



## **Pechanga Homes Saved By Fuels Treatments California - 2004**

The Morales Fire was started in early September 2004 by a surge in an electrical transmission line near Temecula. The Pechanga Tribal Fire Department responded, and found a wind-driven wildfire burning upslope and threatening a home on the crest of the hill.

Captain Nachtmann of the Pechanga Tribal Fire Department ordered his firefighters upslope to provide structure defense, and quickly realized that the home – lot 45 – had defensible space cleared around it. Nachtmann was then able to concentrate his attack on an area of burning chaparral at the head of the fire. He said if the area not been cleared, he doubted that the home would have survived the fire.



In fact, about 98 percent of the 200 nearby homes, had recently been cleared of hazardous fuels by the Pechanga Wildland/Urban Interface Fuels Crew. Crew members, mostly tribal members and Pechanga reserve firefighters, were credited with preventing a “domino effect” in which many of the homes surrounding lot 45 could have been destroyed.

The Morales Fire slowed considerably when it burned into the treated defensible space around lot 45. Grass fuels were 1-2 inches high, and low chaparral shrubs had been removed with a brush hog. Because the fuels were so low to the ground, the fire dropped to short flamelengths, allowing a safe and effective direct attack by the Pechanga firefighters. Once the fire moved into the defensible space, it wrapped around the lot, directing the flame front away from homes, and into a recent burn area where it was controlled.

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