

Memorandum

Date: December 5, 2008

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Scott McGolpin, Director, Department of Public Works

Subject: Update on fire debris removal efforts to date, and request for continuance of item for development and implementation of voluntary program for the County to provide fire debris removal services for private properties affected by the Tea Fire



On November 25, 2008, Public Works staff presented a proposal to your Board regarding a voluntary program for the County to provide fire debris removal services for private properties affected by the Tea Fire who would in turn reimburse the County for its service costs. Also provided to your Board was an update on progress made associated with the removal of fire debris. Your Board approved the proposal in concept and requested that the item be brought back to your Board with more details on December 9, 2008. The following contains a further update on progress made and a request for continuance.

Update

As of the end of day Thursday, December 4, 2008 61 out of 81 affected properties have obtained demolition permits from the Planning and Development Department. This means over 75% of the property owners are being proactive and taking action within less than a month of the fire to clear their parcels of debris. This percentage has doubled since we brought this item to your Board originally on November 25th. This success rate may be attributed to the significant outreach efforts that have been made to the affected property owners. Public works staff has visited the burn area several times to distribute information that is helpful to property owners for debris removal and to ensure that appropriate haulers are transporting the material. As reported earlier, the permitted haulers have been lining containers that are then transported to the Tajiguas Landfill. Tajiguas has been permitted to take burn debris, improvements have been completed at the landfill to accept the material, and employees are appropriately safeguarded from exposure to this material. To date, 2,001 tons of fire debris has been received at Tajiguas. In addition, efforts are being made to recycle as much vegetation, metal, and rubble as possible.

With regards to limiting financial exposure, the County has further learned that the cost to abate each property varies significantly and the average cost in both Lake Arrowhead (350 sites) and San Diego (1700 sites) was \$50,000. The initial project estimate was based on the average cost of \$50,000 multiplied by approximately 80 sites for a total of \$4,000,000. Assuming approximately 20 sites remain multiplied by \$50,000 results in a revised estimate of \$1,000,000. There is the possibility that insurance will not cover the full cost of the property abatement, therefore the property owner would be required to fund the remainder. If the property owner is unable to make the necessary payment, County may not be reimbursed until the eventual sale of the property. Staff is also considering the possibility of FEMA participation to help offset the cost of the program or site abatement. The expenses that are eligible are narrow and must follow particular specifications. While staff will maximize the amount of FEMA reimbursement, your Board should be advised that FEMA participation for debris removal on private property is not typical and funding might be minimal.

Recommendation

Given the fantastic community response to date, staff is recommending that your Board continue the item to December 23, 2008 when your Board reaffirms the Tea Fire Emergency Proclamation. Staff will provide an update on the debris removal efforts. In addition, staff will continue efforts to ensure property owners are aware of resources available to them and provide guidance on moving forward, including the owners yet to obtain a demolition permit and the Mountain Drive Association, with whom we have already made contact.