

Julian: Are there special risks that minority, disabled, and economically disadvantaged populations face regarding notice, communication, evacuation, and other survival issues during a wildfire in Los Angeles County which already has an extremely high Probability over the next 3 years and estimated damages of over \$7 billion in light of prior telecom related fires? Please be specific with examples of the Risk Profile for these vulnerable populations.

CHATGPT:

Yes, minority, disabled, and economically disadvantaged populations face significant and specific risks during wildfires in Los Angeles County. These risks are exacerbated by factors related to notice, communication, evacuation, and other survival issues, especially considering the high probability of wildfires and the potential for severe damages in the area.

1. Notice and Communication Risks

Limited Access to Technology: Economically disadvantaged populations often have limited access to technology, such as smartphones, internet, and advanced alert systems (like apps or notifications). This means they might not receive timely warnings or updates about a wildfire.

Language Barriers: Minority populations, especially those who speak languages other than English, may not receive alerts in their primary language. Emergency communications may be less effective for non-English speakers, leading to delays in receiving critical information.

Disability Barriers: Disabled individuals, particularly those with hearing or visual impairments, might struggle to receive and understand emergency alerts. For instance, deaf individuals might miss out on audio alerts, while visually impaired individuals may have difficulty accessing visual information.

2. Evacuation Challenges

Transportation Barriers: Economically disadvantaged populations may lack access to private transportation, making it harder to evacuate quickly. Public transportation options might be limited during a crisis, especially in rural or underserved areas of Los Angeles County.

Mobility Issues: Disabled individuals, especially those with physical disabilities, face significant challenges in evacuating. Wheelchair users, for example, may have difficulty navigating through rough terrain or debris. Additionally, those who rely on specialized medical equipment or home healthcare services might find it impossible to leave without assistance.

Overcrowded Housing: Economically disadvantaged populations often live in overcrowded housing conditions. In an emergency, it can be challenging to evacuate a large number of people from a single residence, especially if some residents require additional assistance.

3. Survival and Recovery Risks

Shelter Access: Economically disadvantaged individuals may have limited access to safe and suitable shelter options during and after a wildfire. Public shelters might not accommodate

the needs of disabled individuals, such as those requiring medical care or specific accessibility features.

Health and Safety Concerns: Minority and economically disadvantaged populations are more likely to suffer from pre-existing health conditions, which can be exacerbated by smoke inhalation or other wildfire-related hazards. Additionally, these populations may have less access to healthcare, both during and after the event.

Information Gaps: Minority and economically disadvantaged populations may not be aware of available resources for recovery, such as FEMA assistance, insurance claims, or community support programs. This lack of information can delay their recovery process and deepen the long-term impact of the disaster.

4. Case Examples

2018 Woolsey Fire: During the Woolsey Fire, reports indicated that many residents in lower-income areas did not receive timely evacuation notices. The reliance on cell phone alerts, which may not reach people without smartphones, left many vulnerable.

2017 Thomas Fire: In the Thomas Fire, language barriers were a significant issue. Many Spanish-speaking residents did not receive emergency alerts in their language, leading to confusion and delays in evacuation.

2019 Saddle Ridge Fire: Disabled individuals reported significant challenges in evacuating from the Saddle Ridge Fire due to inadequate transportation options and shelters that were not fully accessible.

5. Telecom-Related Risks

Communication Infrastructure Vulnerabilities: Previous wildfires in California, including those in Los Angeles County, have damaged telecommunications infrastructure, leading to power outages and disrupted communication channels. This disruption disproportionately affects vulnerable populations who rely on consistent communication to receive alerts and coordinate evacuations.

Emergency Alert System Failures: Past telecom-related fires have exposed weaknesses in the emergency alert system. For example, cell towers that were damaged or destroyed during wildfires failed to deliver critical alerts, leaving some residents uninformed about evacuation orders.

Conclusion

To mitigate these risks, Los Angeles County needs to implement targeted strategies for vulnerable populations, including multilingual communication, accessible evacuation plans, and tailored support services during and after wildfires. Proactive planning and community engagement are crucial to ensure that all residents, particularly the most vulnerable, can safely navigate the challenges posed by wildfires.

