



## *Setting*

Historically, Riverside County has had the second highest number of state and federally-declared disasters in California. Which hazard poses the greatest risk? Which threat renders Riverside County most vulnerable? How bad will it get, how often? These deceptively simple questions lie at the heart of risk management.

For example, Riverside County has suffered six fire disasters since 1970. Much of the County is at risk from wildland fire, which is a severe and growing problem. Meanwhile, throughout the 20th century, floods caused by storms have been the number one natural disaster in the United States, for lives lost and property damage. Since 1975, Riverside County has suffered eleven floods severe enough to merit Gubernatorial or Presidential declarations of disaster. Inundation due to dam failure, while unlikely, would have even more devastating consequences. Failure of unstable ground, whether due to collapsing or expanding soil, or slope failures such as landslides, debris flows and rockfalls, can cause localized but expensive damage. Areas prone to unstable soil and slopes can generally be predicted, but, absent mitigation and maintenance, such failures can be frequent and recurring.

All of these hazards are costly and potentially life-threatening and affect significant portions of Riverside County. Some hazards must be avoided entirely, while the potential impacts of others can be mitigated by special building techniques. In still other cases, safety-oriented organizations, such as Fire Safe, can provide assistance in educating the public and promoting practices that contribute to improved public safety. With existing development in areas prone to these disasters, an aggressive program is needed to persuade property owners to mitigate, or to sell the property to the County or other entity, or to modify use of the property.

Major earthquakes will cause disasters less frequently than other hazards, yet they have the most serious life, safety, and economic consequences. A mere tens of seconds of strong ground shaking can devastate large areas of the County and overwhelm the County's ability to respond. Economic consequences could last for years. A large earthquake can also trigger occurrences of most of the other disasters considered in this Safety Element.

Because major earthquakes are such high-consequence events, because relatively easy land use mitigation efforts do not considerably reduce earthquake hazards, and because earthquakes have far-reaching consequences outside of damaged areas, much legislation has been written to reduce society's vulnerability to such hazards. For the same reasons, many of the Safety Element policies address earthquake hazards.