

Wildfires and Stanford University



Wildfires are ravishing the west. Many of the fires were sparked by an unprecedented series of thunderstorms, which occurred in mid-August and accounted for more than 12,000 lightning strikes throughout the west sparking hundreds of fires. The recent heatwave helped to intensify and increase the rate of spread of many of the fires. With so many fires burning, firefighting resources have been stretched beyond their limits requiring the prioritization of fires that are immediately threatening life and/or property while allowing some fires to burn with fewer resources to control them.

With the Stanford University property covering more than 8,000 acres, the University has made the mitigation of hazards associated with wildfires a priority. The efforts taken have been truly a team effort including the Stanford University Fire Marshal's Office (SUFMO) and Land, Buildings and Real Estate (LBRE). Some of the efforts taken this year have included:

- **Faculty-Staff Housing Wildland Fire Hazard Surveys** – Surveys were conducted of all faculty-staff housing that is located within the wildland urban interface area (within ½ mile of undeveloped land. SUFMO conducted the surveys and residents were notified of the findings so that they can mitigate those hazards.
- **Commercial Lease Holder Property Surveys** – This year, SUFMO has conducted property surveys of all leased property within the University's wildland area. Working with LBRE, the lease holders were informed of the hazards observed, so that they could take the necessary actions to reduce the hazards. These properties will be assessed on an annual basis so that the properties can be maintained in a manner that reduces the risk associated with wildfires.
- **Response to Concerns Regarding Wildfire Hazards** – SUFMO and LBRE have prioritized their response to concerns regarding wildfire hazards that they receive. The responses include timely inspection of the concerns as well as the mitigating efforts by LBRE to reduce the hazards.
- **Wildfire Management Plan** – In 2019, SUFMO developed an initial Wildfire Management plan. The University is currently working with a consultant to expand the Wildfire



Management Plan including the use of fire modeling that will help to pinpoint areas where additional fuel reduction work would be recommended.

- **Fuel Reduction Work** – This year the University has conducted more wildland fuel reduction work than ever before. The work has included the use of goats, mowing, tilling and brush removal and tree trimming. Extensive fuel reduction has been conducted on property that borders homes in Portola Valley.

While all the efforts taken cannot guarantee that a wildfire will not occur on the University's property, the efforts will help to reduce the intensity, spread and help to protect neighboring properties, buildings within the wildland area and the main campus from a wildfire should one occur. This was evident with two fires that occurred recently in the foothills. Both fires were controlled and extinguished before they could threaten any structures.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

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