

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2025**

**MINUTE ORDER NO. 12**

**SUBJECT:   REDUCING FIRE DANGER THROUGH EMERGENCY ENCAMPMENT  
CLEARINGS DURING RED FLAG WARNINGS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

The County of San Diego faces a significant fire risk due to homeless encampments in high-risk areas. In January alone, multiple fires-including the Friars Fire in Mission Valley, the Center Fire in Rancho Bernardo, and the Gilman Fire in La Jolla-originated in homeless encampments. These fires have threatened homes, destroyed property, forced emergency evacuations, and put the lives of both first responders and residents in danger.

In Los Angeles, 54% of all fires in 2023 were attributed to homeless encampments, with similar trends emerging in the Bay Area and across California. Wildfire remains an ever-present threat in San Diego County, where dry conditions, high winds, and dense vegetation create a constant risk of disaster.

Homeless encampments, often located in canyons, riverbeds, and other fire-prone areas, add an unpredictable and dangerous element to this equation. Open flames used for cooking and warmth, combined with flammable debris and a lack of fire prevention measures, pose a serious fire hazard-not only to surrounding communities but also to those living within the encampments themselves.

Today's action prioritizes public safety by directly addressing the fire risks posed by homeless encampments and implementing proactive fire prevention measures. By improving the process of emergency encampment clearings to address fire risk, we can significantly reduce the likelihood of devastating wildfires. Wildfires do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries, making regional coordination essential. Therefore, today's action also calls for collaboration with neighboring jurisdictions to enhance fire prevention efforts and strengthen public safety across the region.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to return to the Board in 90 days with (1) a report on current County policies and practices on removal of illegal encampments, including emergency removal based on fire risk; (2) recommendations to improve the process of removing illegal encampments.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to identify high fire-risk areas within the County that have significant homeless encampments and prioritize these locations for removal and the issuance of stay-away orders as deemed appropriate.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to work with other jurisdictions interested in implementing similar measures to enhance regional fire prevention efforts.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The year-round threat of wildfires disproportionately impacts rural, low-income, and underserved communities in San Diego County, where limited water infrastructure and resources heighten vulnerabilities. About 79% of the County's unincorporated area is designated as High or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. More than 80% of County Fire's jurisdictional area qualifies as a disadvantaged unincorporated community based on a San Diego Local Agency Formation Commission report on funding, administration, and performance of the former County Service Area No. 135 (now San Diego County Fire Protection District).

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

This proposed action contributes to the County of San Diego's Sustainability Goal of protecting the health and well-being of all San Diegan residents. Enhancing public safety is of paramount priority for the County's more vulnerable residents.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for the actions requested in Recommendation 1 are included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan for the Departments of Park and Recreation, Public Works and Planning and Development Services based on existing staff time. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years associated with Recommendation 1. There may be fiscal impacts associated with future related recommendations which staff would return to the Board for consideration and approval.

Funds for the action requested in Recommendation 2 are included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan in for the Departments of Park and Recreation, Public Works and Planning and Development Services based on existing staff time. There may be additional fiscal impacts associated with future encampment abatements. Depending on the number and complexity of the abatements, additional funding may need to be identified. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years associated with Recommendation 2.

Funds for the action requested in Recommendation 3 are included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan in County Fire and Office of Emergency Services based on existing staff time. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years associated with Recommendation 3.

## **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

## **ACTION:**

ON MOTION of Supervisor Desmond, seconded by Supervisor Anderson, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended.

1. Directed the Chief Administrative Officer to return to the Board in 90 days with (1) a report on current County policies and practices on removal of illegal encampments, including emergency removal based on fire risk; (2) recommendations to improve the process of removing illegal encampments.
2. Directed the Chief Administrative Officer to identify high fire-risk areas within the County that have significant homeless encampments and prioritize these locations for removal and the issuance of stay-away orders as deemed appropriate.

3. Directed the Chief Administrative Officer to work with other jurisdictions interested in implementing similar measures to enhance regional fire prevention efforts.
4. Directed the Chief Administrative Officer to not duplicate efforts outlined in the Board's previous direction through Supervisor Anderson's Board Letter on August 27, 2024 (15) that is coming back to the Board on March 11, 2025.

AYES: Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe, Desmond

ABSENT: (District 1 Seat Vacant)

State of California)  
County of San Diego) §

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER  
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



Signed  
by Andrew Potter