



HILLS
EMERGENCY
FORUM

FOR RELEASE AFTER 4/18/03

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FACT SHEET

What is the Hills Emergency Forum (HEF):

The HEF is a consortium created to provide a leadership structure to facilitate a broad and cooperative approach among eight local governing organizations for fire prevention mitigation, suppression and emergency planning for the urban-wildland intermix area of the Oakland-Berkeley hills.

Members include the City of Berkeley, the City of Oakland, the City of El Cerrito, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, the East Bay Regional Park District, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and the University of California. The original letter of intent signed October 19, 1993 by chief executives and renewed in October 1999.

Mission and goals

"The mission of the Hills Emergency Forum is to coordinate the collection, assessment and sharing of information on East Bay hills fire hazards and further, to provide a forum for building interagency consensus on the development of fire safety standards and codes, incident response and management protocols, public education programs, multi-jurisdictional training, and fuel reduction strategies."

The primary mission of the HEF is to provide a sustainable framework for interagency communication, joint planning and coordinated response to the needs of our various constituents. The organization's goals have been developed over the years and are grouped into the four areas of Assessment, Mitigation, Preparedness and Response

Organizational Structure

The Hills Emergency Group: HEF members include the City Managers of Berkeley, Oakland, and El Cerrito; the General Managers of East Bay Municipal Utility District and East Bay Regional Park District; Deputy Director of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Vice Chancellor of Business Administration Services at University of California, Berkeley and the Unit Chief of the Santa Clara Ranger Unit of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

The Staff Liaison Committee: The HEF's administrative component -- the Staff Liaison Committee (SLC) -- is comprised of representatives from all member agencies. The SLC is responsible for developing and monitoring progress on the Forum's annual workplan, analyzing HEF policy issues for agency executives, identifying issues for possible legislative support, and coordinating the HEF annual public meeting.

Two subcommittees are activated by the SLC as needed to address specific issues -- the East Bay Fire Chiefs (EBFC) and the Vegetation Management Consortium (VMC).

East Bay Fire Chiefs

EBFC consists of the chief officers from fire departments in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties and representatives of allied agencies, such as the California Department of Forestry (CDF). It aims to standardize equipment and training for the two counties, assure coordinated responses to major incidents, and educate the East Bay community about wildland fire safety. Fire Chiefs from the East Bay meet on a regular basis in conjunction with the Alameda and Contra Costa County Chiefs.

Vegetation Management Consortium

The VMC includes representatives from the East Bay cities, other public agencies and utilities, who have a stake in fire safety and fuel management in the East Bay hills. Its focus is fire-hazard reduction through vegetation management strategies.

HEF Current Projects

Field Training Using the Vegetation Management Almanac for the East Bay Hills

In April and May Field classes to train front line workers in the battle against exotic weeds and wildland fire are being offered. With a generous grant from the Alameda-Contra Costa Resource Conservation District and the local Weed Management Area, hands on training will teach participants to identify noxious weeds, develop effective strategies for their control and assess the effectiveness of previous treatments. This training is based on the Vegetation Management Almanac for the East Bay Hills that was published in 2001 by the Hills Emergency Forum. The document was designed to promote native plant and wildlife habitat when conducting vegetation management for fire hazard reduction into the urban-wildland intermix zone. The almanac includes information on making decisions, vegetation management techniques, and the timing of treatments. Available at the Tilden Nature Center for \$25, call 510-525-2233.

Media Safety Day 2003

To kick off the statewide **Wildfire Awareness Week** May 5 to May 11, the East Bay fire agencies will be sponsoring Media Safety Day 2003 on May 7th. The training is designed to better equip local media personnel to safely report on wildland fires. It also will provide the opportunity for the fire agencies to hear from the media regarding how they can help keep the public informed. The agenda for the day will include wildland fire safety, personal protective equipment (PPEs), working with the incident command staff, and hands-on field demonstrations of fire line practices and equipment. This training is co-sponsored with the Alameda County Fire Chief's Association, Contra Costa County Fire Chief's Association and the Diablo Fire Safe Council.

FireWise Workshop

The East Bay has been selected as one of the locations for the six FIREWISE Community Workshops being sponsored by the California Fire Alliance throughout California during 2002-03. This nationally recognized program developed by the National Fire Protection Association brings together elected officials, local government planners, emergency planners, developers, fire departments, contractors and others. Using the collaborative FIREWISE planning process participants learn to effectively transfer knowledge and techniques to their own communities. The workshop will be tailored to our region's specific needs with sessions on the County/Community General Plan Safety Element, multi-hazard mitigation planning and model wildland/urban interface codes.

Roadside Standards

At their October 2002 meeting the HEF directed staff circulate the draft regional standards to address roadside vegetation management for public review. The standards include an overview of jurisdictions in the East Bay Hills, existing relevant standards, as well as environmental and regulatory considerations. Using Claremont Canyon as a model, staff has developed a system for establishing the standards in each fire management compartment, and identifies a fire management strategy and treatment strategies for the canyon. It is recommended that an annual work plan is established that prioritizes implementation projects and recognizes budget cycles. The final standards will be posted to the HEF web site after adoption by the HEF in Spring of 2003.

Input to the National Academy of Public Administration

The National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) is an independent nonprofit organization chartered by the US Congress to improve governance at all levels. In 2001, Congress requested NAPA to undertake a study on how to control fire suppression costs – annual National Fire Plan appropriations now surpass \$2 billion on a regular basis. During 2003 the NAPA Wildfire Panel will be holding workshops across the Nation to talk over issues associated with draft legislation that will specify a new

federal incentive program and funding to facilitate community wildfire hazard mitigation. The HEF Staff Liaison Committee will work with regional fire organizations to provide input related to fire safety in the East Bay Hills.

Partnering with Environmental Agencies

On April 7, 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) released the Draft Recovery Plan for Chaparral and Scrub Community Species East of San Francisco Bay, California. The Service will be taking public comments on the draft plan for 120 days, or until August 7, 2003. The plan covers portions of Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, and San Joaquin counties and focuses on two federally threatened species (Alameda whipsnake and pallid manzanita) and four species of concern (Contra Costa manzanita, Mount Diablo buckwheat, Mount Diablo bird's beak and Berkeley kangaroo rat).

This recovery plan provides a community-level strategy to mimic or reintroduce natural disturbance regimes into the ecosystem to facilitate recovery of the Alameda whipsnake and pallid manzanita. It has the opportunity for win-win with the fire community – opening up shrub lands for species recovery also creates a more sustainable fuel mosaic. Many of the management recommendations will provide an ancillary benefit to urban communities by reducing fuel loads and providing fuel breaks. Several of the HEF members (EBRPD, EBMUD, CDF and UCB) are already working with the Service as cooperators on fire related research. The HEF will also provide comment on the draft plan and look for ways to continue to partner with environmental agencies.

For Further Information see our website at www.lbl.gov/ehs/hef/