

## RELATED TERMS

- Mandatory Evacuation
- Volunteer Groups
- Ad Hoc Evacuation Location



## Lessons Learned Information Sharing

www.LLIS.gov

# LESSON LEARNED

## PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

- Fire
- Community Preparedness
- Public Affairs and Information

## Public Communications: Disseminating Information to Evacuated Residents

### SUMMARY

Local fire departments should evaluate their roles at identified evacuation locations and ensure that timely information is available to evacuated residents. Authorities should explore the use of mass text messaging and the Internet for faster dissemination of incident information.

### DESCRIPTION

In October 2007, 22 wildfires burned over 517,000 acres in 7 counties in southern California over a 3-week period. More than 321,500 residents evacuated their homes in the largest evacuation in state history. One of the fires in Orange County, the Santiago Fire, burned for 19 days before crews contained the blaze on November 8. The fire burned 28,517 acres, destroying 42 buildings and damaging another 14 structures and causing an estimated \$27.5 million in damage and \$6.6 million in suppression costs. The response to the Santiago Fire included nearly 2,000 fire personnel from 170 different agencies as well as 330 police officers and deputies from 5 local law enforcement jurisdictions.

Fire commanders ordered a mandatory evacuation of Silverado Canyon communities at approximately 5:00 a.m. on October 23. Members of volunteer groups assisting the evacuation order congregated in a parking lot in the commercial area closest to Silverado Canyon. A leader of the Canyon Watch volunteer group set up a mobile radio post to communicate with other volunteers. This established a direct communication link for real-time updates on fire conditions passed along from members of Canyon Watch. Many community members turned to these volunteers for incident information, and the area quickly became an ad hoc evacuation location referred to as "Camp Silverado." Few people actually camped in this area since most evacuated residents stayed with relatives, friends, or in area hotels/motels. These residents did not require the services of the designated evacuation center at El Modena High School.

Public reliance on an ad hoc evacuation location for updates on fire conditions and progress proved problematic for incident management personnel. Evacuees perceived that information reports from public information officers and the media were outdated and unreliable. Evacuated residents thus came to believe that Camp Silverado was the only place to receive current, accurate information. Some residents, however, passed along information based upon personal observations, which was not always correct, accurate, or based upon actual fire situation status and conditions. When the Silverado Canyon evacuation order remained in place for over a week, the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) Fire Chief, Chip Prather, met personally with evacuees at Camp Silverado. Chief Prather assured evacuees that the OCFA was taking aggressive action to protect homes and that he would take steps to provide information in a more timely fashion.

Local fire departments should evaluate their roles at identified evacuation locations and ensure that timely information is available to evacuated residents. Authorities should explore the use of mass text messaging and the Internet for faster dissemination of incident information.

**CITATION**

Orange County, CA Fire Authority. *Santiago Fire After Action Report*. 17 Mar 2008.  
<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=30762>

**DISCLAIMER**

*Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* is the US Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency response and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the US Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email [Feedback@llis.dhs.gov](mailto:Feedback@llis.dhs.gov) or visit [www.llis.gov](http://www.llis.gov).