



**Name:** "Firestorm 2007" (Response to California Wildfires, October 2007)

**Name of Organization(s):** California Department of Aging; San Diego Aging and Independence Services (AIS)

The October 2007 wildfires in Southern California provided many serious emergency preparedness and response challenges, accomplishments, and lessons learned, both during and after the event. The ability to effectively respond to the dynamics of this widespread and often shifting disaster was supported by establishing a variety of key, cross-cutting partnerships before the emergency began so they could be drawn upon quickly and flexibly to meet local and individual needs.

Major partnership actions included:

- Establishing coordinated response plans and lines of communication at the state level between the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, the California Department of Public Health and the California Department of Aging to better ensure that the needs of older adults and persons with disabilities were considered in a wide variety of emergency response and recovery activities.
- Providing links from various agencies at the state level to the California Association of Area Agencies on Aging, the San Diego Aging and Independence Services (AIS), and other area agencies on aging in the affected areas. These lines of communication allowed for more effective targeting of resources and activities to particular areas of need.
- Establishing procedures in advance with the Red Cross and County-run shelters, which precipitated the placement of AIS and aging network staff in shelters where they were able to help stabilize crisis situations for seniors, conduct assessments and address particular characteristics of individuals with special needs.
- Ombudsman staff worked closely with public health and licensing officials to help triage evacuations from Skilled Nursing and Board and Care Facilities, as well as to track their movement to alternate facilities.
- Partnerships with local housing and community development officials helped to identify where vacancies existed so that seniors who were displaced could be appropriately housed.

Advance planning was also crucial for targeting assistance to persons with special needs. This planning included:

- Having client lists and contact information readily available so that efforts could be made to contact all vulnerable and special needs clients to determine their situation and needs throughout the crisis.
- Working with county planning and land use officials to identify clients whose addresses matched individuals whose homes were damaged or destroyed by the fires. This process allowed AIS and aging network staff to assess needs and work with FEMA and the Red Cross to provide necessary assistance.
- Staffing local assistance centers so that older and at-risk individuals could be provided information about other services available through the area agencies on aging.

Lessons learned from these activities and partnerships are being integrated into creating a more comprehensive and coordinated emergency response plan for the future.

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