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Immediate steps that can be taken to prepare for rainy season erosion control and hopefully minimize future firestorm vulnerability.

As we try to absorb the aftermath of this horrible event, and come to terms with the consequences for ourselves, friends, and family, it may seem premature to try to focus on the future. However, we do need to start thinking about mudslides and flashfloods as the rainy season begins. There are some very concrete measures that can be taken now to help save our homes. Many insurance policies do not cover the damage due to flooding.

In the past the conventional wisdom has been to seed fast growing non-native grasses (like Rye) after fires. The thought was that planting might help control erosion. Unfortunately, seeding has absolutely no effect for at least the first two rainstorms; most of the debris and sediment left after a fire comes down during those first storms. Seeding can even make the situation worse by introducing non-native grasses and weeds that later create fire ladders that move the fire along at 30-60 mph. Creating simple debris and diversion dams is a much more effective way to protect your house.

Look around your house. If you have a slope leading down to your property identify the depressions or swales where the water is going to flow. If the slope is gentle (perhaps 1 foot drop in 10 feet), then a single debris dam crossing the swale should be sufficient. You can make it from fence tee posts driven into the ground and woven with burned brush. The object is to slow a 50 mph mudslide down to 5-10 mph to allow the sediment to settle. For steep slopes, debris dams every 10-25 feet may be in order. Then use sandbags to create levees to divert water from your property.

If your yard is backed by one long straight slope, a better solution may be to dig a trench along the bottom, and then run a line of sandbags 2 or 3 high completely along your side of the trench. You can then create small woven debris dams in the trench. The debris dams will slow the flow of debris and sediment, and the sandbags will divert the running water

Little distinction has been made between native plant communities like chaparral and the non-native grasses and weeds. They have been lumped together in the term "brush". However, while chaparral burns hot and high, fires tend to move much more slowly through healthy, weed-free plant communities. Many of the areas where the fire was moving the fastest (like Miramar) had dead grass and weeds completely surrounding the native shrubs.

If you feel compelled to sow seed, at least put down California native wildflowers, like Poppies and Lupine. Stay away from Rye or other grasses, and beware of generic "Wildflower Mixes" that contain few actual native flowers and lots of European weeds. There is an excellent web link that describes these measures in more detail at www.laspilitas.com/classes/After_fire.html. Additional losses may be minimized by the action taken now.