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## Lessons Learned Information Sharing

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## PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

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# LESSON LEARNED

## Public Information: Updating Online Fire Information during a Disaster

### SUMMARY

Local fire departments should train additional personnel and enhance Web site functions to permit frequent online updates during a disaster. These measures enable faster dissemination of accurate incident information to the public.

### 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, 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 deputies and police officers from 5 local law enforcement jurisdictions.

Many citizens turned to the Orange County Fire Authority's (OCFA) Web site for information about the incident, resulting in an abnormally high volume of traffic during the incident. The OCFA site received over 18 million hits in October 2007 and almost 3 million hits in November (in comparison to an average of 650,000 per month). The Web site received 800,000 hits during the first 12 hours of the fire, and site traffic peaked to nearly 4 million hits on the third day of the fire.

For additional information, please refer to the OCFA Web site at <http://www.ocfa.org/>.

However, several factors prevented the OCFA Web site from providing timely incident information to the public during the Santiago Fire. First, the OCFA lacked sufficient trained personnel to perform the manual and cumbersome processes for updating the site. On occasion, there were no trained or authorized personnel available to make the appropriate changes even if new information was available. Second, personnel responsible for updating the site encountered difficulties gathering information from the incident command post and the county emergency operations center. These led to additional delays to updating the Web site. Still, personnel updated information as often as possible, including providing a fire progression map every 12 hours during the incident. The after-action report concluded that the OCFA needed to explore methods of automating the update function of the Web site.

Local fire departments should train additional personnel and enhance Web site functions to permit frequent online updates during a disaster. These measures enable faster dissemination of more accurate incident information to the public.

**CITATION**

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

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