Thomas Fire Rebuild: Lessons Learned and Challenges Encountered

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THOMAS FIRE
Cause: Under investigation
Date: December 4, 2017
Location: Ventura, Santa Barbara counties
Acres: 281,893
Structures: 1,063 destroyed
Fatalities: 2
100% contained on January 12, 2018
City of Ventura residents were caught off guard when the hillsides exploded in flames. The wind-driven Thomas fire tore through neighborhoods in the middle of the night, destroying homes, apartment complexes and a psychiatric hospital.
On December 4, 2017, the Thomas Fire was first reported to the north of Santa Paula, near Steckel Park and Thomas Aquinas College, after which the fire is named. Officials attribute the rapid expansion of the blaze to the strong Santa Ana winds that were gusting up to 60 miles per hour that day.
Many people fled with little or no warning when evacuation orders were issued, as the fire had traveled 12 miles (19 km) in just a few hours. Over 104,607 residents were evacuated.
BUILDING AND SAFETY ASSESSMENTS

• Windshield Survey Dec. 5th thru Dec. 9th
  Approximately 20,000 Sites Surveyed

• Detailed Assessment Dec. 12th thru Dec. 22nd
  Approximately 1,800 Sites Surveyed

STATE AGENCIES

• Cal FIRE
• Cal OES (Office of Emergency Services)
• CalRecycle
Structures destroyed in the CITY OF VENTURA
- 524 Completely Lost
- 128 Partially Lost
Phase 1
Site Cleanup
Hazardous Waste Removal
Phase 1: Site Cleanup/Household Hazardous Waste Removal

During Phase 1, the US EPA and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), along with the Ventura County Environmental Health Division, inspected over 1000 properties and removed toxic household hazardous waste such as: lead acid and household batteries; compressed gas cylinders; fertilizers; pool chemicals; paints, thinners and aerosol cans; asbestos siding; pipe insulation and tiles; and cathode ray tubes (CRTs) from televisions, computers and other electronic devices. The contaminated debris was cleaned up and contained as quickly as possible to minimize exposure to emergency personnel, the public, and workers involved in rebuild efforts.

The Phase 1 clearance did not include removal of fire debris and ash, which may contain hazardous substances like heavy metals and asbestos fibers. The remaining ash and debris was removed during Phase 2.
Phase 2: Debris Removal and Property Clean-up

Option 1: CalRecycle Fire Damaged Debris Clearance
Option 2: Local Fire Debris Removal Program
Phase 2: Debris Removal and Property Clean-up

- **Option 1: State Program**

- **During Phase 2,** the State (CalRecycle) removed the remaining debris (including building foundations) from properties with destroyed structures. A Right-of-Entry (ROE) application and insurance information had to be completed before the work was begun. Work included removal of all structural debris, foundations, trees that present a safety hazard to CalRecycle’s work crews, and some soil to ensure that the site is clean and safe for rebuilding. All of the work was undertaken by CalRecycle contractors and there is no cost to the property owner. However, any insurance proceeds for debris removal are dedicated to off-set costs.

- **For Partially Burned or Damaged Structures:** Local program was created
CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING THE INITIAL REBUILD PROCESS

- Reuse of Foundations
- Reuse of Deep Foundation Systems (Caissons, etc.)
- Slope Stability
- Cut and Fill Issues
- Possible Re-Grading
- Retaining Walls
ASSISTING THE COMMUNITY TO REBUILD

- Wildfire Victims WILL pick up pieces after a disaster - RESILIENCY
- Communities WILL rise from the ashes.
- Cities MUST be prepared to immediately assist families to rebuild, with the goal REPOPULATING as soon as possible.
- COMMUNICATE WITH HOMEOWNERS ABOUT SERVICES
- MAKE SURE THE RECONSTRUCTION GUIDELINES AND RULES ARE CLEAR
- PARTNER WITH DESIGN PROFESSIONALS
- BOLSTER CITY STAFF FOR INFLUX OF WORK AHEAD
- CHALLENGES FOR HOMEOWNER UNDERSTANDING THEIR INSURANCE POLICY
COUNCIL MEETING

• Emergency Ordinance
• Development fees waived
• Expedited plan check process
• Contract services agreement
Presubmittal appointments
Plan check expedited reviews
14 business days
PERSONALIZED MEETINGS WITH FAMILIES AFFECTED BY THE DEVASTING FIRES
HANDOUTS

When is a Geotechnical Investigation Required?

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this technical bulletin is to clarify when a geotechnical investigation is required as part of a building permit application. The requirements below are intended as general policy guidelines. Section 1803 of the 2016 California Building Code (CBC) outlines specific instances in which a geotechnical report is required based on soil conditions and construction methods. Where a geotechnical investigation is required, the content of the report shall conform to the requirements of Section 1803 and current City Ordinance.

GENERAL

The requirement for the geotechnical investigation is based on the City of Ventura Ordinance, 2016 which requires a geotechnical investigation be conducted when the proposed structure area is one thousand square feet or more in total proposed area.

Due to City of Ventura being located in Seismic Design Category E, the geotechnical investigation shall also include all required testing and reporting as outlined in Section 1803.5.11 and 1803.5.12 which applies to all structures that are being proposed in Seismic Design Category E.

In all cases, if a geotechnical report has been previously performed for the parcel, this report must be included in the building permit application. If the existing report is more than a year old, a geotechnical report update letter from a qualified licensed professional must be included with the permit application. The update letter shall address whether the recommendations of the previous report are still valid for the proposed project and if additional soil analysis is required.
Plan check becomes a priority
First permit issued

- First Plan submitted 4-18-2018
- Approval May 18, 2018
More permits issued
CONSTRUCTION PROCESS underway

- Hours of Construction
- Inspections
- Staging of Construction Materials
- Construction Trailers
- Certificates of Occupancy
- Temporary Utilities
Grading and Fine grading
A YEAR LATER…

Thomas Fire Rebuild efforts:
417 repair permits issued
179 complete rebuild homes approved
106 complete rebuild homes under review

Building and Safety has given occupancy for the administrative offices and assessment trailers for Aurora Vista Del Mar Hospital. Kalorama Harbor View apartments, under plan check review for the reconstruction of 32 apartment units. Hawaiian Apartment complex under design.

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