

**International Association of Fire Chiefs
Wildland Fire Policy Committee
Leave Early/Evacuate or Stay and Defend (LEOSAD)
Position Statement
October 2008**



LEAVE EARLY/EVACUATE OR STAY AND DEFEND (LEOSAD)

The IAFC Wildland Fire Policy Committee submitted this position statement to the IAFC Board of Directors for their approval. The Wildland Fire Policy Committee is now developing an implementation guide for the LEOSAD program (projected spring 2009).

Problem Statement:

For many years, public response agencies have directed residents to evacuate an area that is endangered. This all or nothing approach has consistently become harder and harder to enforce as the population grows within the wildland urban interface (WUI) because there are also more structures and people to protect than fire and law enforcement agencies can adequately manage. Legal review also indicates that while public agencies use the term “mandatory” evacuation, a resident is not required to vacate said premise, only that law enforcement can restrict the resident from re-entry once vacated.

Studies in Australia have proven that people who leave too late during a wildland fire have a higher death rate than those who leave early. These studies also show that those property owners who build in fire resistive or defensive measures have a higher structure survival rate. Recent after-action studies in San Diego wildland fires show that most homes were lost not to the initial fire front, but to the secondary conflagration from house to house fires, because no one was present to monitor incipient fires.

Desired Outcome:

This new philosophy gives residents the option to become part of the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) solution based upon their comfort and preparedness level. Using the new LEOSAD model, the fire service will conduct public education courses in four modules for the public, law enforcement, firefighters, & media through community meetings. We’ll educate the public how to build in fire defensive construction components, create defensible space, provide water flow and access, and inform them what to expect if you encounter a wildland fire. It’s been found that forming the public education campaign within common media markets yield the best results.

The property owner will then make a conscious, informed decision whether they have performed adequate preventive steps to defend their property from an approaching wildland fire and that they are comfortable remaining on-site to assist firefighters. We believe that a resident can make this type of decision if educated, comfortable, physical ability and has the right to do so.

This new position is done so residents can make an **early** decision to either leave early/evacuate or stay and defend their property. If they can’t decide or are uncomfortable, they need to evacuate early and stay out. This program requires a long-term commitment (multi-year) toward

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changing past paradigms, establishing personal responsibility and creating this new community partnership.

Discussion:

Some people believe that public agencies may incur liability by not evacuating residents. General law review indicates that a public agency only incurs liability if they act in a gross neglect manner. By realizing that public agencies cannot forcibly remove residents, the LEOSAD position then brings the residents into the solution and not the confrontation.

This program is adaptive and a proven success in Australia. It will be embraced by many entities and yet reserved by some. It has to be realized that public agencies must address the growing WUI problem and this is one option that will require a multi-year commitment by those fire agencies embracing this program.

LEOSAD is not a statement alone; it must be a *program* that entails education, personal responsibility and preventive/proactive action by the resident. This program is not a one-size fits all package. Each fire agency and community needs to review the programs tenants for applicability within their respective jurisdiction. This program may also not be viable for those communities with special needs populations and limited access. Note: this program is intended for property owners and residents and not intended for private fire protection resource direction.

Organizational Endorsements:

- National Wildfire Coordinating Group / Wildland Urban Interface Working Team
- FIRESCOPE
- Community Wildfire Protection Plan Project Partners
- California Association of Fire Chiefs

Pending Endorsements:

- Western Division of the International Association of Fire Chiefs
- National Association of State Foresters

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Roper

Chair, IAFC Wildland Fire Policy Committee

Fire Chief, Ventura County (CA) Fire Department