

Best practices

Disaster Mitigation Working in California



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Wildfire Mitigation Investments Saved Students and a Campus



Photo by Tim Horton

A firebreak near faculty and graduate housing

Malibu, CA When the devastating November 2018 Woolsey Fire closed in on Pepperdine University's campus, the university officials had to make a decision with life-or-death consequences. The fire was enormous, eventually killing three people and destroying 1,643 structures in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties as it blazed across 96,949 acres of land. Although the dangers were terrifying, the administration decided to deploy their shelter-in-place protocol and direct the 1,200 students to stay in the designated buildings best able to withstand a raging wildland fire.

The decision was supported by the Los Angeles County Fire Department as the safest course. Fire experts realized that local evacuation roads would become congested and dangerous when wind-driven fire moved with great speed and unpredictability. Phil Phillips, Vice President for Administration said, "Many plan for emergencies. At Pepperdine, we experience emergencies. We have been through many fires, and after each one we sought to make our response plans better. And

doing this well over a decade, our resulting plans stood up very well against the most devastating fire to hit this region in our lifetime."

Pepperdine had been through this before. The campus was threatened by fire in 1985, 1993, and 1996. The October 2007 Canyon Fire burned 4,500 acres in Malibu Canyon, destroying six homes and a church. City, county and state firefighters aided by helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft stopped that blaze at the edge of campus. The school was able to provide water for the firefighting operations since it installed giant water storage tanks, with the largest 3 million gallons of water.

Confidence that Pepperdine students and faculty would be safe on campus was a result of extensive investments in wildfire hazard mitigation and disaster preparations. Campus buildings were designed and constructed to be highly resistant to ignition from intense flames or flying embers. As much as

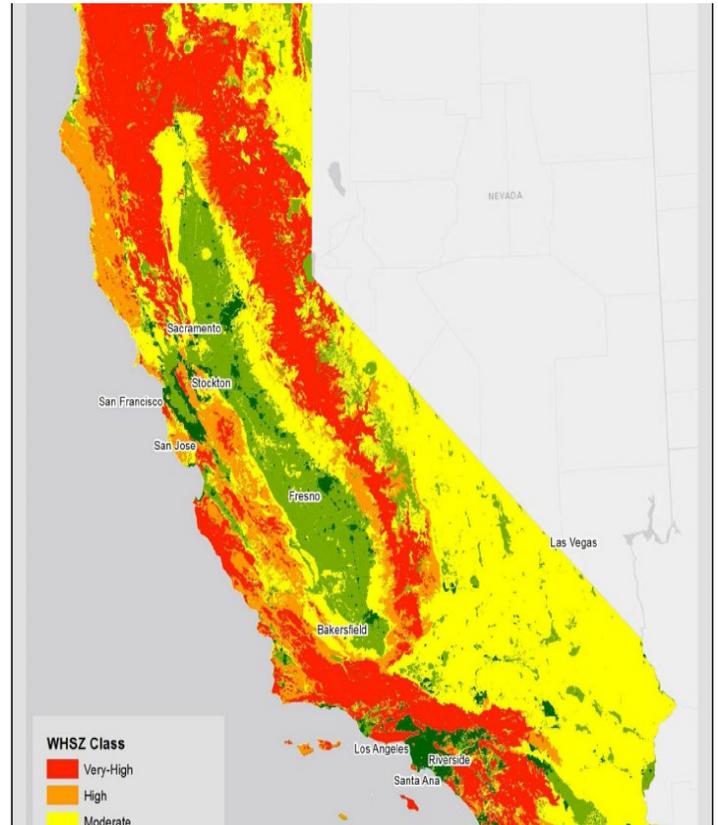


Photo by Tim Horton

Pepperdine University Department of Public Safety wildland firefighters put out a hot spot on campus

possible, the university chose fire-resistant materials, finishes, and building materials that naturally provided enhanced fire resistance, compared to other code-compliant materials and methods. The school roads provided fire breaks. A defensive space perimeter of 200 feet or more was maintained around every building, and a green belt surrounded much of the campus. This required constant maintenance and modification of vegetation on the 830-acre campus. Lastly, the Everbridge Emergency Communication System allowed the University to send messages directly to community members' e-mail, cell, office, and home telephones; SMS/text message; and designated emergency contacts.

Pepperdine University's administration uses an all-hazards approach to protect lives and property. They invest in mitigation measures and disaster preparation. Risk from wildfire, earthquakes, storm surges, tsunamis, high winds, flooding, mud and debris flows, and other hazards must all be considered and countered. Many planning initiatives and emergency protocols are in place, along with a supply of non-perishable food to feed all the students, staff and administrators for as long as two weeks. Pepperdine exhibits a determination to constantly search for new ways to make things even better and safer.



California Wildfire Hazard Severity Zone Map



Los Angeles County Fire Department picks up water from one of two retention basins on campus in preparation for a water drop

More information:

Pepperdine University emergency information
<http://emergency.lpepperdine.edu/overview/>

FEMA Publication 443 Building a Disaster-Resistant University
https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1457-20490-1338/dru_report.pdf

California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
www.caloes.gov

FEMA Region 9
<https://www.fema.gov/fema-region-ix-arizona-california-hawaii>