

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS • 1989-2009

"TOW THE PREPAREDNESS LINE IN 2009"



EMERGENCY SURVIVAL PROGRAM

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# FOCUS

## Then and Now



In October of 2003, Southern California experienced the most devastating wildland fire disaster in California's history. The facts speak for themselves – 739,597 acres burned, 3,731 homes lost and 24 people killed, including one firefighter. At the peak of the fire siege 15,631 firefighters battled to save lives and property from more than a dozen major fires. People who were in the path of the fire were responsible for their own safe evacuation. Southern California is prime for another major fire disaster due to a persistent drought, urban sprawl of communities encroaching into areas of wildland, and millions of acres of vegetation that have not burned in many years. Preparedness is the key to surviving wildland fires.

Severe weather conditions can cause wildland fires, heat waves, and winter storms. Winter storms have caused many disasters, many as recently as the spring of 2005. Winter storms accounted for five national major disasters and eight emergency declarations in 2001, as well as five major disasters and one emergency declaration in 2002. Timely preparation, including structural and non-structural

mitigation measures to avoid the impacts of severe winter weather, can avert heavy personal, business and government expenditures.

Snow and ice on roadways can create hazardous driving conditions. In mountain areas, snow and ice can hamper driving and might cause you to be on your own for several hours or days.

Even if you don't live in severe or winter storm areas, there may be occasions when you travel to or visit these locations. Being aware of the hazards can help you to effectively deal with the challenges of severe winter weather.

The reverse side of this Focus Sheet contains simple steps that may save your life, those of your family, and protect your home from the devastating effects of wildland fires and severe winter weather.

### Check these websites

[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) (Federal Emergency Management Agency)

[www.oes.ca.gov](http://www.oes.ca.gov) (California Governor's Office of Emergency Services)

[www.noaa.com](http://www.noaa.com) (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)

[www.firesafecouncil.org](http://www.firesafecouncil.org) (The Fire Safe Council)

[www.fire.ca.gov](http://www.fire.ca.gov) (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection)

# O C T O B E R

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## Your Home

- Follow building, fire and hazard abatement codes.
- Install non-flammable screens with mesh 1/2 inch or less on chimneys and enclose all roof eaves with fire resistant material such as aluminum or steel and place metal mesh over all attic or roof vents.
- Keep roofs and rain gutters free of needles, leaves, or other debris.
- Enclose the underside of balconies and decks with fire resistant material, such as aluminum decking.
- Inspect chimneys and screens twice annually.
- Install a smoke alarm on each level of your home, especially in bedrooms, and test them monthly.

## Your Yard

- Clear the brush away from your home (a minimum of 100 feet).
- Trim all trees and tree branches away from electrical lines and chimneys. (Use a professional to trim near utilities and power lines)
- Remove weak, dead, and leaning trees and bark beetle infested trees.
- Stack firewood at least 30 feet away from your home or other structures.
- Store all combustible or flammable liquids in approved storage containers.
- Locate all propane tanks at least 30 feet from any structure.
- Use fire-retardant plants and bushes to replace highly combustible vegetation.

## When Wildland Fires Approach

- Listen to the radio or watch television for instructions.
- Evacuate as soon as directed by public safety officials or when danger is perceived.
- Park your vehicles facing the direction of escape with windows rolled up.
- Place your disaster supplies kit and evacuation kit along with valuables and other essentials in your vehicle.
- Secure pets and livestock and prepare them for evacuation.
- Leave your electricity on and leave inside lights on.
- If time permits, cover up by wearing long pants, a long sleeved shirt, goggles, cap, and bandanna. 100% cotton is preferable.
- Close doors behind you when evacuating to slow down the flames, smoke, and heat.
- Help young children, seniors, and persons with disabilities to evacuate safely.

## Plan for Evacuation

- Develop and practice a home evacuation plan. Your plan should include:
  - A floor plan with all escape routes
  - Easily accessible exits for young children, seniors and persons with disabilities. (Locate their rooms as close to exits as possible)
  - A list of valuables to take in an emergency. (Store them together in one location, if possible.)
    - Identify the most important papers to take if you have to leave, such as insurance policies, medical records, and driver's license
    - Include medications and eyeglasses
  - A place to reunite after evacuation
  - The location of animal shelters or other sites that house pets
  - Practice drills
- Work with neighbors to assist:
  - People with special needs
  - People who need transportation to other sites
- Work with local emergency officials to identify:
  - Several routes out of your neighborhood
  - Likely evacuation sites or safe refuge areas

## Winter Storm Preparedness

- Be familiar with winter storm warning messages, such as a flood watch or warning.
- Make sure you have sufficient heating fuel in case regular fuel sources are cut off.
- Have safe emergency heating equipment available.
- Install and check smoke alarms.
- Have disaster supplies on hand, in case you have to shelter in place or in case the power goes out.
- Develop an emergency communication plan.
- Keep cars and other vehicles fueled and in good repair.
- If you are in low-lying areas, keep sandbags, plywood, and plastic sheeting on hand.

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This focus sheet is produced as part of the Emergency Survival Program (ESP). ESP is an awareness campaign designed to increase home, neighborhood, business and school emergency preparedness. ESP was developed by the County of Los Angeles. The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) and representatives from

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