

## RELATED TERMS

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# LESSON LEARNED

## Fire Department Operations: Performing Structure Triage to Assess the Viability of Structures

### SUMMARY

Fire departments should train personnel to perform structure triage when responding to large-scale man-made or natural disasters.

### DESCRIPTION

The San Diego, California, area suffered one of the most destructive fires in the state's history in October 2003. The Cedar Fire began in the Cedar Creek area of the Cleveland National Forest late in the afternoon of October 25, 2003. The City of San Diego's Fire-Rescue Department (SDFD) initially committed 2 Strike Teams to support fire operations across 116,000 acres in neighboring jurisdictions. The fire entered the city of San Diego the next morning. Over the next 2 days, the wildland/urban interface fire consumed more than 28,000 acres within the city and the Miramar Marine Corps Air Station. The SDFD response included several hundred personnel and approximately 100 apparatus. The fire destroyed 335 structures and damaged another 71, with total estimated economic losses of \$204 million.

During the incident response, some SDFD resources were utilized in attempts to save structures that were not salvageable during this incident due to the limited number of resources. These structures would have been viable during normal incident conditions. The SDFD after-action report (AAR) determined that its resources "could have been better deployed on viable structures." The AAR recommends that training for structure triage needs to be improved. Structure triage is the rapid assessment of a structure's viability and assists the incident commander in deploying resources in a manner that produces the greatest benefit. Structure triage is an operational tactic that assesses areas and individual structures in order to determine their respective viability. This tactic aids the incident commander in determining the appropriate deployment of resources.

Fire departments should train personnel to perform structure triage when responding to large-scale man-made or natural disasters.

### CITATION

San Diego County Office of Emergency Services. *San Diego County After-Action Report: Firestorms 2003*. 2006.

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