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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

TO: Chair Doug Chaffee, Supervisor, Fourth District and Honorable Members Board of Supervisors

FROM: Regina Chinsio-Kwong, D.O., County Health Officer 

DATE: April 2, 2025

RE: Status Report for April 8, 2025, Regular Meeting of the County of Orange Board of Supervisors Item 11, Approve Continuation of Local Health Emergency for Trabuco Canyon Airport Fire

This Status Report serves as an update to your Honorable Board of Supervisors (Board) for Regular Meeting of the County of Orange Board of Supervisors Item 11, Approve Continuation of Local Health Emergency for Trabuco Canyon Airport Fire.

On September 11, 2024, Governor Newsom proclaimed a [State of Emergency](#) in response to multiple Southern California Fires, including the Trabuco Canyon Airport Fire (Airport Fire) which started on September 9, 2024.

On September 13, 2024, the County Health Officer, Dr. Regina Chinsio-Kwong, declared a Local Health Emergency for the public health threat posed by the Airport Fire ash and debris to Orange County residents. The Local Health Emergency was reissued on September 20, 2024, ratified by the Board of Supervisors on September 24, 2024, and approved to continue on October 8, 2024.

Per the California Emergency Services Act, the Local Health Emergency must be reviewed every 30 days until the Local Health Emergency is terminated. It is recommended that the Local Health Emergency be extended in support of the County of Orange (County) as coordination for the debris removal and mitigation efforts to protect watershed areas continue.

The Airport Fire burned approximately 23,626 acres, damaging multiple structures, including cabins in the Holy Jim Canyon. Two seasonal underground wells in the Holy Jim Canyon area have the potential of being contaminated if ash and debris from the fire infiltrate the wells with rain activity.

The Local Health Emergency is needed to facilitate the removal of debris and ash related to the fire as well as mitigation efforts needed to protect the water from these wells ahead of significant rain activity.

Consolidated Debris Removal Program for the Airport Fire is being done in several phases:

Phase 1 – Hazardous Material and Hazardous Waste Removal Assistance

Phase 1 operation involves the removal of hazardous waste, including household chemicals, paint cans and lithium batteries at impacted properties within Orange County, including damaged and destroyed structures and leased United States Forest Service land. The Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) is the operational liaison. DTSC has created a Hazardous Waste

Assessment and Removal Dashboard. Clean up progress of the Airport Fire can be viewed by clicking on the “Airport” at the top right-hand corner of the page. [Fires 2024 - Household Hazardous Waste Public Dashboard](#)

DTSC contractors completed Phase 1 operation on November 15, 2024. HCA Environmental Health staff was part of the Phase 1 and represented as the County liaison in the operation. Hazardous waste removal was completed at 88 cabins/structures in effected area of El Cariso, Long Canyon and Holy Jim.

Phase 1.5 – Watersheds Mitigation Efforts

The Department of Water Resources (DWR), Trabuco Canyon Water District, and Orange County Public Works (OCPW) conducted assessments.

The protective exterior earthen berm adjacent to Trabuco Creek has been negatively impacted and degraded by prior debris flow incidents, including the Holy Fire. The Phase 1.5 watershed mission included the installation of a total of 5,950 linear feet of water protection compost socks and 500 linear feet of straw wattles to protect the environment and the water supply in the affected area.

DWR Flood Fight Specialists completed the watershed mission on November 7, 2024.

Between December 23, 2024 to January 3, 2025, OCPW worked on grading and armoring the slope to protect the Trabuco Water District (TCWD) wells and facility. BMP protections recommended by OCPW were installed from January 3 through January 5, 2025.

Phase 2 – Private Property Debris Removal

Phase 2 operation involves all debris removal, including sheet metal, roofing, concrete cinder blocks, foundations, contaminated soil and ash, and soil testing for asbestos and other contaminants.

OCPW is the lead agency to implement Phase 2 operation. Orange County Sheriff’s Department Emergency Management Bureau is in communication with California Office of Emergency Services for Phase 2.

Property debris removal remains underway in affected areas. Asbestos testing is ongoing. Limited resources state-wide and recent rains have resulted in testing and debris removal delays. HCA will be available for any additional technical questions to support debris removal operations.

Recommended Action

Approve continuation of Local Health Emergency for the Airport Fire and affected areas to facilitate debris and ash removal as well as mitigation efforts to protect water wells; and set review to determine the need for continuing local emergency for May 6, 2025, and every 30 days thereafter until terminated.

Please contact me at (714) 834-2729 or rchinsiokwong@ochca.com with any questions or concerns.

cc: Michelle Aguirre, Interim County Executive Officer
Robin Stieler, OC Clerk of the Board
Dr. Veronica Kelley, Agency Director