

EL DORADO HILLS FIRE DEPARTMENT
"YOUR SAFETY ... OUR COMMITMENT"



**FINAL REPORT ON FIRE PREVENTION
SERVICES PERFORMED IN RESCUE CEA
(AGREEMENT FOR SERVICES# 5753)**

January 2022 Report

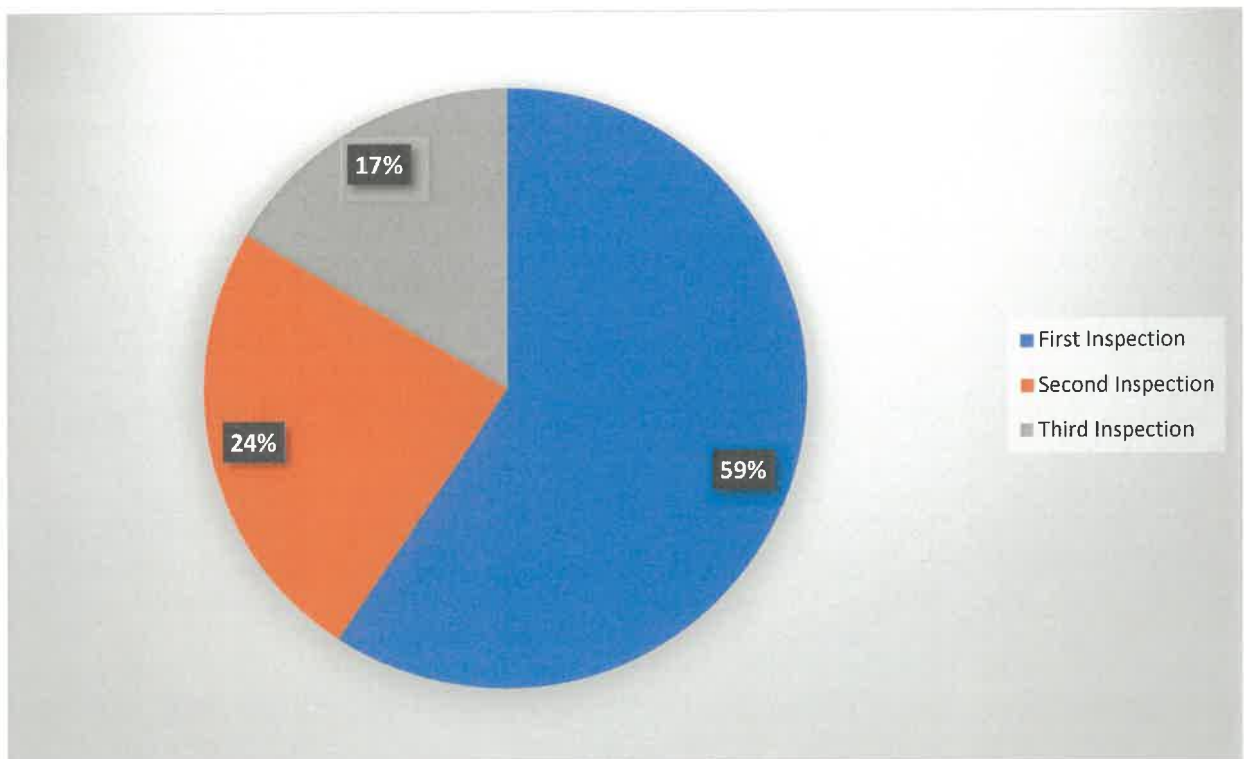
1.0 OVERVIEW

On May 25, 2021, the County of El Dorado (hereafter referred to as County) and the El Dorado Hills County Water District, operating as the El Dorado Hills Fire Department (hereafter referred to as EDHFD), entered into a service agreement for wildfire fire inspection services in the Rescue County Emphasis Area (CEA). The agreement was amended on June 23, 2021, to clarify that the agreement was for the period of July 1 – December 31, 2021. County requested that EDHFD perform inspection services on 237 private parcels in the Rescue CEA¹ to confirm that each property complied with County Codes & Ordinances Chapter 8.09 (Vegetation Management and Defensible Space).

EDHFD performed a total of 428 inspections of properties within the CEA. In addition to the 237 parcels identified in the agreement², EDHFD performed inspections on an additional 17 private parcels that were contiguous with the borders of the CEA area. This report identifies the results of the total inspection performed by EDHFD.

As shown in Figure 1-1, of the 428 inspections completed by EDHFD in the CEA all 254 parcels received a first inspection. A second inspection was completed on 104 parcels. Three or more inspections were completed on 70 parcels.

Figure 1-1: Percentage of Inspections Performed by EDHFD in CEA



At the time of this report's preparation 196 of the 254 parcels (77%) inspected by EDHFD within the CEA were found to be in compliance with the County's Vegetation Management and Defensible Space requirements. However, an additional 53 parcels (21%) have not been

¹ The County had previously notified each parcel owner in the CEA of the scheduled inspection earlier in 2021.

² See Amendment A of the agreement for a complete list of parcels identified within the CEA.

inspected due to privacy right limits associated with driveway gates or other causes. Finally, five parcels (2%) are being referred to the County for enforcement action as a result of the property owner refusing to comply with the County’s requirements after multiple inspections by EDHFD.

2.0 REPORT FINDINGS

EDHFD staff initiated the Vegetation Management and Defensible Space inspection program within the CEA beginning on July 15, 2021³. Staff placed a large sign at each of the five primary access points into the CEA one week prior to the inspections starting to provide community awareness to the residents. Three EDHFD Defensible Space Inspectors and one Firefighter from the Rescue Fire Protection District⁴ were assigned to complete the parcel inspections.

Figure 2-1 provides a summary of the inspections performed by EDHFD during the agreement period. The majority of parcels received their first inspection during the months of July and August. By early September all but four parcels had received their first inspection by EDHFD inspectors also investigated two citizen complaints filed with the County Vegetation Management Program on one undeveloped parcel located within the CEA for compliance with the “Good Neighbor” provisions found in County Code.

Figure 2-1: Summary of Defensible Space Inspections Performed by Type/Month

Activity Type	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec ⁵	Jan	Total
First Inspection - Compliant	61	73	10	1	0	0	3	148
Second Inspection - Compliant	0	10	5	13	0	0	4	32
Third Inspection - Compliant	0	1	1	4	4	0	2	12
First Inspection - Non-Compliant	6	16	1	0	0	0	1	24
Second Inspection - Non-Compliant	0	7	4	1	2	0	4	18
Third Inspection - Non-Compliant	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	5
First Inspection - Uninspected	57	20	3	0	0	0	0	80
Second Inspection - Uninspected	0	15	17	19	0	0	3	54
Third Inspection - Uninspected	0	0	13	20	20	0	0	53
Complaint Investigations	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	126	142	54	58	27	0	21	428

Eighty parcels were assessed and found to have closed gates that prevented access⁶ to inspectors to perform a full inspection of the property for compliance with County Code. EDHFD inspectors

³ EDHFD Defensible Space Inspectors were performing vegetation management inspections prior to that date within the district and were unavailable to inspect CEA parcels.

⁴ EDHFD provides administrative services, including fire prevention support, to the Rescue Fire Protection District as part of a shared services agreement between the two districts.

⁵ No contract inspections were performed in December, 2021 due to Covid-19 Health Precautions and the Holiday Break Period.

⁶ Government inspections of private property are limited under the right to privacy requirements found in both state and federal law.

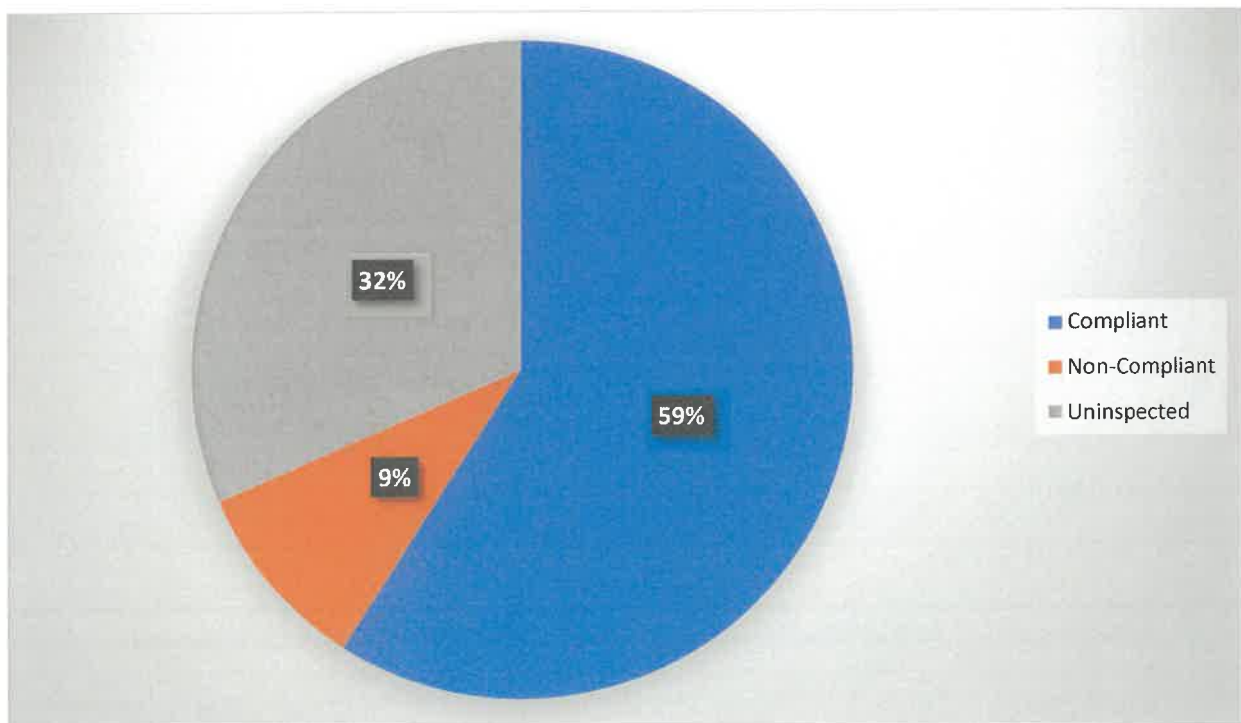
placed a request to contact handbill on the gate and a letter was sent to the parcel owner requesting they contact the district to schedule the inspection. If no contact was made by the owner EDHFD would then send an inspection request letter via certified mail.

Twenty-four parcels within the CEA were inspected and found to be in violation of the County Code provisions at the time of the first inspection. Each homeowner was issued a corrective action notice using a EDHFD inspection form that was consistent with the County’s form. The homeowners were educated by staff on the risk to their property and adjoining properties that the hazard posed and provided guidance on the steps that they should undertake to correct the violation. The four most common violations discovered by inspectors within the CEA were:

- Dead grasses, shrubs and trees located within 100-feet of structures to prevent embers and fire spread from endangering the exposed exterior walls, windows and decks.
- Removing leaf material and other debris from the roof and gutters on the structure to reduce ember ignition sources.
- Dead vegetation and other hazardous vegetation within 10-feet of LP-Gas Tank.
- Increasing the recommended spacing between shrubs, trees and other vegetation to prevent fire spread from extending to the structure through dense vegetation within 100-feet of the building.

Figure 2-2 provides the percentage of parcels within the CEA that were found to be either compliant, non-compliant or uninspected after the first inspection performed by inspectors.

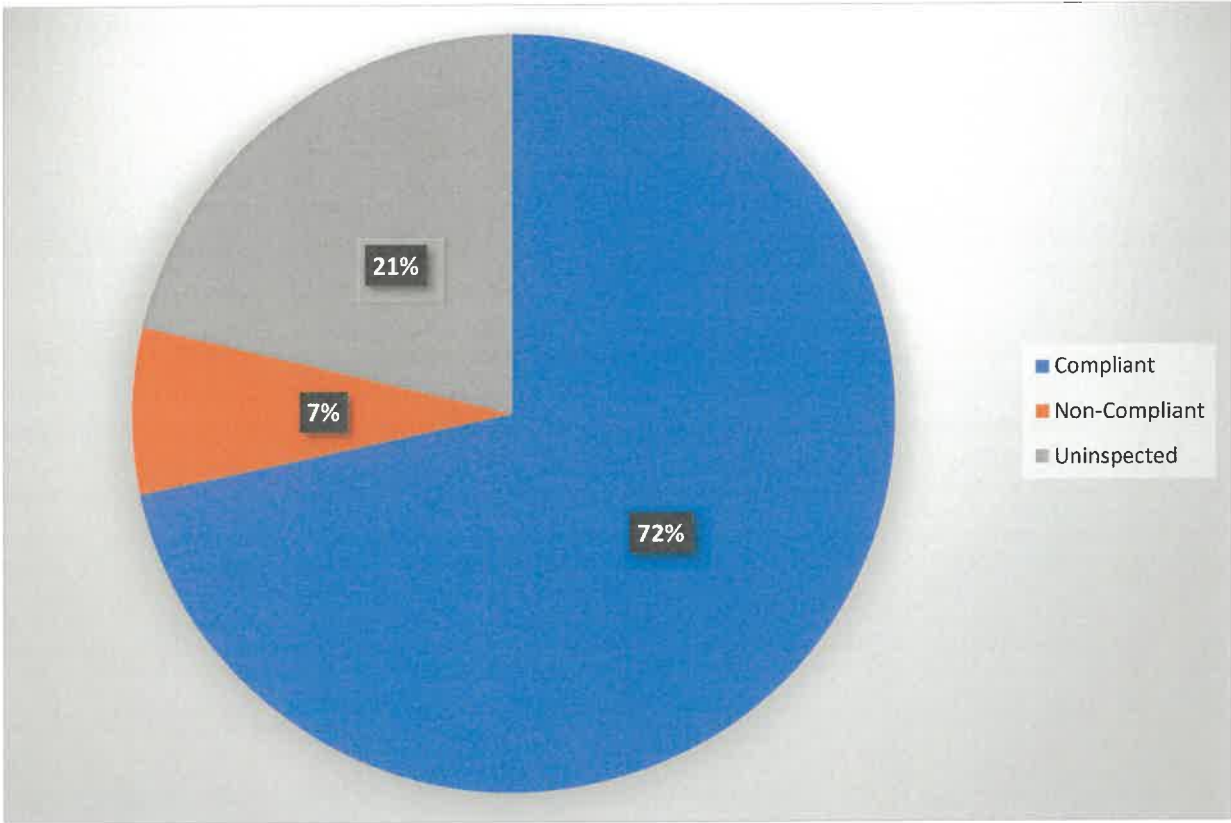
Figure 2-2: Breakdown of Property Inspections Performed After the First Inspection



A large percentage (150) of the parcels in the CEA inspected were found to be in compliance with County Code at the time of the first inspection. At the onset of the inspection program beginning in the CEA many of the residents stated upon contact with EDHFD inspectors that they were not aware of the inspection program in their community until they observed the large signs posted along the access road. No resident contacted reported that they were aware of the inspection activity as a result of the written notice sent to them by the County earlier in the year. Inspectors encountered some resistance from owners to the inspections taking place but this concern was overcome in most instances by on-site education about the program.

Figure 2-3 provides the percentage of parcels within the CEA that were found to be either compliant, non-compliant or uninspected after the second inspection performed by inspectors.

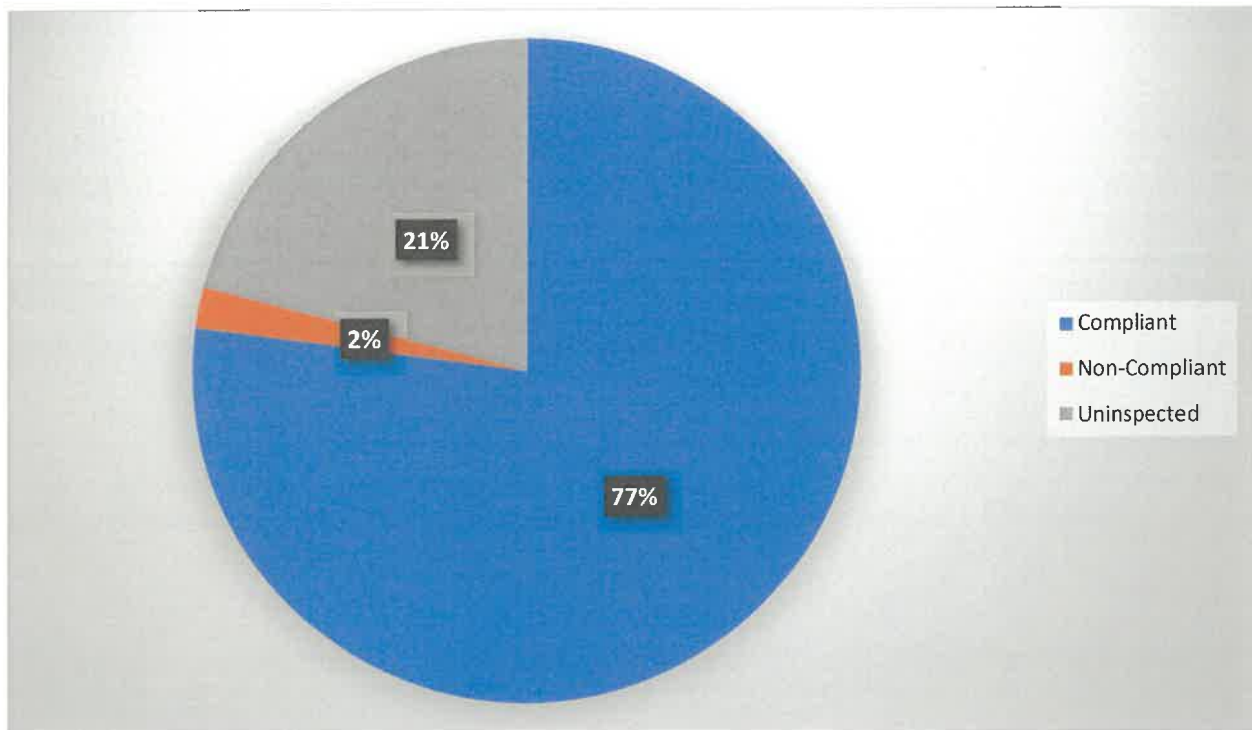
Figure 2-3: Breakdown of Property Inspections Performed After the Second Inspection



The number of properties inspected that were found to be in compliance with County Code increased to 182 at the conclusion of the second inspection. The number of parcels that were inspected a second time and found to still require additional corrective actions decreased to 18. The number of parcels that remained uninspected dropped from 80 to 54 parcels. Each uninspected property owner was sent a second letter via US Certified Mail requesting that they contact EDHFD to schedule an inspection.

Figure 2-4 provides the percentage of parcels within the CEA that were found to be either compliant, non-compliant or uninspected after the third inspection performed by inspectors.

Figure 2-4: Breakdown of Property Inspections Performed After the Third Inspection



The number of properties inspected that were found to be in compliance with County Code increased to 196 at the conclusion of the third inspection. The number of parcels that were inspected a third time and found to still require additional corrective actions decreased to 5. The number of parcels that remained uninspected dropped from 54 to 53 parcels.

The majority of inspections performed in the CEA were completed by the end of November, 2021. Efforts to finish the inspection of the remaining parcels that required reinspection's was delayed in December, 2021 due to COVID-19 health precaution actions that directly impacted EDHFD inspection staff and the holiday period. Eight inspections were completed within the CEA in January, 2022 as a result of the December impacts.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. The County and its partner agencies should consider starting the defensible space inspections of individual parcels earlier in the year.** Defensible space inspections should begin during the late-winter, early-spring seasons to allow homeowners the opportunity to remove hazardous vegetation and other hazards when the overall fire risk to the community is generally low. EDHFD inspection staff observed that many of the violations observed on individual parcels in the CEA should be abated prior to the fire risk increasing in the community. This will allow parcel owners the opportunity to remove annual grasses, reduce hazardous vegetation, remove leaf matter on roofs, etc.... and then dispose of the vegetation waste materials when the potential of escaped burn piles and mechanical operations such as mowing grasses starting a large loss wildfire is reduced.

2. **The County and its partner agencies should look at replacing the existing Vegetation Management Reporting System with a more robust system capable of meeting property owner and agency needs.** The County's Vegetation Management Records System (ArcGIS Collector) is very limited in its application and use in reporting inspections. The system has no reliable means to create and print inspection records in the field. This would allow inspection staff to provide the owner/occupant an electronic record of the inspection in the field. Inspection records entered into the system are frequently not found when inspectors go back to the parcel. Photographs and other attached materials cannot be retrieved or printed. The parcel owner has no online access to see the status of the report. Inspectors have no means in the system to schedule future inspections of a parcel. No parcel self-certification capability to reduce the frequency of reinspection's for minor violations.

3. **The County and its partner agencies should increase community outreach and awareness in the CEA prior to starting the inspections.** Additional efforts in community outreach will increase awareness and reduce the number of hazards found during the inspection. The road signs were effective in improving awareness. Individual property owner notices should probably be sent out no sooner than 30 days before the inspection. Community newsletters, news article in local medial outlets, and the use of social medial outlets can increase awareness by the public.

4. **Defensible space inspections of parcels should occur with no less than two inspectors present on site.** While many parcel owners were cooperative, and in some cases eager, there were a few instances when the parcel owner or occupant challenged the right of both the County and EDHFD inspectors to perform the inspection. In those instances, staff was able to educate the owner/occupant on the benefits of the inspection and we worked collaboratively to reach a successful outcome. Having two inspectors work together to perform the inspection both [a] increases officer safety, and [b] allows the inspection team to perform all of the tasks associated with completing the inspection effectively.

5. **The enforcement of the County Code on uninspected properties when owners refuse to cooperate after three attempts needs to be resolved.** The results of the EDHFD inspections in the Rescue CEA area demonstrate that the County and partner agencies need to develop a comprehensive strategy that reduces the number of property owners who refuse to allow access to government inspectors to verify that the property complies with County Code. Twenty-one percent (54 parcels) of the parcels in the CEA were not inspected as a result of [a] closed gates across driveway, and [b] ignoring multiple legal notices requesting access for the inspection to occur.

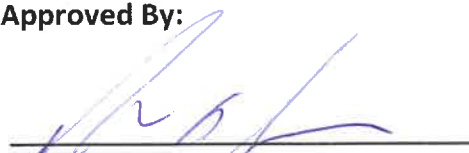
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