

# NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY NEWSLETTER

VOL. 3 NO. 3

July, 1986

## 1985 PUBLICATION OF THE YEAR AWARD: CALIFORNIA GEOLOGY

In presenting CALIFORNIA GEOLOGY with the first publication of the year award NFES has recognized it as the best (and most cost effective) publication in the environmental safety field.

CALIFORNIA GEOLOGY is the official publication of the California Division of Mines and Geology. It reports monthly on the earth sciences of California. Articles of interest to geology, mining, seismology, paleontology, mineralogy, and allied earth sciences are included. It can be ordered (\$ 10.00 for 2 years) from DMG, P.O. Box 2980, Sacramento, CA 95812. Back issues, if available, cost \$ 0.50. DMG also publishes Bulletins, Special Reports, County Reports, the Geologic Map of California, and other maps and information which, along with book reviews, are announced in the publication.

Many of the articles in CALIFORNIA GEOLOGY are supported with photos and sketches and are written in such a way that the nonprofessional in the earth sciences can relate to the subject at hand. Whenever geologic problems and disasters such as slides, fire related soil erosion, earthquakes, soil and geology related vegetation changes, to name just a few, occur in California, they will be discussed within a short time highlighting the cause as well as possible preventative measures. Even just one article of interest to you each year will be well worth the subscription.

A brief selection of the many excellent articles published in recent years is listed below:

- \* Mexico Earthquake 1985 (4/86)
- \* Hazard From Mudslides...(4/86)
- \* Rainfall Conditions For Abundant Debris Avalanches (12/85)
- \* Geologic Hazard, Negligence, and Real Estate (7/85).
- \* Landslide Hazard in California (8/85).
- \* Landslides and Floods-Jan. 1982 (7/82)
- \* Artificial and Natural Slope Failures(5/80).
- \* S. Calif. Landslides-1978 (1/79).
- \* Marble Cone Fire-Effects on Erosion(12/77).

## UPCOMING EVENTS: SAVING LIVES AND HOMES

The July 2, 1985 Baldwin Hills fire in the City of Los Angeles destroyed 49 homes, damaged 17 homes, and took 3 lives. Fires with predictable high losses of life and property may happen throughout the southland again this fire season.

To reduce the probability of such future fire disasters and to help residents with judging and minimizing fire potential in their community, NFES is assisting the local Topanga-Las Virgenes Resource Conservation District in sponsoring a fuel hazard abatement/brush clearance workshop in which citizens as well as public agencies are invited to participate. The event will be held on July 26 from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM at the Topanga Elementary School at 141 N. Topanga Canyon Blvd, Topanga. Topanga is located in the coastal Santa Monica mountains of Los Angeles County. To reach the school you must cross the bridge leading from Topanga Canyon Blvd. to the school.

Please see PREDICTING DISASTERS P. 2

## FIRE RESISTANT PLANTS WOOD SHINGLE ROOFS

The myth of fire-resistant plants and the politics of fire safety have been responsible for the loss of many homes in the Pacific Southwest over the last 30 years. 'Educated' by public agencies as well as by the news media, many people to this date still believe that fire-resistant plants really exist and that they can save their homes. Others have planted their yards with 'fire-resistant' plants recommended by public agencies only to see these plants explode in wildfires as they get old.

The 'fire-resistant' plant concept had its birth in southern California, specifically Los Angeles County. It, apparently, was born out of 'necessity' to justify extensive post WW II development in fireprone watershed areas (mostly hillsides) without common sense zoning, grading and building code ordinances.

Please see BURNING OF HOMES, P.2

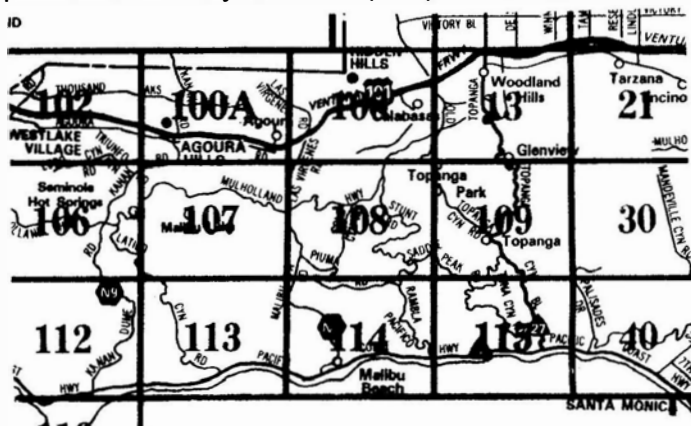
## PREDICTING DISASTERS

Continued from P. 1

Hazard abatement crews will demonstrate how to clear, thin and prune native and ornamental landscape vegetation in order to comply with local brush clearance ordinances. Along with the brush clearance demonstration NFES will be leading a **CHAPARRAL MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP** whose purpose it is to assist residents with judging disaster potential in their community and with becoming good crisis managers in preparation for calamities such as fire, flood, slides, and earthquakes. Environmental safety experts including the Foundation's Board of Directors will be on hand (both in an indoor classroom setting and outdoors on the site) to assist the public with questions about proper replanting of hillsides, slope stability and soil erosion control, locating and effectively fireproofing and landscaping one's home, identification of native and ornamental plants etc.

Topanga is the proper setting for such public awareness and self-help programs because it (specifically its Fernwood section) has been identified as a high risk area for a fire disaster similar to the Baldwin Hills fire.

As a follow-up to the brush clearance demonstration and chaparral management workshop NFES and TLVRCD have scheduled a **FIRE HAZARD ASSESSMENT FIELD TRIP** for Saturday, August 9, 1986. The field trip will start at 10:00 AM at TLVRCD headquarters located at 122 N. Topanga Canyon Blvd. Topanga (Los Angeles County Thomas Guide Map Page 109 C -4), will cover the central and western Santa Monica mountains and will conclude at 4:00 PM in Malibu. Participants need to provide their own transportation and sack lunch. Anyone is urged to contact NFES for assistance with coordinating similar field trips and related public safety programs for other fireprone watershed areas. For field trip reservations and further information please contact Lyllis Hill at (213)456-2652.



## BURNING OF HOMES

Continued from P. 1

After the predictable 1961 Bel-Air/Brentwood Fire in which 484 homes were lost, the public demanded an immediate solution to prevent or reduce such fire losses. One common sense solution would have been to ban wooden roofs in fire prone areas. However, this was only rarely feasible because the political pressure (and financial contributions) from special interest groups such as the wood shingle industry was too great.

As an alternative, research supported by public agencies then created the concept (the myth) of fire-resistant plants. Lists of plants labeled as 'fire-resistant' were eagerly snatched up by many public agencies and distributed without any further examination. Once in print, the political climate was such that it was almost impossible for knowledgeable scientists to counter 'fire-resistant' claims with further hands on research.

Movies sponsored by the wood shingle industry such as **THE GREEN FIREMAN** advocated the planting of greenbelts of 'fire-resistant' plants to protect wood shingle homes without stating that flammability depends on moisture content, the ratio of (fine) dead to live fuels, and the amount of flammable fuels present per unit area. Wood shingles have a low fuel moisture content, consist of 100% dead fuels and expose a large surface area. A wood shingle roof catching a house on fire could be compared to highly flammable grassy flash fuels catching mature woody chaparral vegetation on fire. Would you clear the flammable vegetation from around your home, chip it, compress it into shingles and nail these onto your roof where they will probably catch your house on fire?

In wildland fire control we estimate the probability of flammable materials catching on fire if they are exposed to an ignition source. During the fire conditions of the 1985 Baldwin Hills Fire, there was a 70% probability of the highly flammable plants on the hillsides catching on fire but an almost 100 percent probability of the wooden roofs catching on fire! For the Bel-Air/Brentwood fire of 1961 it had already been shown that with a 100 feet brush clearance, a house with a wood roof had a 21 times greater chance of burning than a home with a nonwood roof.

Remember that your safety depends on your neighbor's cooperation. Support ordinances that ban wood shingles in fireprone communities

## **IMPROVEMENT NEEDED CITATION: L. A. County Fire Dept.**

Competition among public agencies is a recognized fact and is often referred to as turf when one agency is negatively affected by another in properly and effectively carrying out its mandated services. When this happens the taxpayer has to foot the bill by bankrolling overlapping services or by seeing his tax dollar apparently wasted on nonproductive services.

This Foundation was founded in response to the need people felt for protecting themselves more effectively from common environmental dangers. A strong stand was immediately required to protect the right of the taxpayers to use and distribute data generated by public agencies for public welfare, to protect freedom of information, and to gain access to various experts to tap their knowledge. Apparently, Los Angeles County Fire officials saw in these efforts a threat to their turf and tried to scuttle the **NFES** efforts for a successful 1984 public safety conference, thereby also attempting to effect the 1985 conference proceedings which stressed an integrated approach to public safety.

As we approach the 21st century we must realize that fire is but one aspect in the (cost)effective management of our natural resources. Especially in Southern California, we have to achieve a more (budgetary) balanced approach to natural resource management. This approach has to include a more effective utilization of related sciences, whether or not these have strong union representation.

## **NATIONAL WILDLAND/URBAN FIRE PROTECTION INITIATIVE**

Under the name National/Urban Fire Protection Initiative, the U.S. Forest Service, in cooperation with the National Fire Protection Association and the U.S. Fire Administration, has set up a nationwide interdisciplinary task force to help develop strategies to reduce the loss of life, property, and natural resources from fires occurring in the wildland/urban interface. The major objective of the task force will be to produce a report recommending actions that will lead to a national focus in developing and implementing solutions to the wildland/urban fire problem.

Membership to the Task Force is selective and will consist of representatives from fire services,

It has been suggested that NFES should ignore such activities as even strong turf has been shrugged of as 'occasional' misunderstanding. However, the attempts over the years, by L.A. County Fire Dept. to shut down cooperative efforts as well as fire related safety publications by the U.S. Forest Service, to shut down NPS in some of its public safety efforts, and to eliminate the California Department of Forestry, is not coincidental. Such activity should be of concern to everyone as it affects public safety.

It is one thing to publically carry out cooperative efforts while on the other side of the coin hindering related work if it is viewed as "stepping on local turf." Let us hope that the cooperative efforts with other agencies carried out publically in 1986 by the L.A. County Fire Dept. reflect a genuine change in the philosophy of past and present **top management.** **With this in mind the improvement needed citation is given as a positive step forward.**

---

building and construction industry, land development firms, state, county, and city government, conservation groups, and the academic community. **NFES** is gratified that, thanks to the concern of such groups and the strong grass roots support of homeowner association groups, its wildfire related public safety activities will now be carried on at the national level. The state-of-the-art safety publications and homeowners guides produced by its staff, the 1984 conference and workshop Living in the Chaparral of Southern California (which stressed an integrated approach to public safety), the follow-up conference and workshop proceedings as well as the continuous safety seminars had come to the attention of the three lead agencies and had helped their staff in taking the initial step forward.

A 'National Wildland/Urban Fire Protection Conference' is now planned for September 15-18, 1986 in Denver.

Some concerned parties have already noted that history has shown that the battles in successfully reducing the damage from wildfires can not be won by larger budgets for fire suppression and related activities. The battles must be fought in the political arena through a focus on effective zoning ordinances and building codes and through curtailing the power of special interest groups. We concur and add to this closer cooperation among the disciplines.

## THE BOOK CORNER

In January we added 3 new publications to our list of selected bookstore items. Now we are adding more:

**PEACE OF MIND IN EARTHQUAKE COUNTRY** \$ 8.95

Written by Peter Yanew with a foreward by Charles Richter, it is an old time favorite on how to save your home and life during earthquakes.

**THE COMPLETE BOOK OF HOME INSPECTION** \$ 8.95

by Norman Becker is a book that every homeowner or homebuyer should own. It is illustrated with 150 photographs and drawings, provides inspection worksheets and inspection checklists at the end of each chapter and gives step-by-step procedures used by professional home inspectors.

**FLOWERING PLANTS** \$ 14.95

is an excellent 239 page plant identification booklet made possible through the team effort of members of the California Native Plant Society. The book focusses on coastal and chaparral regions of Southern California and features excellent plant descriptions and color plates.

**WILDFLOWERS OF THE SANTA MONICA MOUNT.** \$ 15.95

by Milt McAuley also focusses on the native flowering plants in the coastal regions of Southern California. Both 'Flowering Plants' and 'Wildflowers...' complement each other and both are recommended to the vegetation manager, homeowner, and outdoor enthusiast. Color photography is excellent.

**A HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO FIRE & WATERSHED MANAGEMENT AT THE CHAPARRAL/URBAN INTERFACE** \$ 1.50\*

This is the state-of-the-art full color abridged version of the booklet 'Living More Safely...'

**LIVING MORE SAFELY IN THE CHAPARRAL- URBAN INTERFACE** \$ 5.00

addresses managing ones watershed property through effective hillside planting, watershed-, fire- and vegetation management. Available through NFES while supplies last. Published by PSW, Berkeley, it has been reprinted in 1986.

**LIVING IN THE CHAPARRAL OF S. CALIFORNIA** \$10.95\*

features an integrated approach to resource management by 16 public safety experts who address subjects such as wildland fire management, fire ecology, landuse, planning etc.

**THE IMPACT OF THE CL-215 ON MAJOR FIRE DISASTERS** \$10.95\*

pertains to the performance of the amphibian fixed wing airplane 'super scooper' and is based on NFES research done on the 1985 Baldwin Hills burn (available Oct. 1, 1986)

**THE OAT FIRE OF OCTOBER 31, 1982** \$ 9.95\*

On the fireline research documents that age classes of woody vegetation were instrumental in controlling fire spread (avail. Jan. 1, 1987).

**FIRE MANAGEMENT IN THE S. MONICA MOUNT.** \$12.95\*

documents the fire history of the Santa Monica Mountains (the largest national recreation area adjacent to a large city) during the 20th century and offers fire management alternatives.

To order any of the above, add 6 % sales tax and \$ 2.40 for shipping and handling. We will bill you if postage exceeds this amount. Purchase orders also accepted.

Books marked \* are available at discount for five or more books. Inquire with NFES.

**National Foundation For  
Environmental Safety**  
2210 Wilshire Blvd., S.184  
Santa Monica, CA 90403  
(213) 456-2652

