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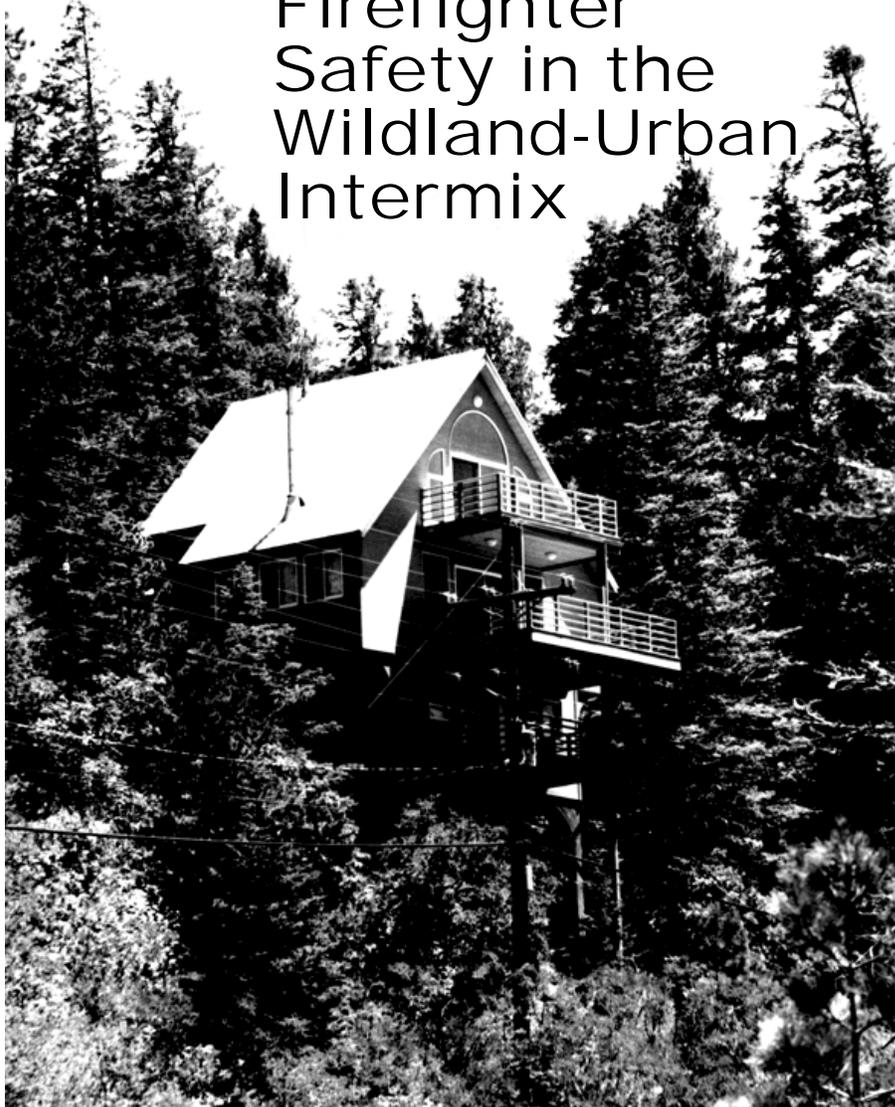
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Improving Firefighter Safety in the Wildland-Urban Intermix



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Introduction

Each year, the incursion of private residences in wildland increases the chance that wildland and structural firefighters will battle an uncontrolled fire in the “wildland-urban intermix,” where homes and naturally occurring vegetation are the fuels at risk. Although much of the general population believes that wildland-urban intermix fires are unique to Southern California, they exist across the United States, and are threatening to destroy valuable

natural resources and structures at an ever-increasing rate. The past several years have seen these intermix fires (Figure 1) occur from Florida to Alaska, from Long Island to Montana, and from Maine to Southern California. While the natural fuel types of these fires may differ based on geographic and climatic conditions across the country, one factor remains constant: the risks to firefighters battling these fires. Since 1990, numerous firefighters (both wildland and

structural) have been entrapped, burned, and sometimes killed while suppressing fires in the intermix.

With lands in the wildland-urban intermix continuing to increase, it is time to clearly define all the groups involved in these areas, and to identify the factors that must be addressed to ensure firefighter safety when the inevitable wildland-urban intermix fires do occur.



Figure 1—A firefighter removes hose while fighting a wildland-urban intermix fire in San Diego County (Los Angeles Times Syndicate Photo, Don Barletti).

