acres per hour, the Freeway Fire was driven by 40 mph winds and required measurement in acres per minute. Motorists driving on the 91 Freeway reported they could not keep up with the fire as it spread through wildland areas—even while driving at speeds of 50 mph.

Simulation training conducted on October 27, 2008, for a WUI fire in the mutual threat zone along the 91 Freeway provided incident commanders some possible trigger points of when and where to call for evacuation. During the fire, these same trigger points were utilized to make the evacuation decisions. When the potential existed for the fire to escape planned, control boundaries, evacuations were ordered.

The manner and timeliness in which residents were notified is being reviewed. After the 2007 Santiago Fire, the County of Orange led in the development and implementation of a public notification system. The AlertOC notification program has been adopted and implemented in many cities throughout the County. The City of Yorba Linda was in the beginning stages of implementing the program. Since the fire, the Alert OC program has moved into the next phase of implementation and is now capable of making public notifications.



The Brea Police Department conducting evacuations.

Deciding when to repopulate an evacuated neighborhood is one of the most difficult made by law enforcement and incident commanders—given the unpredictable nature of a WUI fire. Although a frustrating ordeal for residents, evacuation orders are to prevent homeowners from entering the dangerous conditions usually present in fire-burned areas.

The OCFA uses an Occupant Liaison Program to keep homeowners informed; to assist them in retrieving items such as medication, money, or clothing left while evacuating; and to provide emotional support. When appropriate, Occupant Liaison Teams may escort residents to their property. These efforts are to prevent homeowners from independently returning to their property and into a potentially dangerous situation.

After a reconnaissance flight deemed most areas to be safe, the mandatory evacuations were lifted on November 16 at 3:00 p.m. Even then, law enforcement officers were directed to allow only verified residents or those who had legitimate business—insurance adjusters, clean-up crews, etc.—into the impacted neighborhoods.

Even though the fire was extinguished, fire crews needed to maintain a presence within the impacted neighborhoods for several days. Firefighters conducted patrols looking for new fire

starts, as well as overhauled burned structures. Fire apparatus needed to be able to move freely from street to street as crews cleaned off fire retardant that drifted onto unburned homes and vehicles. Wildland engines, handcrews, and helicopters conducted mop-up operations in the wildland and—where necessary—removed hazards adjacent to homes created by partially burned trees and vegetation.



The orderly evacuation of residents during a WUI fire can be challenging and may create delays for fire apparatus.



Water Supply

The demands of a single structure fire can tax a well functioning water system. Normal firefighting efforts often involve one fire engine connected to a fire hydrant. The water is supplied directly to the fire or to one or more fire engines. In contrast, in an urban conflagration such as the Freeway Complex Fire, multiple engines move into threatened neighborhoods to extinguish flames and defend multiple homes on numerous streets.

Water systems must incorporate “fire flow” as an element of system design and functionality. Needed fire flow is the amount of water available for providing fire protection at selected locations throughout a community. The OCFA Planning and Development Services Section reviews all plans for new development to ensure an adequate fire flow is provided according to the City’s adopted Fire Code. Like all California jurisdictions, the City of Yorba Linda is required by State law to adopt the California Fire Code (CFC). The latest Fire Code edition was adopted in 2007. This newly adopted code allows for doubling of the required fire flow in areas where “conditions indicate an unusual susceptibility to group fires or conflagrations.” This should be considered in all new developments within a city that is adjacent to a wildland-urban interface or within a designated High Hazard Zone.

Using the fire code tables, a typical street with homes not exceeding 3,600 square feet would be protected by fire hydrants capable of delivering 1,500 gpm for a minimum of two hours with no less than 20 pounds psi of residual pressure. For homes between 3,600 and 4,800 square feet, fire hydrants must deliver 1,750 gpm for two hours with no less than 20 pounds psi of residual pressure. Locally adopted amendments require fire hydrant spacing of 300 feet along the street. The typical fire flow demand is based on fighting a single structure fire and protecting the immediate exposures.

Faced with multiple structures, many fully involved in fire, some Company Officers resorted to the use of master streams to contain the fire spread. This meant a single fire engine may have pumped more than 1,000 gpm—affecting the available water supply. On some streets, multiple master streams were deployed. Once water demand issues were identified, tactics were modified. The master streams were shut down in favor of smaller hand lines.

Around 2:00 p.m. on November 15, several radio transmissions were received from fire companies reporting low or no water pressure in various sections of Yorba Linda. Some areas were Hidden Hills Road, Mission Hills Lane, High Tree Circle, Fairwood Circle, Green Crest Drive, and Skyridge Drive. With homes burning on multiple fronts, Strike Team Leaders had to make critical decisions. They directed fire companies to areas that had available water, thereby giving firefighters a chance to protect and save homes.

To provide structure protection and ensure rekindles were minimized, a Compressed Air Foam System (CAFS) Task Force with five Patrol units remained in the Hidden Hills area. The CAFS Task Force, under the direction of OCFA Battalion Chief Antrim, extinguished fires and laid protective foam on unburned structures for several hours. Two water tenders were ordered to the impacted area to shuttle water to the fire companies. These tenders systematically began checking fire hydrants until one was found with enough pressure to fill the tanks. Eventually, water tenders had to fall back to the hydrants at the lowest point in the system to refill.

According to the YLWD After Action Report, the water demand use for the first two days of the fire was nearly 20 million gallons above normal.

A request for service was placed to the Yorba Linda Water District (YLWD) through the Yorba Linda EOC about 2:00 p.m. YLWD personnel responded quickly and were able to make adjustments to improve the water delivery in several areas. According to the YLWD After Action Report, YLWD personnel were initially unable to access the Santiago Pump Station because of the extraordinary fire conditions. When they were able to make access, personnel determined there had been sufficient heat to cause the pump station for the Santiago Reservoir to automatically shut down. Once this occurred, the continued demand eventually drained the Santiago Reservoir, the supply for Hidden Hills and other nearby communities.

At 5:50 p.m., the YLWD requested three fire engines assist them in supplementing the water grid system at Manzanita Avenue and Smoke Tree Avenue. Additionally, two mobile water pumps were brought in from the Laguna Beach County Water District and the Santa Margarita Water District. They supplemented water supplies at the reservoirs serving the impacted areas. YLWD's efforts took several hours to complete; its personnel worked through the night and into the following day to ensure a secure water supply.

Water District Task Force

On January 20, 2009, the OCFA's Emergency Planning and Coordination Battalion Chief (Ferdig) attended the first meeting of a task force organized by the Water Emergency Response Organization of Orange County (WEROC). This organization coordinates and supports comprehensive emergency preparedness programs for the Orange County water industry.

The task force is to create a Water Utility and Fire Department Coordination Template for water agencies along the WUI. The template would include—but would not be limited to—areas such as water pressure zones, fire hydrant specifications, types of available equipment, necessary equipment, and identification of critical infrastructure in need of protection during a disaster. Some of the participating agencies on the task force are:

- Laguna Beach County Water District
- Yorba Linda Water District
- Moulton Niguel Water District
- South Coast Water District
- Irvine Ranch Water District
- City of Orange Water Department
- Orange County Fire Authority
- OC Emergency Management Bureau

The task force's goals are (1) to develop a stronger working relationship between water districts and fire agencies; (2) to develop implementation standards for use during red-flag conditions; (3) to develop a water district liaison program; and (4) to develop a standard template for providing fire agencies information about the water supply available during firefighting efforts.

The water supply template will assist each water district within the WUI to create an agency-specific plan. These plans will be tested using a tabletop exercise simulating multiple wildland fires impacting Orange County simultaneously. Refer to the **YLWD After Action Report** at <http://www.ocfamedia.org/uploads/PDF/fcfaarylwd.pdf> for additional details.

Mutual Aid

The California Fire and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid Plan is an extension of—and supportive document to—the California Emergency Plan. The plan provides for systematic mobilization, organization, and operation of necessary fire and rescue resources of the state and its political subdivisions in mitigating the effects of disasters, whether natural or man-caused.



Valley View Conservation Camp handcrew
from Elk Creek, Ca

No community has the resources sufficient to cope with any and all emergencies. Thus, fire officials must preplan emergency operations to ensure the efficient use of available resources. Basic to California's emergency planning is a statewide system of fire service mutual aid. Each jurisdiction first relies upon its own resources with mutual aid resources being available from other agencies to augment local response when conditions warrant. The master Mutual Aid Plan outlines and governs what is commonly referred to as the Mutual Aid System for fire service in California.

The Mutual Aid System for fire service in California has been described by the United States Fire Administration as “unparalleled in the United States.” The system is founded on the principle of fire departments providing resources to one another during times of major emergencies when a local agency is overwhelmed and does not have the ability to handle the incident on its own. The system allows resources committed to an incident to escalate from a few engines to hundreds. The State is divided into six mutual aid regions to facilitate coordination of mutual aid. Coordinators are identified at the local and national levels, under the umbrella of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) Fire and Rescue Branch.

Emergencies may reach such a magnitude as to require mutual aid resources from adjacent local, County, and State levels. Specific requests for mutual aid are processed from the local agency to the County Operational Area Coordinator. OCFA is the coordinator for the Orange County Operational Area. From the County, the request goes to the Regional Coordinator (LACO) and then to the State Coordinator (OES), if necessary. Each ascending level has access to greater numbers of firefighting resources from throughout the State.

During most wildland fires, mutual aid resources are requested and assembled in preparation for anticipated strategic actions. However, with fires that rapidly turn into WUI conflagrations—such as the Freeway Complex Fire—little time to plan for strategic actions is available, and resources are needed immediately. This is compounded further when multiple major fires occur simultaneously. Delays can be disastrous. Oftentimes, different fires are requesting the same resources.

When the Freeway Complex Fire began, only two fires of significance were blazing in Southern California: the Tea Fire in Santa Barbara County and the Sayre Fire in Los Angeles County. These fires were burning out of control, and numerous homes were already lost when the Freeway

Complex Fire began. Numerous mutual aid requests to both fires had been filled or were pending when the Freeway Complex Fire began. The OCFA had sent a Type 1 and a Type 3 strike team—10 engines—to the Tea Fire while MetroNet cities sent three Type 1 strike teams—15 engines. Additionally, the Orange County-based Office of Emergency Services (OES) strike team—5 engines—was activated and sent to Santa Barbara County. The OCFA staffs one of the OES engines with the other four being staffed by MetroNet cities. The Sayre Fire in Los Angeles County, having started after the Tea Fire, only received one Type 1 strike team from the OCFA and one Type 1 strike team from the MetroNet cities.

Prior to the Freeway Complex Fire being reported, all vacancies created by the deployment of OCFA fire engines to Santa Barbara and Los Angeles Counties had been filled. This was achieved by activating the OCFA relief engine fleet and “recalling” off-duty personnel or personnel reporting for normal duty at 8:00 a.m. on November 15.



Riverside County fire crews protect homes in Yorba Linda

At the onset of the Freeway Complex Fire, immediate resource requests were placed for Type 1 and Type 3 strike teams beyond what could be provided by the OCFA and local agencies. In total, 35 strike teams—175 engines—of various types were ordered within the first four hours of the incident. The OCFA and other Orange County cities provided seven Type 1 strike teams and one Type 3 strike team—40 engines total. By noon, six strike teams—30 engines—had arrived from Riverside County. By 1:30 p.m., a total of 19 strike teams—95 engines—and 1 task force—6 engines—were operating on the fire. This was in addition to the 58 engines, 3 trucks, 8 patrols, and 5 water tenders that responded as single increments to the Freeway and Landfill Fires. While some resources were coming from an extended distance, prior to 2:00 p.m., 159 engines were assigned to and operating on the Freeway Complex Fire.

The early ordering of resources made it possible for 159 engines, 3 trucks, 8 patrols, and 5 water tenders to be operating on the Freeway Fire by 1:30 p.m.

The availability of resources was largely due to the lack of competition for resources from other fires. A change in the resource ordering policy after the 2007 fire siege also proved to be beneficial. This change allowed for Operational Area and Regional Coordinators to directly request up to five strike teams—25 engines—across operational area boundaries based on the closest resource concept. This was in contrast to the previous rule that permitted only one strike team to be obtained outside the regional ordering system.

Air Resources

Unless owned and operated by local government, air resources—helicopters, fixed wing air tankers, lead planes, and air attack platforms—are coordinated by CAL FIRE and the United States Forestry Service (USFS). In Southern California, the Southern Region Operations Center in Riverside is the base for this joint operation.

Air resource requests are prioritized based on factors, including threat to life and property. New fire starts receive the highest priority for aircraft, because the greatest opportunity for control is during the initial attack phase. Aircraft assigned to active fires may be diverted to a new incident unless a “no divert” order has been established. No divert orders are only established when aircraft are on fires where structures are burning or immediately threatened and there are no higher priority fires in the region.

On Friday, November 14, 2008, CAL FIRE pre-positioned four air tankers, two helicopters, and two air attack aircraft in Southern California. These aircraft augmented CAL FIRE resources of two air tankers, one helicopter, and one air attack already in place at the Hemet and Ramona airbases. The net effect of the pre-positioning of Northern California-based aircraft to Southern California was to double the number of available aircraft at each airbase.



Air Tanker dropping retardant along a ridgeline

To prepare for the Red Flag Warning expected across parts of Southern California, CAL FIRE signed a one-week contract for the DC-10 Air Tanker 910 based out of the San

Bernardino International Airport. The Federal airbase in San Bernardino was also up-staffed with four air tankers, two lead planes, and two air attack aircraft. On Saturday, November 15, all State and Federal aircraft were assigned an 8:00 a.m. start time. The initial attack aircraft for the Freeway Complex Fire were dispatched at 9:35 a.m. with the first aircraft arriving at 10:10 a.m.

OCFA Helicopters 41 (HC41) and 241 (HC241) were dispatched to the Freeway Complex Fire from Fullerton Airport at 9:08 a.m. on November 15. The winds at Fullerton Airport were light and blowing offshore. After lift-off, the flight crews saw the smoke column rising from the fire in Corona was building and beginning to bend. The Santa Ana wind was having a strong influence. A 30–40-knot headwind was measured by an airspeed indication of 110 knots and a ground speed reading of 70 knots. Wind turbulence, coupled with the building low level smoke, made it difficult for the helicopter pilots to maintain visual flight conditions and make effective water drops.

Orange County Sheriff’s Department (OCSD) helicopter Duke 1 also responded on the initial dispatch with the ORC helicopters. Duke 1 arrived over the fire about 9:30 a.m. but had to land to

deploy its 170-gallon bucket prior to engaging in the firefight. Duke 1 and the ORC helicopters were initially using the lake and water hazards of the Green River Golf Course as their water source. The buffeting wind soon made hovering to fill the bucket and water tanks too hazardous. A ground-based water point was established, so the helicopters could land and be filled safely.



OCFA helicopter uses a snorkel to refill its water tank.

Incident commanders on the ground quickly recognized the need for additional aircraft. At 9:19 a.m., they ordered one air attack, two air tankers, and two additional Type 2 helicopters. At 10:10 a.m., these air resources arrived over the Freeway Complex Fire. The aircraft order was augmented once again at 10:10 a.m., with an order for one lead plane, three air tankers, and four Type 2 helicopters.

Helicopters may fly at sunrise and up to 30 minutes after sunset. On the first day, all initial attack aircraft flew the maximum possible hours. Around 8:30 p.m., the aircraft were released to their home bases. Mandatory work-rest cycles for pilots demand they receive eight hours of uninterrupted rest before flying again. This meant the earliest a pilot could take off to return to the



OCFA helicopter coming in for another load of water.

fire on Sunday, November 16, was about 6:00 a.m. With the preflight inspection time, flight time to the helibase, and briefing time once there, an 8:00 a.m. start time was projected for all assigned helicopters. By 9:00 a.m., all assigned helicopters were flying over the fire.

By the conclusion of the Freeway Complex Fire, 17 firefighting helicopters had been assigned. These were supplied from local, state, and federal agencies, as well as helicopters from private vendors that were on a call when needed (CWN) contract basis. During the first six hours of the Freeway Complex Fire, OCFA helicopters dropped 48,400 gallons of

water and foam. By the end of the second day, a total of 88,000 gallons had been dropped. During that same two-day period, 12 fixed wing air tankers with four lead planes operating from the San Bernardino and Hemet air bases dropped 208,791 gallons of retardant. The DC-10, Air Tanker 910, made a record-setting ten air drops applying a total of 109,445 gallons of retardant in the Yorba Linda and Chino Hills areas.

All aircraft orders were filled for the Freeway Complex Fire. However, one Federal helicopter was diverted to a new fire start while it was awaiting demobilization from its base. The availability of air resources greatly differed in comparison to the 2007 Santiago Fire, where much of California’s airborne fire suppression resources were already actively engaged in firefighting efforts—or were grounded due to severe wind conditions.



Air tanker lays a retardant line in front of the fire to slow its forward progress.



Logistics Support

The Incident Command System (ICS) has proven itself valuable in managing emergency incidents worldwide. ICS is a flexible, scalable response framework where firefighters from various agencies, who may not routinely work together, can fight major incidents through standard response and operation procedures. A critical component of ICS is the logistical support function. This effort can be compared to establishing and maintaining a small, temporary city designed for the sole purpose of supporting all the needs of an incident. In the case of the Freeway Complex Fire, the proximity of the fire to several hundred Yorba Linda homes and the near 70 mph winds made it apparent that the logistical needs for this incident were going to be significant and challenging.



The Incident Base takes shape in Irvine Park.

The extreme weather conditions and the potential for loss of lives and structures made it clear full implementation of the Logistics Section (LOGS) would be required. ORC Battalion Chief

Runnstrand was ordered as the Logistic Section Chief for the Freeway Complex Fire. Personnel from the OCFA Service Center provided much-needed logistical support with water, food, and deployment of a logistical cache that is stocked and ready for immediate use. The cache included 10,000 feet of wildland hose, foam, tools, and medical supplies. Within the first hour, an order was placed for 500 sack lunches. This order was increased to 2,000 within the next hour.

The Logistics Section from CAL FIRE Incident Command Team 6 eventually assumed all logistical needs for the Freeway Complex Fire. The Logistics Section Chief, his Deputy, and the leaders for each of the six logistics units blended effortlessly with OCFA personnel who had already begun the logistic coordination. The decision was made to keep this blended effort throughout the fire, which was another lesson learned from the 2007 Santiago Fire.

Initially, the Yorba Regional Park was designated as the incident base due to its proximity to the fire. As the fire threatened the City of Yorba Linda, and before the base had been completely established, the decision was made to move it to Irvine Regional Park. This facility had been used in previous incidents and was familiar to the OCFA logistics team. Additionally, the park's size, parking, and convenient access to major freeways better met the demands of the nearly 4,000 personnel and equipment assigned to the incident. Overall, the support needs were met in an effective and efficient manner.

The success of LOGS on the Freeway Complex Fire was largely the result of the support, cooperation, and hard work of individuals representing the Orange County Sheriff's Department, Irvine Regional Park staff, Citizens Emergency Response Teams (CERT), and numerous vendors

and businesses throughout the area, along with the exemplary training and professionalism of the firefighting personnel.

The following six units combine to make the Logistics Section for a major incident such as the Freeway Complex Fire:

The **Food Unit** set up a mobile kitchen, allowing the serving of breakfast by the second morning. Until that was established, a mobile catering vendor was used to provide hot meals. Separate contract vendors provided sack lunches to meet the demand for on-the-line feeding of suppression crews and base personnel. Due to the more than 3,800 firefighters needed for this fire, the kitchen was unable to meet the meal demands in a timely manner and was augmented by the catering vendor. This solution met the needs of the incident efficiently and effectively.

The **Medical Unit** is tasked with providing everything from basic First Aid to advanced life support for incident personnel. A Medical Plan was published in the Incident Action Plan (IAP) and was followed successfully. No deaths or major injuries were reported on this incident. Contributing to the smoothness of this operation was the proximity to urban medical facilities and the training of many firefighters as Emergency Medical Technicians or Paramedics.

The **Communication Unit** provides the radio, pager, and Internet communication needs of the incident. Because of the mix of resources from within the County and beyond, a communications radio frequency patch was established allowing for shared radio communications with those having VHF radios and those with 800 MHz radios. This greatly enhanced communications and contributed to the safety of on-the-line resources in the early portion of the incident. Once the radio cache of 200 radios from the National Interagency Fire Cache (NIFC) arrived, the communication plan was transitioned to VHF radios for the remainder of the incident. The OCFA



The OCFA Communications trailer supports incident communications.

Logistics/Communications trailer was useful as a mobile office space to secure, protect, and deploy the equipment. Later, it became the on-site dispatch facility for the incident.

The **Supply Unit** orders and disburses supplies necessary for the incident. Everything from the requests for fire engines and aircraft to the purchase of sleeping bags and batteries is funneled through this unit. Staff from the OCFA Service Center was invaluable in providing early support and assistance.

The wildland cache—a predetermined complement of tools, equipment, and supplies stocked by the OCFA and available for immediate use—was brought to the base. It provided needed resources until the larger cache from South Operations arrived.

The **Facilities Unit** creates and maintains the physical layout of the incident base camp. Consideration must be given to all aspects of supporting the incident. Included are the staging of operations; maintaining and repairing of apparatus; feeding and housing of assigned personnel,

including the special needs of inmate crews; providing suitable working space for the administrative and support positions including—but not limited to—the Incident Command Post (ICP); and providing showers, laundry, and other support functions for personnel assigned for extended periods.

The Facilities Unit on the Freeway Complex Fire benefited from several factors in creating an efficient base camp. A pre-existing agreement with Irvine Regional Park and the familiarity with the layout coupled with the outstanding cooperation with the park staff, made for a quick and painless setup. The close proximity to the OCFA's RFOTC allowed for a sharing of assets—especially early on—that normally would not be considered. The CERT personnel filled many roles within this unit and clearly contributed to its success. Finally, the Orange County Sheriff's Department's command vehicles (Samantha 1 and 2) were put to good use and were greatly appreciated.



The Facilities Unit on the Freeway Complex Fire created an efficient base camp to support the needs of more than 3,800 personnel.



Incident Communications

During the first 24 hours of the Freeway Complex Fire, incident radio communications were initiated using the County of Orange 800 MHz Countywide Coordinated Communications System (CCCS). The fire service in Orange County has been on the 800 MHz System for the past 20 years. Since 1999, it has been the countywide network shared by all public safety agencies in Orange County. Over 16,000 mobile, portable, and base station radios are on the system servicing fire, law, public works, and lifeguard agencies throughout the County. All mobile and portable radios have common channels for inter-agency communications.

The 800 MHz CCCS has proven to be a highly sophisticated and reliable communications system for the public agency users in Orange County. Several other fire and law agencies throughout Southern California use radios with common national 800 MHz frequencies—the same as those used on the Orange County system.

The 800 MHz radio system was well-used by all first responders. A total of 78,892 transmissions were conducted midnight-to-midnight on November 15. This represents the seventh busiest day in the history of the 800 MHz CCCS. Only one “busy” event—all channels were busy—occurred during this time. On November 16, usage dropped to about 63,000 transmissions, as fire agencies transitioned much of their radio communications to the VHF (Very High Frequency) radio channels provided by the CAL FIRE IMT. All 800 MHz radio systems remained operational, although some fire damage was sustained at two radio sites.

During the fire, the 800 MHz system was never at full capacity. Despite the intense communication needs, the 800 MHz system’s design assured excess capacity was always available. The system was designed and built to handle high volume radio traffic as experienced during the 2007 Santiago Fire. **Table 7** below provides a comparison of a normal daily 800 MHz radio system number of transmissions. The comparison date of November 15, 2007, was chosen simply as the same time of year and a non-major fire day.

Table 7: Total Number of 800 MHz CCCS Transmissions
(All Disciplines Countywide)

| Date – 2008 | Number of Transmissions | Date – 2007 | Number of Transmissions |
|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| November 15 | 78,892* | November 15 | 57,184 |
| November 16 | 63,719 | November 16 | 56,522 |
| November 17 | 58,099 | November 17 | 52,601 |
| November 18 | 57,552 | November 18 | 44,703 |
| November 19 | 58,474 | November 19 | 50,141 |
| November 20 | 54,951 | November 20 | 53,615 |
| November 21 | 59,878 | November 21 | 52,769 |

*This day represented the seventh busiest day in the history of the 800 MHz CCCS.

As indicated in the table above, the first 24 hours of the incident were the busiest. An approximate 38 percent increase in radio traffic occurred on the 800 MHz Radio system as compared to the

same dates in 2007. This activity level started to decrease as the CAL FIRE IMT arrived. The IMT used the VHF radio system for major incident radio communications. As the incident continued to expand, an order was placed for the National Incident Fire Cache (NIFC) to support the large number of resources responding from various agencies throughout the state.

The NIFC cache includes radios, repeaters, and common frequencies standard to all fire agencies throughout the country. All Orange County fire agencies maintain radios common to the system used with the NIFC radios on VHF spectrum. The NIFC cache maintains over 40,000 radios available for use during major incidents, such as Hurricane Katrina, earthquakes, and multiple fires as in the October 2007 fire siege. Resources responding are also required to have VHF radios as part of their mutual aid response equipment. Standard training on the operation and support of the NIFC system assigned to major incidents is provided throughout the year and throughout the country. The change in radio systems occurred on Sunday, November 16, at 7:00 a.m., the second day of the fire, during the morning shift change.

As of Sunday, November 16, 800 MHz radio transmissions were slightly higher than normal and remained at that level throughout the duration. As the fire progressed and more out-of-area resources arrived, most of fire communications had been moved to the VHF radio channels. Although, the 800 MHz radios was still being used by the OCFA and other Orange County agencies for supplementary communications.

A radio “patch” had been initiated between the VHF “Orange County Access” channel and the 800 MHz “4C” talk group on November 16. Radio patches connects two different radio systems operating on different frequency bands, allowing for seamless communication. This allowed any VHF radio being used at the incident to communicate with command staff operating on the Orange County 800 MHz system (Channel 4C). This patch remained operational on the command channel until the end of incident. Feedback from communications staff assigned to the incident indicated this worked well, including in places where the incident radio repeaters did not work.

Personnel using VHF radios made early reports indicating they were unable to make contact with those using 800 MHz radios. This was mainly due to the radio “patch” frequencies not yet being in place. The problem was corrected once the patch was established. This concern and others regarding user familiarity and training are being addressed by an After Action Communications Committee comprised of representatives from CAL FIRE and OCFA.

Additionally, a number of reports of VHF radios not being able to cover specific areas in Carbon Canyon were received by the communications staff. This problem is inherent in the area for all wireless communications, due to the deep and narrow canyons. This problem was corrected by placing a manual repeater in the Carbon Canyon area of Sleepy Hollow. Coverage and interoperability is always a safety concern when mixing radios from different systems with different users. Commanders and supervisors had to take extra precautions to ensure any emergency radio traffic would be heard and acknowledged.

Several of the 2007 Santiago Fire After Action Report communications recommendations were implemented for the Freeway Complex Fire with good success:

- A total of 32 relief engine/strike team communications kits were in place. Each kit contained the necessary radios and pagers for use by emergency crews assigned to surge fire engines activated during the incident.
- Every OCFA first responder apparatus was provided with VHF radios compatible with state and federal resources communications.
- An 800 MHz to VHF radio patch was set up on the Command Channel for interoperable communications among all agencies responding.
- Satellite data communications was set up at the incident base in the early stages of the incident.



Emergency Operations Center

The Freeway Complex Fire impacted a vast geographical area, including several cities and counties. The cities of Anaheim, Brea, Chino Hills, Diamond Bar, and Yorba Linda activated their Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) as the fire moved into their communities.

The Yorba Linda Assistant City Manager activated the EOC at approximately 12:45 p.m. on November 15. City personnel with EOC responsibilities were called back to help staff the center. The OCFA dispatched Battalion Chief Valbuena to the Yorba Linda EOC at 12:30 p.m. to serve as an Agency Representative to provide fire information and situation status in support of EOC operations. Two OCFA Fire Prevention personnel were also sent to assist the Agency Representative and help with structure damage assessment. Additionally, the Yorba Linda Water District (YLWD) sent a representative to act as liaison to the City of Yorba Linda's EOC. Both OCFA and YLWD representatives worked jointly to address the water supply problems that occurred during the fire. These jurisdictional EOCs assisted with coordinating local issues in cooperation with the County EOC, such as evacuation of residents, coordination of evacuation centers, street closures, coordination with school districts and businesses, and coordination of local government resources.

With the initial activation of the City of Yorba Linda and the City of Orange EOCs, and the predicted fire activity of the Freeway Fire, the County of Orange Operational Area EOC was activated on Saturday, November 15, 2008, at 11:00 a.m.

Early in the incident, the Operational Area EOC was activated to support the roles and responsibilities of the County of Orange. This activation requires personnel pre-identified to the



The County EOC- Policy Room

policy group and other personnel trained in support functions to be contacted. The personnel responds to the EOC located at the Orange County Sheriff's Department's Loma Ridge Communications Facility near the City of Orange. Representatives from the County Executive Office, Orange County Public Works, Orange County Sheriff's Department, Probation, OCFA, Orange County Waste and Recycling, Health Care Agency, Social Services Agency, and the County Emergency Manager make up the policy group. An EOC Liaison, Public Information Manager, and various staff supported the policy group. This

group was faced with several decisions during the EOC activation, including health issues related to air quality, evacuation of residents, closure of major roadways, and identification of shelter needs.

One of the first tasks completed by the Emergency Management staff was to notify the Chair of the Board of Supervisors, the Emergency Management Council, the Operational Area Executive Board, Operational Area Members, County agencies, and the State Office of Emergency Services of the incident.

The general public was kept informed through press releases, media interviews, and jurisdictional websites. This was the first test of the new Operational Area EOC website. The website served as a critical point for information distribution. Public information was actively managed via the website, including the dissemination of 25 news releases and/or media advisories and regular press briefings.

An additional method of releasing pertinent information to the public was the new County mass notification system, AlertOC. AlertOC was used during the EOC activation on behalf of the City of Yorba Linda. The request for the County to activate this system came at 3:52 p.m., and the message was issued at 4:09 p.m. The system was used to alert residents in the immediate path of the fire to evacuate the area.

The Orange County Social Services Agency, American Red Cross, and the Orange County Department of Education all collaborated and helped coordinate the opening and management of evacuation shelters for residents affected by the fire. The shelter locations included Katella High School, Valencia High School, and the Brea Community Center. Two other shelters—Travis and Esperanza—were initially opened, but they had to be closed due to the impact of smoke. Over the three days these shelters were opened, they registered over 919 individuals—with 229 evacuees staying in the shelters overnight and nearly 1,320 meals provided.

A Local Assistance Center was established near the affected population of the Freeway Complex Fire. The City of Anaheim graciously hosted the Local Assistance Center at the East Anaheim Gymnasium. This location was large enough for public, private, and non-profit agencies to come together and provide assistance to the local residents and businesses.

Orange County Community Resources, Animal Control Division, assisted with the establishment of animal shelters. The Orange County Animal Shelter was opened to accept small animals, while the Los Alamitos Race Course and the Huntington Beach Equestrian Center were opened to accept large animals.

Early on, the EOC Manager requested County counsel to create an emergency proclamation in accordance with County of Orange ordinance and the Operational Area Emergency Plan. The local proclamation was signed on Saturday, November 15, 2008. The State of California was informed of the signed emergency proclamation and that Orange County was requesting a State Gubernatorial Proclamation and Federal Declaration of Emergency. The Governor issued a State Proclamation late Saturday, November 15; however, a federal declaration was not issued until Monday, November 17.



Governor Schwarzenegger receives a briefing.

The 2008 Freeway Complex Fire challenged the County Emergency Operations Center on a different level than the 2007 Santiago Fire. During the Freeway Complex Fire, the County's main responsibility revolved around operational area coordination and mutual aid support. The lessons learned during the Freeway Complex Fire will improve the County's coordination of information

and resources during a major incident or catastrophic event. As staff to the Emergency Management Council and the Operational Area Executive Board, the Sheriff's Department Emergency Management Bureau will ensure enhancement of existing plans, procedures, training, and response.

By the end of the incident, the cities of Yorba Linda, Brea, Anaheim, and Chino Hills and the County of Orange Operational Area had all declared a local emergency. Additionally, due to fire and/or smoke conditions, the Brea Olinda Unified School District, Placentia Yorba Linda School District, Anaheim Hills Montessori, Calvary Christian School, St. Angela Merici Catholic School, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School, Christian Preschool and Elementary School, and the St. Joseph Catholic School and Preschool were closed for one or more days.

The cost for the response to the Freeway Complex Fire for the County's EOC, Orange County Sheriff's Department field response, and Orange County Public Works Storm Center and field response along with the damages sustained to the Brea Olinda Landfill are currently estimated at \$3,585,000. The Operational Area EOC was officially deactivated at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, November 17. Refer to the **Orange County Sheriff's Department After Action Report** at <http://www.ocfamedia.org/uploads/PDF/fcfaarocsd.pdf> for additional details.



Media and Public Communications

The Corporate Communications Section was responsible for disseminating information and handling public relations during the Freeway Complex Fire. This included the responsibility for the activation of the Media Center, conducting the Public Information Officer (PIO) function for the incident command, updating of the OCFA website, and handling inquiries from elected officials. OCFA Board of Directors and City Managers were issued advisories via email. The advisories kept board members informed and allowed them to make inquiries to the Corporate Communications Battalion Chief. With the extreme fire behavior, rapid spread, and threat to homes, the OCFA new there would be great media interest.

The OCFA Media Center was activated soon after the start fire. Personnel were called back to duty and were answering telephone calls by 10:00 a.m. Staffed by four personnel from Community Relations and Education in the first couple of hours, additional professional staff from Finance, Fire Prevention, and Human Resources were put into service answering calls by noon the first day. The Media Center staff was further supplemented with two personnel from CAL FIRE. Their PIO experience was invaluable as they were able to assist OCFA personnel in handling media inquiries and by answering calls from the public. From the onset on November 15 until the fire was declared fully controlled on November 19, the Media Center received over 6,000 calls from the public and the media.

Communications between the OCFA Media Center and the Orange County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was efficient throughout the incident. A total of 25 press releases and media advisories with information on evacuations and road closures were issued in a coordinated fashion between the Media Center and the EOC.

OCFA was able to assign a Community Education Specialist to the Disaster Center established for Yorba Linda residents. The Education Specialist distributed informational fliers and was able to answer questions from the community. On the third and fourth day of the incident, the Community Education Specialists also conducted school programs for the entire school population of two of the elementary schools in Yorba Linda.

The programs educated the children on the disaster in their community and helped to allay their fears. The school programs were very well received by the students and faculty.

The OCFA website (www.ocfa.org) received almost 1.4 million inquiries during the first day of the incident. Nearly 5 million inquiries were made from November 15 through November 25, 2008. Prior to November, the average number of inquiries to the website was 25,171 per day. The website was a key source of information about the fire. OCFA personnel provided updates to the website as often as possible. A fire progression map was uploaded every 12 hours. Only a small number of personnel were available to perform website updates, and the updating was a slow and cumbersome process. At times, fire and evacuation information needed updating, but qualified personnel were not available. Complaints were received about the freshness of website



Reporting the Fire

information and the difficulty of navigating through the site as well as conducting information searches.

OCFA was also in the midst of a PIO transition at the time of the Freeway Complex Fire. The newly selected PIO was not scheduled to start his assignment and was on vacation at the beginning of the incident. The Corporate Communications Battalion Chief served as the initial point of contact for media inquiries. To gather information, he responded directly to the Incident Command Post that had been established at the Green River Golf Course. All media inquiries were referred to him, and the number of cell phone calls being received was overwhelming. This made it extremely difficult to communicate with the Media Center and delayed getting updated information relayed. Around noon, a Fire Prevention Specialist was assigned to answer calls and handle all communication with the Media Center—while the Battalion Chief provided media interviews.



OCFA Assistant Chief of Operations
Mark Kramer briefs news crews.

The rapid spread of the incident and the difficulty in communications between the field and the Media Center lead to some confusion. Incongruent information ended up being disseminated to the media. Additionally, the media became aware of water supply issues on the incident prior to field PIOs and the Media Center; this contributed to the confusion and inaccurate information.

The Incident Management Team PIO arrived early in the afternoon the first day. The PIO transition meeting was attended by the Chino Hills Fire District PIO, CAL FIRE – Riverside County PIO, Anaheim City PIO, and Anaheim Police Department PIO. Coordination between CAL FIRE – Riverside County, the IMT PIO, and OCFA was good throughout the incident.

The OCFA PIO returned from vacation upon learning of the Freeway Fire and arrived at the incident at around 10:00 p.m. the first day. Since the incident had already been transitioned to the IMT, the OCFA PIO was assigned to the base camp and worked with the pool of PIOs who were already assigned. The OCFA PIO worked the night shift. However, it would have been more advantageous to have the OCFA PIO work during the day because of his knowledge and familiarity with the local media. After the first day, most of the media inquiries came during the day.

Fire Investigation

The Freeway Fire originated in Riverside County near the 91 Freeway and the Green River off-ramp in the City of Corona. The area of origin is the jurisdiction of CAL FIRE; therefore, CAL FIRE investigators assumed the responsibility for the fire investigation. The preliminary fire cause is reported as accidental. The preliminary cause may be the result of a vehicle exhaust system igniting roadside vegetation. The fire investigation report is expected to be complete by the end of March 2009.



CAL FIRE arson investigators search the area of origin of the Freeway Fire for evidence.

The Landfill Fire, investigated by the Brea Police Department along with investigators from the OCFA, was determined to have been caused by inadequate maintenance of power lines supplying electricity to equipment in an oil field. The electrical lines are owned by Breit-Burn Management Company in Los Angeles. Investigators believe arcing or a discharge of current from the power lines caused the brush near the lines in the fields northeast of Valencia Avenue and Carbon Canyon Road to ignite.



The origin of the Landfill Fire is seen behind the homes in the City of Brea.



Volunteer Groups and Resources

Many volunteer groups assisted during the Freeway Complex Fire in various capacities. Major volunteer groups included:

- American Red Cross
- Salvation Army
- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
- OCFA Chaplains
- Trauma Intervention Program (TIP)

These volunteer groups provided invaluable assistance to a wide variety of non-suppression and incident support activities. The positive attitude, helping nature, and initiative of these groups were recognized and appreciated by OCFA staff, the Incident Command staff, and those who responsible for supervising and managing various support functions.

The American Red Cross is the lead agency responsible for establishing and staffing evacuation centers during disasters and other major emergencies requiring evacuation of large numbers of residents. During the Freeway Complex Fire, three evacuation shelters were established. The first was at Valencia High School in the City of Placentia; the second at Katella High School in the City of Anaheim; and the third at the Brea Community Center. While these shelters were in operation, 202 volunteers and staff worked, 919 people registered, and 1,320 meals were served—along with numerous snacks. All three shelters were opened Saturday, November 15 and closed Monday, November 17.



Evacuated residents are served dinner at one of the local high school evacuation centers.

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards impacting their community. CERT trains people in basic disaster response skills such as fire safety, light disaster and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. Using classroom and field exercise training, CERT members assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event when professional responders are not immediately available to help. CERT members also are encouraged to support emergency response agencies by taking a more active role in emergency preparedness projects in their community. CERT is part of the Federal Government's Citizen's Corp Program. More than 150 volunteers and 38 partner agency staff assisted with the American Red Cross response.

The CERT Mutual Aid Program (CMAP) is an organization of Orange County CERT jurisdictions and citizen volunteers. They are dedicated to collaboration and coordination of volunteer activities in a disaster response. Jurisdiction coordinators and volunteers are governed and supported by a mutual aid agreement, approved in August 2008 by the Orange County Executive Committee and

added to the County's emergency response plan. The mutual aid agreement identifies the CMAP organization and outlines the course of action to be taken to activate Orange County volunteers.

The request for the activation of CERT volunteers for the Freeway Complex Fire was based on a previous use of volunteers during the October 2007 Santiago Fire. In the early morning hours of Sunday, November 16, a request from the Orange County EOC was received to activate mutual aid volunteers to the Irvine Regional Park base camp. Calls were made to CMAP Coordinators to begin the process of volunteer and equipment activation. Agencies affected by the fires (Anaheim, Fullerton, and Placentia) activated CERT members within their own jurisdictions.



CERT volunteer assists in directing resources at the Freeway Complex Fire Incident Base.

During the Freeway Complex Fires, 254 civilian volunteers covered 168 hours of activation at the Irvine Regional Park base camp. Volunteers worked shifts ranging anywhere from 4 to 12 hours. Coordinators were present for all shifts. Support roles included traffic safety management at base camp and assisting in strike team demobilization. A request was made to fill CMAP volunteer shifts from Sunday, November 16, to Wednesday, November 19, with a possibility of expanded volunteer coverage to Friday, November 21.

CMAP operational periods were selected by CERT Coordinators. The CERT Coordinators worked 12-hour

shifts (4:00 p.m.–4:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.), and the CMAP volunteers were assigned 12-hour shifts (5:00 p.m.–5:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.), with an additional 4-hour shift in the morning and evening to assist with volunteer changeover.

CMAP representatives from Newport Beach, Seal Beach, Garden Grove, San Juan Capistrano, Huntington Beach, Costa Mesa, and Anaheim responded as Technical Specialists from November 16 to November 21. Coordinators from Newport Beach, Seal Beach, San Juan Capistrano, Huntington Beach, and Garden Grove filled the 12-hour on-site shifts. Huntington Beach and Costa Mesa representatives coordinated volunteer scheduling.

Representation of CERT members included Costa Mesa (43); Newport Beach (34); Garden Grove (60); San Juan Capistrano (22); Irvine (11); Huntington Beach (24); Dana Point (10); Santa Ana (2); Anaheim (1); and West Orange County CERT, which included the cities of Seal Beach, Westminster, Cypress, Los Alamitos, La Palma, and Buena Park (47).

The CMAP organization has worked with the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Grant Program since 2005. Its goal is to create regional equipment caches to support CERT programs countywide and to respond upon request. The cities of Seal Beach, Dana Point, Fullerton, and Anaheim have dedicated supplies for CMAP response. Seal Beach provided the response equipment trailer and tow vehicle for this activation—while the Garden Grove CERT program provided a volunteer rehab vehicle and radios.

On Sunday, November 16, OCFA implemented its Occupant Liaison Program. OCFA personnel with fire department vehicles were assigned to the American Red Cross Centers and went into the fire areas to support the citizens of Yorba Linda. The Occupant Liaison Program provides customer service for information, coordination, and comfort to individuals experiencing emergency incidents such as fires, floods, mudslides, or any other type of incident resulting in the displacement of the occupants from their residences or places of business. Four Occupant Liaison Teams—comprised of an OCFA Fire Prevention Inspector, a Trauma Intervention Program (TIP) representative, and an OCFA Chaplain were available.

The Trauma Intervention Program (TIP) is a non-profit volunteer organization of specially trained citizen volunteers. They provide immediate emotional and practical support to victims and their families following a tragedy or traumatic event. TIP provided volunteers to the OCFA Occupant Liaison Teams. They were invaluable in assisting with counseling residents who had been evacuated or whose homes were damaged or destroyed.

The Salvation Army is a non-profit organization with a history of providing services and programs during times of disaster in Orange County over the last 100 years. Its community services also include transitional housing, emergency shelters, counseling, and responding to emergency disasters. Over the last couple of years, the Salvation Army has responded to many local disasters including the Santiago and Freeway Complex Fires. Through the mobilization of over 100 volunteers, the Army provided assistance to those affected by the disasters with food, clothing, and counseling, as well as services provided to first responder fire and law enforcement personnel. The Army mobilized its Emergency Disaster Canteens providing food, beverages, water, and a variety of personal items. The Salvation Army responds to emergency disaster events by providing a myriad of equipment, supplies, and volunteers.

OCFA has a long-standing and very active volunteer Chaplain Program. Members of the Chaplain Program were an important piece of the Occupant Liaison Team. They were on-hand and available to support and assist residents with their spiritual needs during this crisis. They also helped with other non-suppression support duties.

Many other accounts of individual volunteers providing assistance during the Freeway Complex Fire abound. Having trained, qualified, and eager volunteers who are capable of assisting in non-suppression activities freed up full-time firefighting personnel. In turn, they could focus solely on fire suppression efforts. Additionally, they assisted in providing human services, aid, and comfort to evacuated residents and those whose homes were damaged or destroyed. The contributions and assistance of all volunteer groups and the individual volunteers were invaluable.



Fiscal Impacts

Each year, the OCFA establishes cost reimbursement rates. They are used to bill for personnel and equipment resources requested on an assistance-by-hire basis by state, federal, and other agencies needing OCFA services. The personnel rates are based on budgeted salary and benefit costs. Also included are indirect costs such as financial services, purchasing, and human resources. Equipment rates are based on rate schedules provided by CAL FIRE and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These rates recover OCFA’s costs when assisting other agencies or when an OCFA incident is declared a major incident subject to public assistance funding.

Public assistance funding is authorized by the Stafford Act and funded through FEMA. The Stafford Act:

- Gives the President the authority to administer federal disaster assistance.
- Defines the scope and eligibility criteria of the major disaster assistance programs.
- Authorizes grants and direct assistance to the states.
- Defines the minimum federal cost-sharing levels.

As of January 31, 2009, OCFA’s costs from the Freeway Complex Fire are estimated at \$2.3 million. Due to the magnitude of the fire, both FEMA and the State’s Office of Emergency Services (OES) declared the Freeway Complex Fire as a major incident. They offered to provide public assistance funding to the participating agencies.

Following guidelines for federal public assistance, on November 20, 2008, a Local Government Fiscal Responsibility Agreement was made between CAL FIRE, FEMA/OES, and OCFA concerning reimbursement of resources for the Freeway Complex Fire. Based on the Local Government Fiscal Responsibility Agreement, OCFA expects reimbursement of approximately 94 percent of costs associated with the fire. **Table 8** below shows costs and the source of anticipated reimbursements.

Table 8: OCFA Cost Reimbursement

| Reimbursement | FEMA | CAL FIRE | OES | Total |
|--|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Claim Submitted | \$527, 210.20 | \$1,575, 775.84 | \$184,670.07 | \$2,287,656.08 |
| Estimated Percent of Reimbursement (%) | 93.80 | 100 | 100 | |
| Estimated Total Reimbursement | \$494,523.17 | \$1,575,775.84 | \$184,670.07 | \$2,254,969.08 |
| OCFA’s Share | \$32,687.03 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 | \$32,687.03 |



Recovery Efforts

As the Freeway Complex Fire was being controlled, efforts began to address the post-fire risk to lives and property that could arise during the coming rainy season. The combined effects of vegetation loss and the effect on soils from fire, created conditions greatly increasing the threat of floods, erosion, and debris flow in the impacted areas.

To prepare for the winter, the OCFA, along with the California State Office of Emergency Services (OES), coordinated assessments of the burned areas with Burn Area Recovery Teams (BART). These teams consisted of representatives from CAL FIRE, California Geological Survey, Department of Water Resources, Department of Fish and Game, Department of Parks and Recreation, and Regional Water Quality Control Boards. Refer to the **Burn Area Recovery Team Report** for more details— <http://www.ocfamedia.org/uploads/PDF/fcfaarbart.pdf>.

The BART members conducted a rapid assessment of the fire area to identify hazards and subsequent mitigations including:

- Identifying on-site and downstream threats to public health or safety from land sliding, debris torrents, flooding, road hazards, and other fire-related problems.
- Identifying threats to watershed resources, including excessive erosion; impaired water quality; threats to wildlife, fisheries, and botanical values; and cultural resources.
- Determining measures needed to prevent or mitigate identified threats.



Sand bags in place west of Banyon Rim.

The BART report provides mitigations to reduce—but not entirely eliminate—risk from the identified hazards. Suggestions such as straw mulching and erosion control fabric or blankets, straw wattles to provide a mechanical barrier to water flow and trap sediment, hydro-mulching in selected areas, and K-rails to direct water run-off, if used properly, are very effective.

The following are some of the recommendations for specific areas from the BART report:

- Where possible, drainage basins be expanded and cleaned of all debris. Adequately sized culverts should be placed within the debris basins so flood waters will be discharged effectively. Residents are discouraged from using plastic ground covers: they cause an acceleration of water runoff within the burn area.
- The Ranch in the Olinda Village area will require a large soil berm, K-rail, or rip-rap to direct watershed discharge around the threatened property.
- In general, residences located at the base of the hills in Chino Hills, Yorba Linda, and Brea should take precautions to limit impacts of future rainfall through the use of K-rail,

sandbags, or other flood prevention barriers. Additionally, keeping existing culverts free of debris would be a priority to ensure proper drainage.

- Expect higher than normal watershed discharges with possible debris flow in all rain events for the next two or more rain seasons.
- Specific areas along the BNSF railroad were addressed: Box Canyon and Horse Shoe Bend. An early warning monitoring system with various monitoring points along the hillside above the railroad is advised. Additionally, a minimum of three debris basins should be constructed around Horse Shoe Bend. This will ensure debris is collected prior to making contact with the railroad tracks.
- Emergency evacuation plans should be implemented for all communities within the burn area.
- Any dead/fire burned trees and vegetation and live standing trees that could cause damming or choking of debris in creeks or drainage basins should be removed immediately. A plan should be developed and approved by appropriate agencies to remove problem vegetation for any remaining downstream areas.
- All county, private, and state roads and trails should be monitored for washout and debris flow during and after precipitation events.
- The Chino Hills State Park should be monitored for debris and sediment flows during and after rain events, as large amount of debris may flow into the sediment basin reservoir and cause erosion along roads, bridges, and trails.



Use of K-rail to channel future debris flow around homes.



Resident's preparation for possible mud and debris flow proved to be beneficial.

A moderate to heavy rainstorm was predicted for the Orange County area on November 26–27, 2008. Predicted rainfall amounts ranged from 1.5 inches to 2.5 inches. The OCFA began preparations for the possibility of mud and debris flows by working closely with the local communities of Yorba Linda, as well as the Santiago Fire areas. Evacuation plans were coordinated with local government and law enforcement in the areas directly impacted by fires.

The three main objectives for the OCFA were to (1) provide incident management and support if significant flooding and debris flow occurred in the burn areas, (2) coordinate weather-related calls for service with the City of Yorba Linda, and (3) assist with the timely and orderly evacuation of residential areas as necessary.

The following OCFA resources were pre-staged to reduce reaction time and get needed help to any impacted areas quickly. The augmented resources were staged at the Yorba Linda Community Center.

- An Incident Management Team
- One Bulldozer
- Two Swift Water Rescue units
- One Handcrew
- One Type 3 Strike Team
- Two Reserve Patrols: 10 and 32

The City of Yorba Linda and its residents played a significant role in preparing for the rain event. While fire crews were continuing to overhaul the burn areas, community efforts were underway to fill, distribute, and place sandbags, straw bales, and other mitigation efforts. This effort also drew volunteer participation from across the city, as well as from other cities across the county.



Dozer clearing mud off the street following the rains that hit the fire consumed areas of Yorba Linda.



Major Challenges

- Over the last decade, Southern California has experienced eight years of drought conditions, contributing to an increase in dead fuels, explosive and dryer fuels, and more intense fire behavior.²
- A sustained Santa Ana wind event contributed to two significant fires starting less than two hours apart in the same area of Orange County. The extreme winds, rapid fire spread, and urban interface environment created a wide fire front. This had a major impact on resource availability.
- Houses with unprotected vents and other openings became vulnerable to ember intrusion. Raging winds turned burning fuel into an “ember-storm,” threatening at-risk homes in the fire’s path.
- The OCFA, pursuant to a Board-adopted policy, dispatches a minimum of 18 firefighters to a single “working structure fire” (4 engines, 1 truck company, and 1 paramedic) as the necessary “Effective Firefighting Force.” That ratio of firefighters to working structure fire was not possible to achieve during the Freeway Complex Fire.
- While conducting structure protection during the Freeway and Landfill Fires, interior firefighting was often needed. A Federal mandate and best practice, the “Two-in and Two-out Rule” demands that in the absence of a life safety or rescue scenario, two or more firefighters are required to conduct interior firefighting with a minimum of two additional firefighters on standby outside the occupancy ready to conduct firefighter rescue. To comply with this safety rule, four-person staffing is required on a single engine company. Since most OCFA engines are staffed with three firefighters, they were not safe nor within legal guidelines to conduct interior operations without support from a second company.
- Wind blown embers, carried aloft by the fire’s thermal column, created spot fires more than a mile ahead of the main fire front. These spot fires then merged with the main flame front. This rapidly compressed the transformation time from brush fire into urban conflagration.
- The Freeway Fire and the Landfill Fire began in rapid succession and made resource tracking, command and control, and communications more difficult during the initial attack phase. Many responding agencies converged on the incident simultaneously making resource accountability extremely difficult.
- Two additional brush fires—the Landfill and Diemer Fires, in western Yorba Linda—along with the Freeway Complex Fire jumping the 91 Freeway in two places, further stretched the already taxed resources.

² US Geological Survey. *Water Watch Past Stream Flow Conditions*. Accessed <http://water.usgs.gov/waterwatch/?m=statesum&r=ca&w=statesum%2Cmedian> on March 6, 2009.

- Two strike teams were requested by ORC Battalion Chief Reeder to stage at Station 53 in preparation of the fire's arrival to Yorba Linda. These strike teams self-diverted to Green River and the 91 Freeway.
- The incident impacted two Office of Emergency Services regions, four counties (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino), and five emergency dispatch centers. Impacting these major geographical areas created communication, operational, and command challenges.
- The lack of common radio communications presented significant challenges. Some local agencies do not have VHF high band capability as required by FIRESCOPE. Many agencies continued to use their own radio systems or failed to follow the established communications plan. This further exacerbated the fire-ground communications problem. Additionally, the terrain in the fire area was extremely broken and mountainous--hampering radio transmissions.
- Self-dispatching of off-duty firefighters on relief apparatus to the fire presented challenges to personnel accountability and safety. In some instances, these resources were not discovered to be at the fire for 12 hours or more.
- Many mutual aid resources had difficulty navigating through unfamiliar local communities. Resources lacked a reliable mapping method of locating specific fire-impacted areas.
- The incident was run as a unified complex. It started as two fires in the same general area, and a central ordering point was established for both fires through the OCFA. The large incident culture and command structure are unfamiliar to many local agencies, creating confusion.
- An initial challenge occurred in working with law enforcement to form a unified command structure and to have a single decision maker. Prior experience on the part of the participating agencies facilitated this process.
- The conflict between state (SEMS) and national (NIMS) definitions for evacuation terminology continues to cause confusion for the media and public (mandatory vs. order/warning).
- The loss of water pressure in the Hidden Hills community and in other neighborhoods was a major challenge for the ground forces protecting threatened structures.
- More than 375 law enforcement personnel from various agencies assisted the Brea Police Department during the fire. Providing them with accurate and timely information on areas to be evacuated or repopulated was challenging.
- A rapidly developing fire that stretched over a large urban area made it difficult for the OCFA Media Center to stay current on fire conditions and information.

- Fire extinguishment efforts placed an extreme demand on the water system. Whether due to the use of master stream devices, the numerous firefighting hose lines, and/or the scores of garden hoses left running at individual homes, the demand on the system taxed the water capacity and deliverability.
- Homeowners—those remaining within the fire perimeter and those who evacuated—created traffic challenges inhibiting the movement of fire apparatus.
- The speed and unpredictability by which the fire moved through the urban interface made it challenging to stay ahead the fire and rapidly identify areas to be evacuated.
- Ornamental vegetation provided an unexpected source of fire brands the wind was able to carry deep into residential neighborhoods. Palm trees were a significant contributor to this problem.
- Wooden decks, balconies, and other unprotected structures provided an entry way for embers and flames to enter homes.
- Due to the demand to keep pace with a rapidly moving fire, a “bump and run” tactic was employed. In some cases, structures had to be left unattended after initial extinguishment, resulting in some rekindles and the loss of structures. This may not have occurred had there been sufficient units to employ an “anchor and hold” strategy.
- Fire retardant “drift” from air tankers created a major safety and post-fire clean-up challenge. Large amounts of fire retardant from aircraft was either dropped on homes or drifted far from the target due to the winds.
- The Department Operation Center (DOC) was not established until OCFA Division Chief Robinson arrived at the OCFA Emergency Command Center (ECC) at approximately 11:30 a.m. on November 15. This led to difficulty in receiving, placing, and tracking orders early in the fire.
- The presence of private fire protection services created operational challenges and a level of confusion among residents. These resources, normally sponsored by homeowners’ insurance companies, currently have no operational guidelines, certification standards, and no common communications with the incident commanders.
- A Red Flag Warning or a Red Flag Fire Weather Watch had not been issued for Orange County. Wind prediction for the day was significantly different than experienced. This resulted in the OCFA not implementing its Extreme Weather Plan (SOP 209.13) or the Red Flag Alert Program (SOP 209.12). Either or both would have increased public awareness and implemented operational procedures in response to the extreme weather conditions.
- Due to the size and rapid growth of the incident, meeting all logistical needs in the early stages was challenging.



Successes

- Importantly, no loss of life occurred. Reported injuries were few and considered minor.
- Hundreds of structures were successfully protected. Low humidity and high winds made this a very dangerous time for fires in the wildland urban interface (WUI). Although structures were lost and damaged, if not for the excellent work of the firefighters and citizens who protected their homes, the losses would have been greater.
- The Unified Command Incident Management Team worked well together. Although the team was large, each agency was mindful of the others' needs. This helped create common ground on difficult issues. As challenges arose, all the agencies worked toward the common goal of meeting the incident needs.
- Coordination with law enforcement was excellent. The early integration proved to be extremely advantageous for citizen evacuation. Additionally, the placement of law enforcement personnel within Operational Branches helped reduce the lag time for evacuations.
- The advance planning and tabletop exercise given in preparation for an incident in the mutual threat zone provided for a more effective command and control.
- A smooth transition occurred from the initial attack incident commanders and the incident management team. This can be attributed to an attitude of cooperation and respect.
- Despite the radio communication problems, water supply issues, and the time required to assemble the required firefighting assets to meet the demand of this urban conflagration, personnel worked hard to contain this incident and to minimize loss.
- Interagency cooperation was effective in solving issues and obtaining necessary resources. Operationally-related activities such as traffic control, evacuation, and repopulation were easy to implement due to the close coordination between the involved agencies.
- The integration of OCFA personnel into all general staff positions provided the CAL FIRE IMT 6 with local knowledge and expertise essential to the successful conclusion. Local agency participation in strategy meetings helped obtain agency support and "buy in" for the operational plan.
- The Orange County Access Channel was used as the Incident Command Net. Thus, all ORC 800 MHz radio users, and VHF high band users, could communicate on one common channel.
- The use of OCFA's new Compressed Air Foam System (CAFS) units was highly successful. The high mobility of the units allowed for quick pick-up and redeployment. The foam lasted longer than expected and freed other resources for other assignments.

- The OCFA was able to quickly provide representatives to the County and City Emergency Operation Centers. This enabled a direct line of communication between the impacted jurisdictions and the incident command team.
- Using Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) personnel—to perform various functions within the incident base—freed fire personnel for other assignments.
- The incident was able to provide three structural engines to support the local water supply system.

Recommendations

Mitigation and Preparation

1. [Continue regional planning efforts. Establish interoperable communication plans for mutual threat zones.](#) *In Progress*
2. [Develop regional operating plans \(similar to Silverado Canyon Fire Plan\) for high fire severity zones.](#) *In Progress*
3. [Develop a rapid attack mobilization plan that facilitates dispatch, mobilization, and situation management practices during major emergencies or Red Flag Warning conditions.](#) *In Progress*
4. [Work with local water agencies to evaluate potential threats and weaknesses to the water distribution systems and facilities housing critical infrastructure. Assist in the development of a mutual aid plan between water agencies permitting inter-agency cooperation during major emergencies. Develop contingency plans and practical exercises to test for vulnerabilities.](#) *In Progress*

Prevention and Public Education

1. [Facilitate the development and enforcement of applicable building and fire codes for fuel modification and building construction in the wildland-urban interface \(WUI\) environment.](#) *In Progress*
2. [Develop informational material for ornamental vegetation planting and maintenance to reduce flame spread and ember production.](#)
3. [Provide sufficient Occupant Liaison personnel to assist residents when returning to evacuated areas. Selected OCFA professional staff, when trained, may fit this role appropriately.](#)
4. [Ensure the terminology used in regard to public evacuation is commonly understood and is in conformance with SEMS/NIMS and/or FIRESCOPE to minimize confusion between public agencies.](#)

Operations and Response

Resources

1. [Complete development of a formal plan for placing “surge capacity” engines in service. The plan should address storage of the units, outfitting, communications, and staffing.](#) *In Progress*
2. [Complete the modification of five patrols to compressed air foam system \(CAFS\) units. Develop use and response configuration plans.](#) *In Progress*

3. Establish a full-time fire handcrew. Handcrews are needed to meet our wildland fire suppression mission. Fire crews are consistently listed as critical resource needs during every wildland fire. *Delayed due to budget*
4. Develop and consider alternatives for staffing additional fire bulldozers when needed.
5. Develop internal staffing criteria for water tenders, patrols, and other critical resources when Reserve personnel are unable to respond. *In Progress*
6. Develop a policy pertaining to the use of privately-owned resources such as water tenders, earth moving equipment, and other support resources that may be used when offered during emergency situations.
7. Follow through with the staffing recommendations from the Santiago Fire to increase the staffing at stations with a Type III engine to four personnel. In the interim, achieve this through the use of back-fill for two months during the peak of fire season as a reasonable stopgap until this can be achieved. *In Progress*
8. Work with law enforcement to develop more effective evacuation and repopulation procedures.

Communications

1. Increase CAL FIRE Command Net radio coverage in Orange County by adding two or more additional radio repeaters. *In Progress*
2. Exercise radio interoperability in Orange County regularly. Radio users must be familiar with VHF radio operations.
3. Establish a VHF frequency group for State Responsibility Areas (SRA) in Orange County, so all responding units can operate on this group. The command and tactical nets should be established before an incident occurs. *Complete*
4. Continue efforts to equip all resources in Orange County with VHF radio capability per FIRESCOPE. *In Progress*

Incident Command/Management

1. Develop a program to increase the availability of Incident Management Team(s) for year-round response within Orange County.
2. Continue to evaluate ICS training needs and offer appropriate courses to all personnel including Command staff. *In Progress*
3. Provide periodic refresher training on the use of firing operations to all chief officers.
4. Review and consider currently available technology, such as Toughbook laptop computers, for use in all command vehicles and eventually on every fire engine. These computers

should have mapping software installed and maintained. These tools have proven to be invaluable resources on fires and provide critical information for planning and firefighting purposes.

5. Continue the development and use of ICS trainee positions to facilitate succession planning and the development of incident management teams. *In Progress*
6. Identify additional potential assignments for OCFA professional staff on major incidents. *In Progress*
7. Develop a policy for interacting with private fire protection resources.

Air Operations

1. Develop best practice staffing and deployment model for the OCFA helicopter program.
2. Develop a policy on first and best use of law enforcement helicopters. Where appropriate, assist local law enforcement agencies to obtain red-card certification for pilots, fueling operations, and helicopter use on local government fires.
3. Train and qualify additional OCFA personnel as Air Ops Branch Director (AOBD), Air Support Group Supervisor (ASGS), Helicopter Coordinator (HLCO), and Helibase Manager (HEMB).
4. Complete night vision goggle training to provide night flying capability. *In Progress*
5. Research the feasibility and local use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) to facilitate mapping during smoky conditions.
6. Pre-identify helispots and water source dip sites in fire prone areas.
7. Increase mobile refueling capability for helicopters.
8. Establish a land use agreement with Corona Airport for future deployments.
9. Develop best practices for aircraft use on wildfires. Aircraft are a proven asset and, unlike ground forces, are limited by daylight flying time. Practice and policy should be developed to ensure “first light” use of all air assets.
10. Provide periodic training to Chief Officers on the use of interagency radios and communications with the aircraft command and control elements (ATGS and HLCO).

Emergency Command Center

1. Develop an operations manual for the OCFA Department Operations Center (DOC). The manual should identify critical positions within the DOC and outline critical tasks needing to be completed during a major emergency or event. *In Progress*
2. Order ECC support personnel to support incident command teams and expanded dispatch as needed. This will help with ensuring orders are placed correctly and assist the plans section on arriving resources.
3. Provide managerial support in the absence of the ECC Chief. The DOC manager must be able to provide managerial support and operational and tactical guidance to the ECC Supervisor.
4. Empower ECC supervisors to modify normal dispatch procedures to meet operational needs and station coverage during major emergencies.

Logistics

1. Ensure adequate fuel and equipment support is available during major emergencies.
2. Identify and pre-plan additional base camp locations for WUI fires. *In Progress*

Training

1. Provide S-215 - Fire Operations in the Wildland/Urban Interface course to all OCFA company officers. Include annual refresher on the use of firing operations. *In Progress*
2. Continue to train with law enforcement personnel in the complexities of extended attack incidents and unified command procedures.
3. Conduct onsite training of the Freeway Complex Fire for Chief Officers of the affected agencies.
4. Train OCFA Fire Prevention personnel to be able to function as a city EOC agency representative.
5. Provide training to selected professional staff to assist the Public Information section.
6. Provide WUI structure protection tactics training to all operations personnel.
7. Initiate a training program with the water districts that includes ICS/NIMS/SEMS, and with tabletop exercises.

Volunteer Groups

1. Continue the use of Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) for logistical support. Seek additional duties they may safely perform during major emergencies.

2. Develop a policy and procedure for accepting community support and offers to help or provide resources.

Public Information

1. Improve the OCFA website so incident information is easily and readily available. The site should incorporate technology to allow for interactive maps and data search.
2. Develop procedures for initiating frequent community briefings. Topics should include incident status, evacuation information, repopulation expectations, and other relevant information of interest.
3. Conduct training with cities regarding Emergency Operations Center activities such as evacuation and repopulation procedures, media information distribution, and public notification.

As a result of the 2007 Santiago Fire, a detailed after action report was written that included its own set of recommendations. Prior to the Freeway Complex Fire, many of these recommendations had been implemented and proved to be beneficial. Others are being developed and worked on by established work groups. The use of these work groups should continue, and the recommendations within this report should be distributed among them.



Glossary

AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE – Individual assigned to an incident from an assisting or cooperating agency. He/she has been delegated authority to make decisions on matters affecting that agency's participation at the incident. Agency Representatives report to the Incident Liaison Officer.

AIR ATTACK – Airplanes flying over an incident, providing tactical coordination with the incident commander on the ground, and directing air tankers and helicopters to critical areas of a fire for retardant and water drops.

ANCHOR AND HOLD STRATEGY – Structure protection tactic often used in a wildland-urban interface fire. Firefighting forces engage the fire and then remain in selected areas to ensure no or limited fire starts after the passing of the fire front.

ARCING – Luminous discharge of current—formed when a strong current jumps a gap in a circuit or between two electrodes.

BASE CAMP – Location at which primary logistics functions for an incident are coordinated and administered—only one base camp per incident.

BRANCH – Organizational level having functional or geographic responsibility for major parts of incident operations. The Branch level is organizationally between Section and Division/Group in the Operations Section, and between Section and Units in the Logistics Section. Branches are identified by the use of Roman Numerals or by functional name (e.g., medical, security).

BUMP AND RUN STRATEGY – Structure protection tactic often used in a wildland-urban interface fire where firefighting forces must keep moving ahead of the advancing fire. They attempt to control spot fires and/or provide initial knock-down of fires established within a structure.

BURN AREA RECOVERY TEAM (BART) – Team comprised of multi-agency and multi-disciplined resource specialists assembled to assess fire damage and suppression effects and to prepare mitigation measures. Upon development of a rehabilitation plan, the team makes recommendations on hazard mitigation.

BURN OVER – Wildfire situation where—because of wind-shift, topography, and/or poor planning—a person (firefighter) is caught in an inescapable fire and literally has fire burn over, under, and around him/her; this is the leading cause of firefighter deaths during wildfires.

CENTRAL ORDERING POINT – Facility or dispatch center where all personnel, supplies, and equipment requests are placed and tracked.

CHIEF OFFICERS – Agency Administrators, Fire Chiefs, Deputy Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs, Division Chiefs, and Battalion Chiefs with executive and/or management-level responsibilities.

COMPLEX – Two or more individual incidents located in the same general area that is assigned to a single Incident Commander or to Unified Command.

COMPRESSED AIR FOAM SYSTEM (CAFS) – Used in firefighting to deliver fire retardant foam for the purpose of extinguishing a fire or protecting unburned areas from becoming involved in flame. CAFS units are effective when used to pre-treat structures and vegetation with foam in advance of the fire to protect it from heat and flames.

CONFLAGRATION – Uncontrolled burning or fire that moves across natural and man-made barriers and threatens human life or property and the environment.

CONTAINMENT – Fire is contained when it is surrounded on all sides by some form of boundary, line, or clearance but is still burning and has the potential to jump or escape the containment line.

CONTROLLED – Fire is controlled when no further threat of it escaping outside the containment line exists.

COOPERATING AGENCY – Agency supplying assistance including—but not limited to—direct tactical or support functions or resources to the incident control effort.

DEFENSIBLE SPACE – Creating a fire safe landscape for at least 30 feet around homes—out to 100 feet or more in some areas—to reduce the chance of a wildfire spreading to structures. – Essentially, an area helping to protect a home and provide a safety zone for the firefighters battling flames.

DEFENSIVE – Firefighting mode primarily focusing on the protection of exposures through the confinement of the fire to a selected area.

DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS CENTER (DOC) – DOC provides agency dispatching capability independent and separate from routine emergency dispatch. The DOC is activated and staffed for large or complex incidents allowing personnel to focus efforts solely on the incident: maintaining situation status, processing orders for resources, and maintaining a direct link with EOCs.

EMERGENCY COMMAND CENTER (ECC) – Dispatch Center, an ECC is the center of an agency's information and communication capability. It is tasked with receiving and processing incoming calls for help. ECC personnel determine the nature of the request and forward it to the appropriate resource.

EXTREME FIRE BEHAVIOR – “Extreme” implies a level of fire behavior characteristics ordinarily precluding methods of direct control action. One or more of the following is usually involved high rate of spread, prolific crowning and/or spotting, presence of fire whirls, and/or strong convection column. Predictability is difficult since such fires often exercise some degree of influence on their environment and behave erratically and dangerously.

FIRE LINE – Area where the vegetation has been removed to deny the fire fuel—or a river, a freeway, or some other barrier expected to stop the fire. Hose lines from fire engines may also contribute to a fire being surrounded and contained.

FIRE MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE GRANT (FMAG) – Federal assistance program

managed by FEMA through the State Office of Emergency Services (OES). Program is designed to help state and/or local jurisdictions impacted by high cost, high damage wildland fires.

FIRE PERIMETER – Entire outer edge or boundary of a fire.

FIRING OPERATIONS – Setting a controlled fire with the intent to create a fire break so the path of the fire will be impeded.

FIXED WING AIRCRAFT (AIR TANKERS) – Aircraft designed for the purpose of picking up and depositing fire retardant on a fire while in mid-air.

FUEL MODIFICATION – Modification and irrigation of combustible vegetation to reduce fuel energy output. Highly flammable wildland vegetation is replaced with managed areas of light or fire resistive fuels and thereby allowing firefighters the ability to control a fire while relatively small.

FUELS – Combustible material or vegetation.

GREY BOOK – Agreement between CAL FIRE and the six contract counties that addresses direct fire protection of State Responsibility Area (SRA) within each of the contract counties. Orange County, along with the other contract counties, receives funding from the state to provide protection to the SRA

HANDCREW – Team of wildland firefighters primarily assigned to fire line construction activities. Handcrews also mop up hot-spots, burn out vegetation to provide fuel free zones, and assist with hose lays.

HIGH WATERSHED DISPATCH – Level of dispatching ensuring the appropriate type and number of wildland firefighting resources based on current weather conditions.

INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM (ICS) – Standardized on-scene emergency management concept specifically designed to allow its user(s) to adopt an integrated organizational structure equal to the complexity and demands of single or multiple incidents, without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries.

INCIDENT COMMANDER – ICS position responsible for overall management of the incident. Reports to the Agency Administrator for the agency having incident jurisdiction.

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM (IMT) – Incident commander and appropriate general and command staff personnel assigned to an incident. Also known as an Incident Command Team.

INITIAL ATTACK (IA) – Aggressive suppression action taken by first arriving resources with the priorities of protecting life, property, and the environment.

INTERFACE ZONE – Area where the wildland comes together with the urban areas. This is often referred to as the I-Zone or the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

MASTER MUTUAL AID SYSTEM – Creates a formal structure in which a jurisdictions

personnel, facilities, and equipment can voluntarily assist other jurisdictions when capabilities are overwhelmed.

MASTER STREAM – Controllable, high-capacity water jet used for manual firefighting or automatic fire protection systems; also known as a monitor, deluge gun, or deck gun.

MUTUAL THREAT ZONE – Area in which two or more jurisdictions have responsibility to protect in case of a fire, flood, or other emergency.

OFFENSIVE ATTACK – Putting water directly on the flames with the intent to extinguish.

OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES (OES) – The California Governor’s Office of the Emergency Services.

PATROL UNIT – OCFA fire apparatus designed for wildland firefighting built on a heavy-duty passenger crew-cab truck chassis. It carries 100 gallons of water in a pressurized tank. OCFA Patrols are assigned to fire stations adjacent to wildland interface areas.

RATE OF SPREAD (ROS) – Relative activity of a fire as it extends from the point of origin and the total perimeter of the fire. Usually expressed in acres per hour.

RED FLAG WARNING – Term used by fire weather forecasters to alert users to an ongoing or imminent critical fire weather pattern.

REGIONAL ORDERING SUPPORT SYSTEM (ROSS) – Computer software program, which automates the resource ordering, status, and reporting process during a wildfire; tracks all tactical, logistical, service, and support resources mobilized by the incident dispatch community.

REHABILITATION – Activities necessary to repair damage or disturbance caused by wildfire or the wildfire suppression activity.

REKINDLED – Act of catching on fire once again; usually caused by a fire not fully extinguished.

RIPARIAN AREA – Interface between land and a stream—usually an ecological area with the abundance of both plants and animals.

SANTA ANA WINDS – Type of Foehn wind—a warm, dry, and strong general wind that flowing down into the valleys when stable, high pressure air is forced across and then down the lee side slopes of a mountain range. The descending air is warmed and dried due to adiabatic compression producing critical fire weather conditions. Locally, it is called by various names such as Santa Ana and Sundowner winds.

SOUTH OPS – Formally known as the Southern California Geographic Area Coordination Center (OSCC), it is the focal point for coordinating the mobilization of resources for wildland fire and other incidents throughout the Geographic Area. Located in Riverside, the Center also provides Intelligence and Predictive Services.

SPECIAL STAFFING – Persons put in place on assigned fire apparatus in addition to the normal staffing—usually done in case of an emergency such as a fire, wind event, or flood.

SPIKE CAMP – Remote camp usually near a fireline and lacking the logistical support a larger fire camp would have.

SPOT FIRE OR SPOTTING – Small fire ahead of the main fire—caused by hot embers being carried (generally by winds) to a receptive fuel bed or structure. Spotting indicates extreme fire conditions.

STATE RESPONSIBILITY AREA (SRA) – The California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection classifies areas in which the primary financial responsibility for preventing and suppressing fires is that of the state. CAL FIRE has SRA responsibility for the protection of over 31 million acres of California’s privately-owned wildlands.

STRIKE TEAM – Engine strike team consisting of five fire engines of the same type and a lead vehicle. Strike team leaders are usually a Captain or a Battalion Chief. Strike teams can also be made up of bulldozers and handcrews. A strike team comprised of structure engines is designated with the letter “A”; i.e., 1400A. A strike team comprised of wildland engines is designated with the letter “C”; e.g., 9329C.

STRUCTURE PROTECTION GROUP – Two or more fire apparatus capable of pumping water for the purpose of preventing homes in a designated area from being burned by wildfire nearby.

UNIFIED COMMAND – Unified team effort allowing all agencies with jurisdictional responsibility for the incident, either geographical or functional, to manage an incident by establishing a common set of incident objectives and strategies.

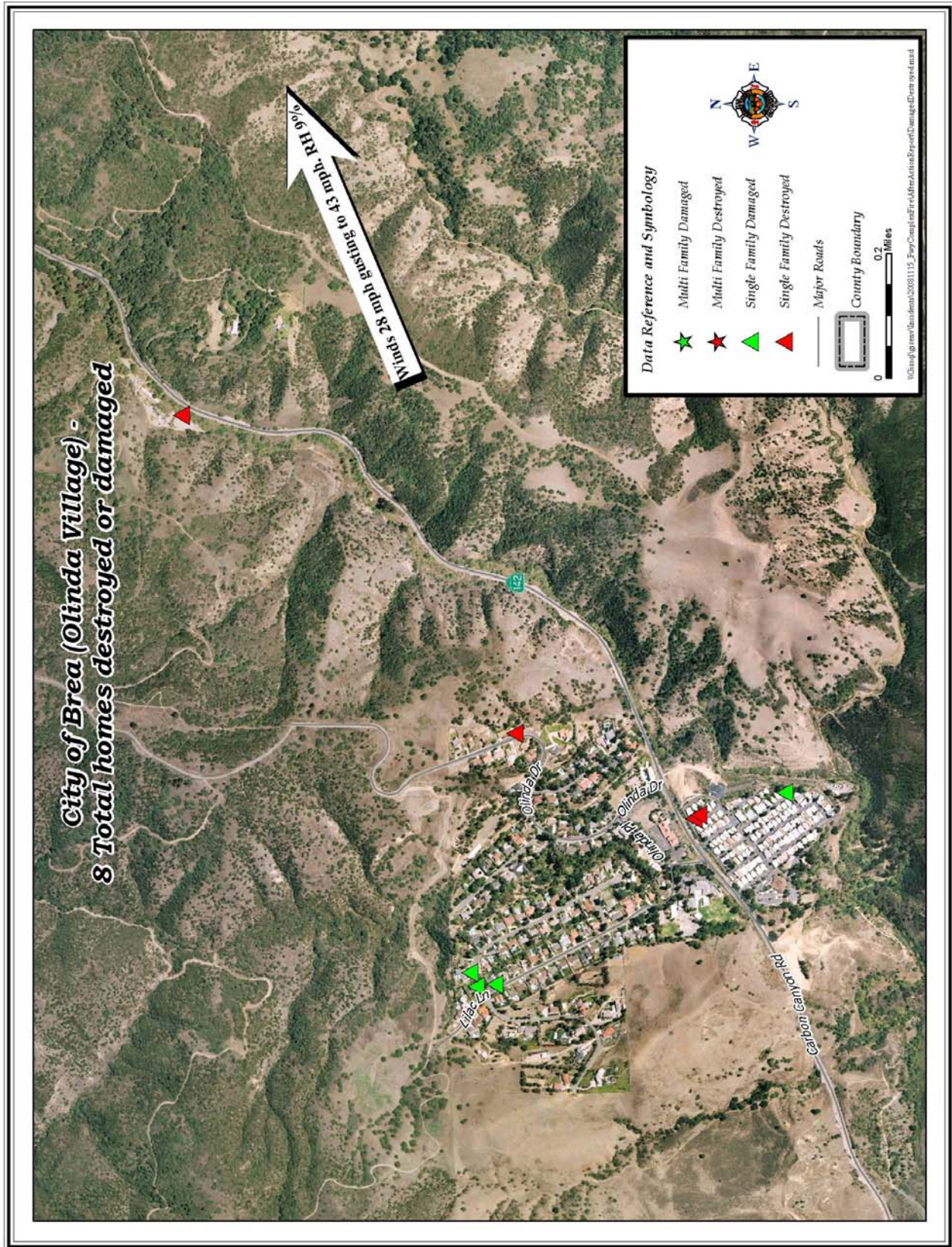
WATER TENDER – Specialized firefighting apparatus capable of transporting a minimum of 1,000 gallons of water from a water source directly to the fire scene.

WILDLAND ENGINE (Type 3) – Fire engines designed for the wildland firefighting environment. Constructed on heavy-duty commercial truck chassis with high ground clearance and often equipped with four wheel drive. Type 3 engines carry 500 gallons of water and have a minimum pump capacity of 120 gpm at 250 psi.

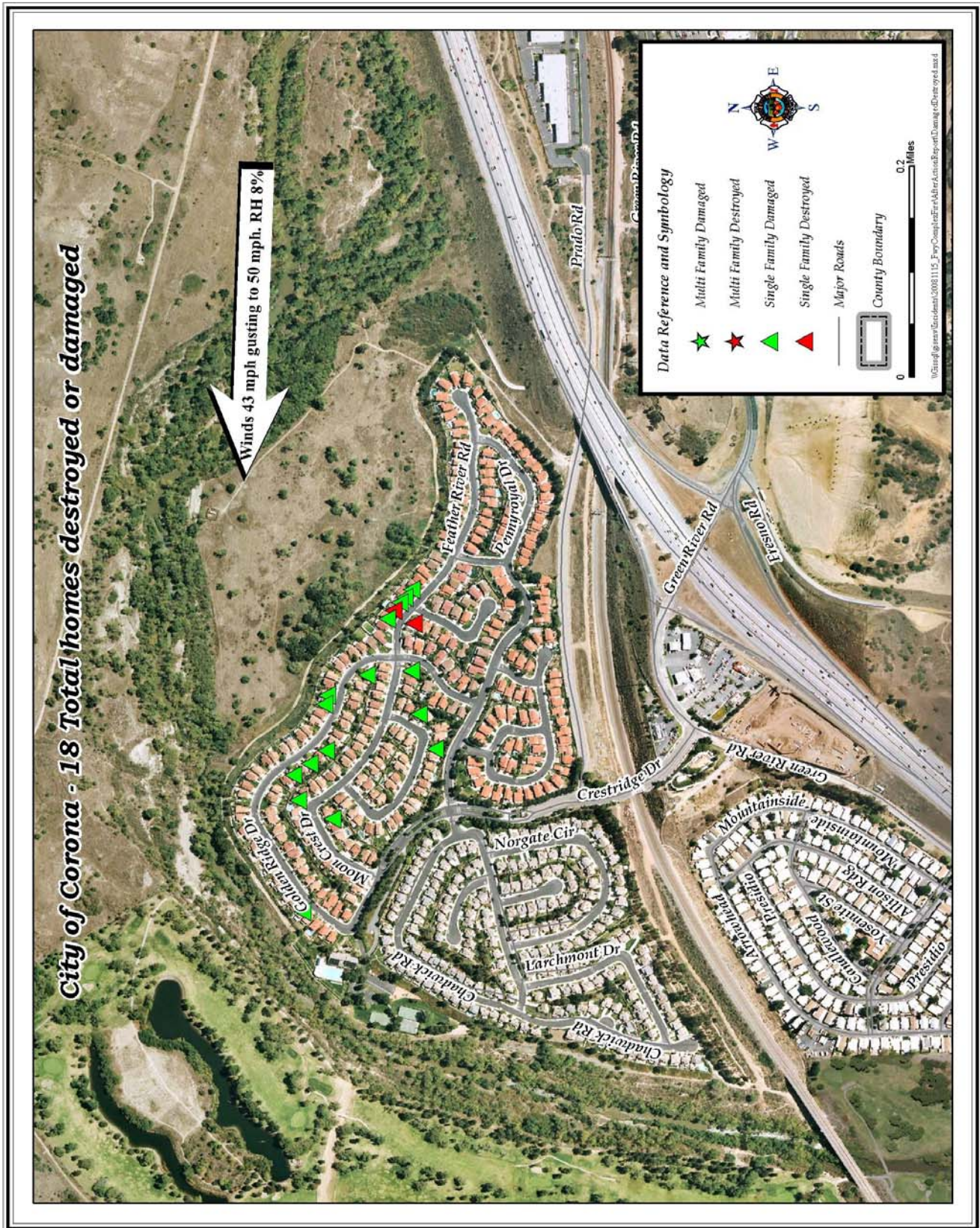
WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE (WUI) – Line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.



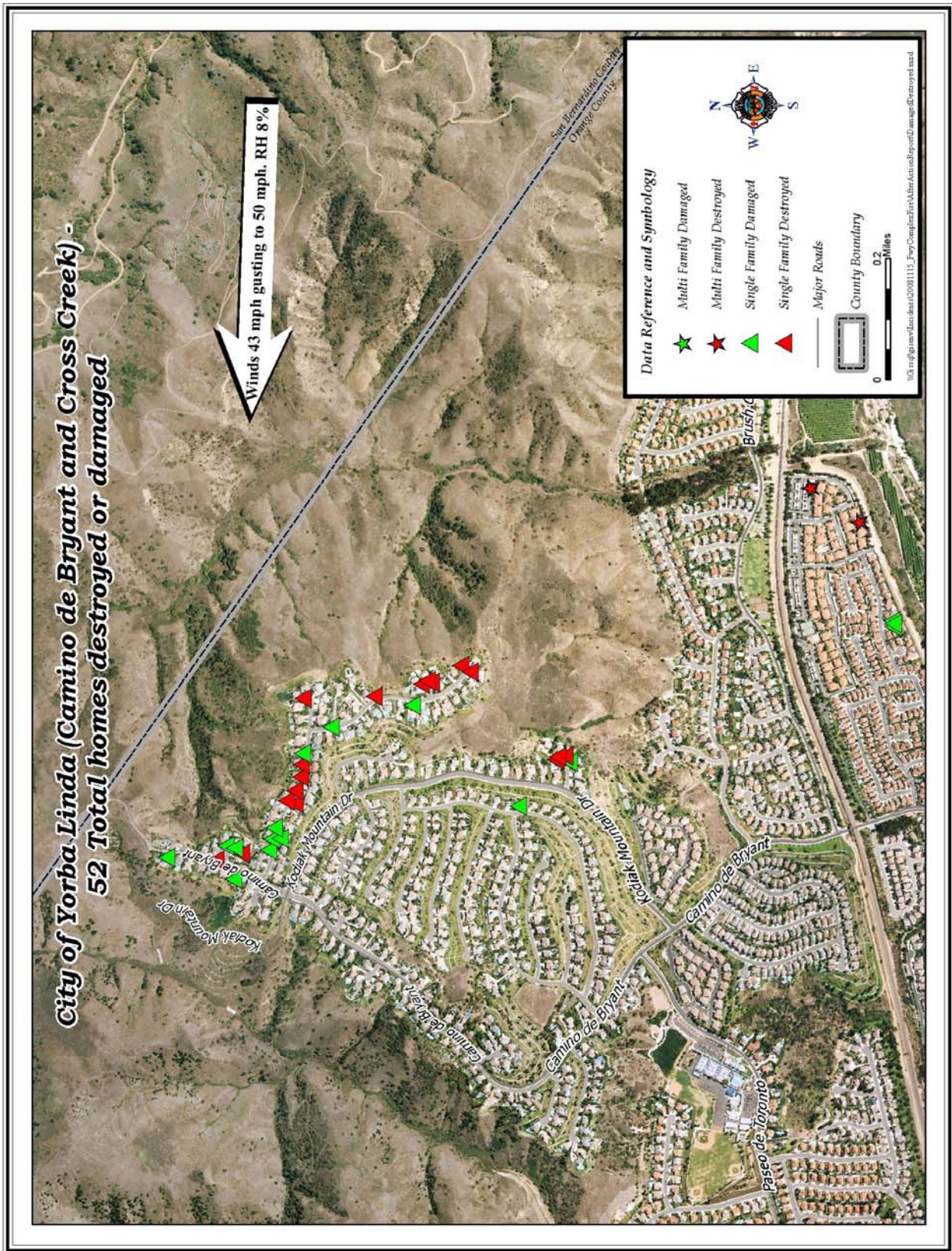
Map 17: City of Brea—Homes Destroyed or Damaged



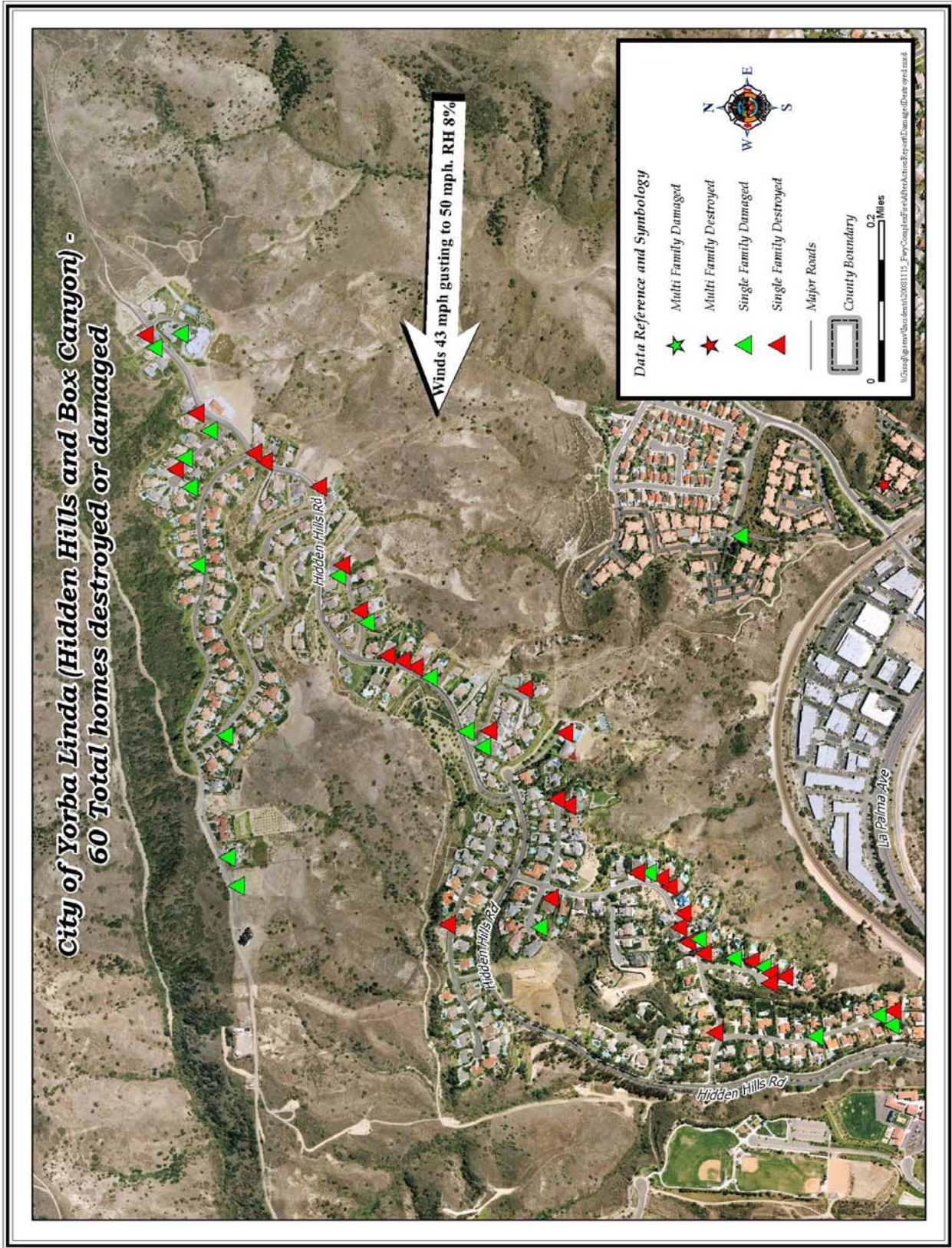
Map 18: City of Corona—Homes Destroyed or Damaged



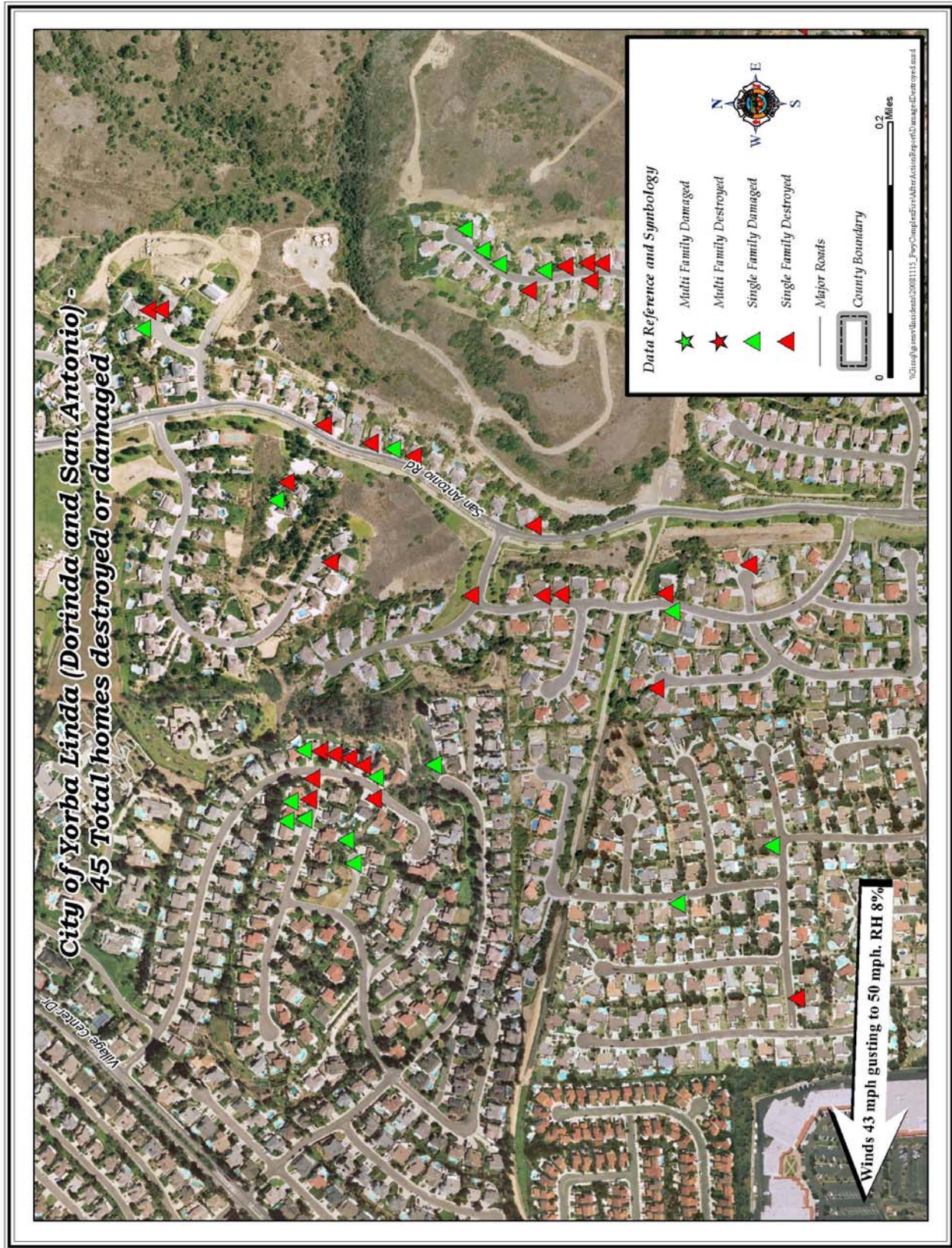
Map 19: City of Yorba Linda—Camino de Bryant and Cross Creek



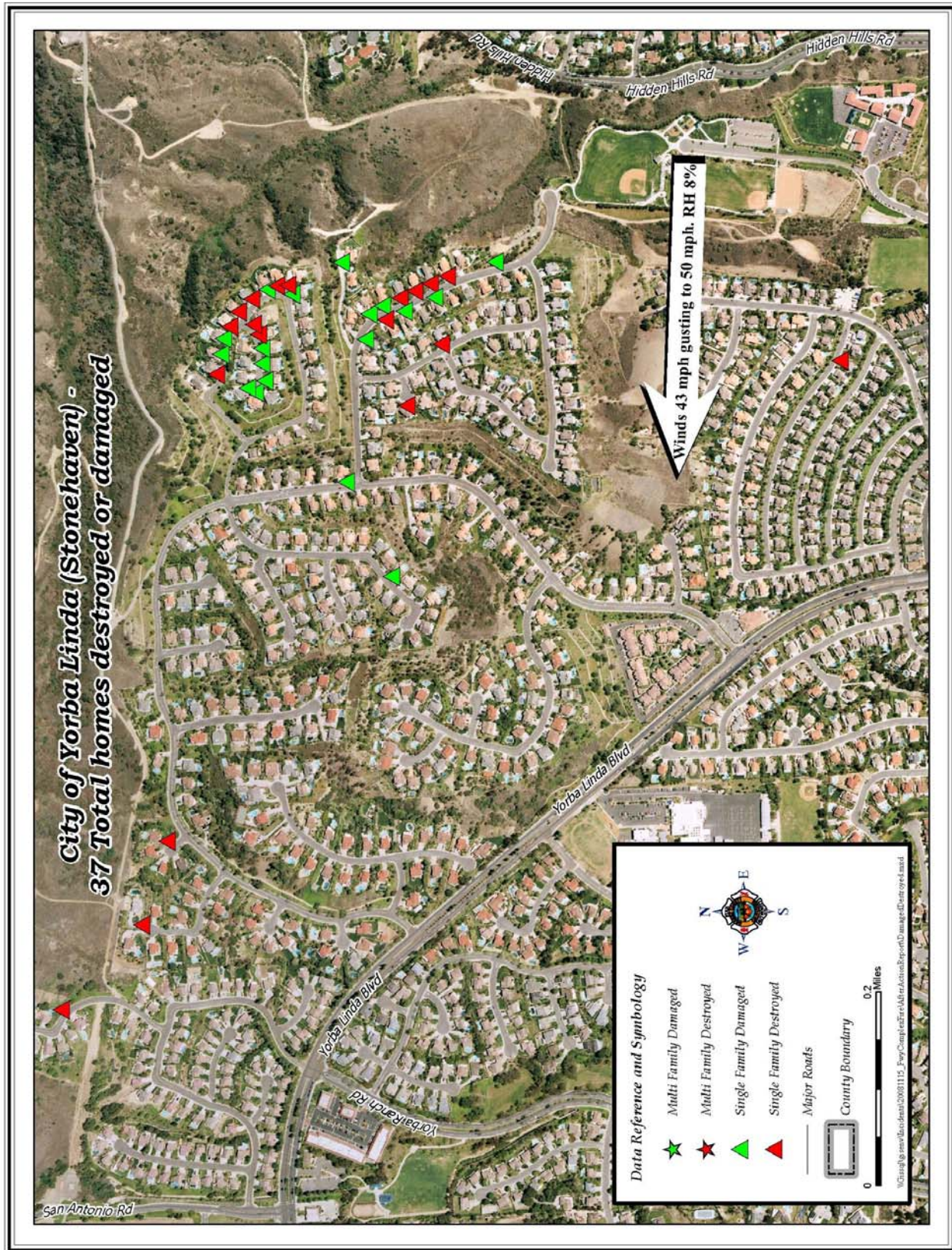
Map 20: City of Yorba Linda—Hidden Hills and Box Canyon



Map 21: City of Yorba Linda—Dorinda and San Antonio



Map 22: City of Yorba Linda—Stonehaven





Acknowledgements

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