



TO: Chairman Donald P. Wagner, Supervisor, Third District and Honorable Members Board of Supervisors

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

DATE: October 31, 2024

RE: Status Report for Regular Meeting of the County of Orange Board of Supervisors Item 10, 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 10, 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

During this phase, the removal of hazardous waste, including pesticides, batteries, paint cans, televisions, floor tiles, and bulk asbestos, is being performed for impacted properties within Orange County, including damaged and destroyed structures and leased United States Forest Service land. During Phase 1, the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) is tasked with leading efforts.

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](#)

Phase 1 work is already underway in Riverside. Orange County cleanup will start as soon as Riverside County is completed. The OC Health Care Agency Environmental Health is available to provide hazardous waste technical support to DTSC throughout the Phase 1 process.

Phase 1.5 – Watersheds Mitigation Efforts

The Watershed Team (Trabuco Canyon Water District (TCWD)) and Orange County Public Works 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. If this berm is compromised by the level of debris flow that is anticipated based on recent modeling, the secondary berm at the Trabuco Creek Ground Water Treatment Facility (GWTF) may experience critical failure that would significantly damage the facility and compromise the wells’ water quality.

Burn Area Emergency Response (BAER) and Watershed Emergency Response (WERT) Team analysis and reports are being conducted to further inform these post-fire protective measures of the seasonally operated Trabuco Creek that provides local produced drinking water to TCWD customers and accounts for approximately 24% of the total average annual system demand, and as much as 40% of the system demand during extreme wet years.

Phase 2 – Private Property Debris Removal

During the second phase of cleanup, all debris removal, including sheet metal, roofing, concrete cinder blocks, foundations, contaminated soil and ash. Detailed Phase 2 plans will be shared publicly on the Airport Fire Recovery website.

This phase will be conducted once Phases 1 and 1.5 are complete.

The County of Orange is working closely with California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (CalOES), DTSC, National Forest Service, and the California Department of Resources, Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) for Phase I and II.

All agencies intend to clear the Trabuco Canyon and Holy Jim properties as soon as possible to mitigate further environmental contamination to the surrounding area and watershed when the rainy season starts.

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 December 3, 2024, 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
Massoud Shamel, Senior Deputy County Counsel