

## NATION

# Firewalls Missing in Devastating Wildfires

NewsUSA

(NU) - In October 2003, California wildfires blazed through Ventura County, just north of Los Angeles. News reports indicated that among the devastating effects were 22 lost lives, more than 3,600 destroyed homes and more than 750,000 burned acres of land.

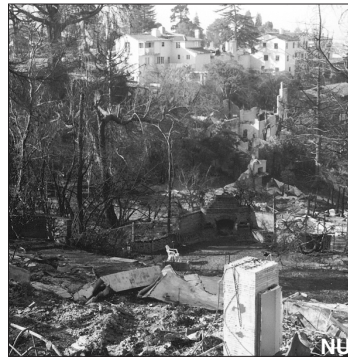
The National Concrete Masonry Association says much of the damage could have been prevented or contained if fire-resistant concrete masonry firewalls and exterior walls had been used in construction of the homes.

Scott Anders, who lost his home to the fires, saw four neighbors die in the inferno. Anders said he is not sure he wants to rebuild in the area, but if he does, fire safety will be a top priority. "We knew we were living in a tinderbox," he said.

Unlike wood and other lightweight building materials, concrete masonry does not provide fuel for a fire or produce hazardous fumes. And concrete masonry can withstand longer fire exposure without structural collapse, improving safety for firefighters and homeowners.

The use of concrete masonry in construction limits the spreading of fires when they do occur. Concrete is noncombustible and maintains its structural integrity during a blaze.

A balanced design concept promotes a comprehensive approach to fire safety that includes three components:



**Wildfires in California destroyed many homes.**

- Compartmentalization by using noncombustible walls and floors to limit fire spreading.

- Automatic detection, such as smoke detectors.

- Automatic sprinklers to suppress the fire until it can be extinguished.

These components, working together, can provide the highest levels of property protection and fire safety.

Fire tragedies, such as the one in California, have caused people to look more closely at home design and construction. Consumers are demanding greater levels of protection. If homeowners are to have a greater chance of protecting their homes and their lives, engineers and building code officials must comply with these demands, says the National Concrete Masonry Association.

For more information on fire safety, call 1-800-366-7731 or visit [www.ncma.org](http://www.ncma.org).