

WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS

Laguna Beach Unified School District

A Report to the Board of Trustees • August 27, 2026

- **Ryan Zajda** Director of Facilities and Sustainability, LBUSD
- **Tim Crilly** Co Chair LBUSD Safety Committee & Athletic Trainer, LBHS
- **Brian Carlson** Assistant Principal, LBHS
- **Pat Cary** Administrative Fire Captain, LBFD
- **Chris Gort** Fire Safety Inspector, Wildfire Mitigation Programs
- **Jose Videla** Managing Principal, TBP Architects



LAGUNA BEACH
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

District Overview & Site Review

Ryan Zajda – Director of Facilities and Sustainability, LBUSD

Governing Framework

- AB 1747 / SB 848 require an annually reviewed Comprehensive Safety Plan (Ed. Code § 32280–32286, Board Policy 0450), aligned to NIMS
- Site Specific Safety Plan preparation by school site. Updated on an annual basis.
- School annual Fire and Life Safety Inspection Laguna Beach Fire Department (LBFD) and Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA)
- School Vegetation Management and Wildfire Risk Reduction Inspection by Laguna Beach Fire Department (LBFD) and Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA)

Orange County Intelligence Assessment Center (OCIAC)

Regular school site risk assessments and guidance reports to address safety and security vulnerabilities. Focus is in three primary areas: facilities, technology, and wellness.

Sites Covered

- **District Office**
550 Blumont Street
- **El Morro Elementary**
8681 N. Coast Highway
- **Top of the World Elementary**
21601 Treetop Lane
- **Thurston Middle School**
2100 Park Avenue
- **Laguna Beach High School**
625 Park Avenue

Safety Committees, Partnerships & Training

Tim Crilly — Co Chair LBUUSD Safety Committee & Athletic Trainer, LBHS

1

Two-Level Committees

- LBUUSD Safety Committee — District Safety Plan and Guidance
- Site Specific Safety Planning Committee — principal, teacher, parent & classified staff reps at every campus (Ed. Code § 32281)

2

District & Site Command

- **EOC at District Office:** Bridge between public emergency services and districtwide operations.
- **School Site Incident Command:** Staff and students address emergency incidents with EOC, police, and fire.

3

Partners & Affiliations

- City of Laguna Beach Police and Fire Departments
- Emergency Preparedness Interagency Collaborative (EPIC)

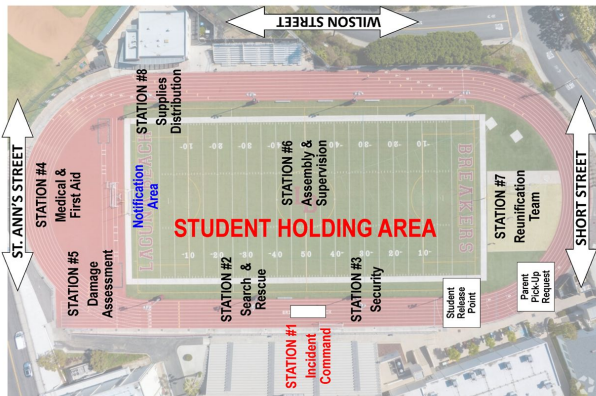


School Site-Specific Safety Preparation

Brian Carlson — Assistant Principal, LBHS



El Morro — alternate zone: El Morro Canyon Trail → bus staging at El Morro State Park → LBHS



TEAM STATION LOCATOR MAP

Laguna Beach High School — Evacuation staging plan

Every site defines an on-campus dispersal zone, a shelter-in-place location, and an off-site alternate evacuation zone with bus transport.

- Thurston: designated fire rated gym and field area; mapped search-and-rescue zones by team; mid-period/mid-lunch evacuation protocol
- LBHS: football field/track evacuation area; 4 numbered campus sweep zones; formal Runner/Locator reunification
- Top of the World: full bus-evacuation drill and coastal red flag staging — directly applicable to wildfire scenarios
- El Morro: designated MPR/field staging area and evacuation bus staging zone at State Park El Morro Canyon Trail

Objective:

Proactive approach to school safety and security by working closely with law enforcement, emergency services, LBUSD, staff, families, and community partners to maintain a comprehensive safety plan and provide ongoing staff & student training in emergency preparedness, crisis response, and recovery.

City, Fire Agency & Land Management Coordination

Pat Cary, Administrative Fire Captain, and Chris Gort, Fire Safety Inspector, Wildfire Mitigation Programs

Inspection Coverage

- Laguna Beach Fire Department — LBHS, Thurston, Top of the World
- OCFA — El Morro Elementary

Fuel Modification

- City of Laguna Beach: targeted goat grazing on adjacent hillsides
- El Morro: OCFA hand crews working with a State Parks staff biologist
- District manages fuel modification of vegetation within property limits.

Wildfire Communications

A 3-phase message template (awareness → status updates → closure) is built into the District's Safety Plan, coordinated with the City. District works directly with City EOC to collaborate and push messages in sync with community messaging through **NIXLE**.

Fire Prevention Weed Abatement & Tree Trimming



HeloPod Helicopter Water Fill Station

Strategic infrastructure supporting local and regional aerial fire suppression capabilities.



Building & Site Design for Wildfire Resilience

Jose Videla — Managing Principal, TBP Architects

1

Site Vegetation

- IBHS: a fully noncombustible “Zone 0” (0–5 ft around every building) is the single most effective, science-based mitigation available
- Vegetation “4 R's” within 100 ft: Removal, Reduction, Replacement, Resistant plantings
- Swapping mulch for rock in the near-building zone is low-cost and high-impact

2

Exterior Walls

- Noncombustible or ignition-resistant siding, multi-pane tempered windows, ember-tight gaps at doors and vents
- Fiber-cement siding costs ~25% less than typical wood siding — wildfire-resistant walls are not necessarily a cost increase

3

Roofs

- Class A fire-rated roof assembly, ember-resistant vents (1/8" mesh), gutters kept clear of debris
- IBHS: the roof and its vents are a primary ember entry point into a building
- Roof/vent/gutter upgrades add ~27% to cost — the largest single line item, but also the highest-payoff

Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS). It is an independent, nonprofit research organization funded by the insurance industry. IBHS conducts full-scale testing and research on how buildings perform during wildfires and other natural hazards, then turns that research into practical construction and mitigation recommendations.

Commitment to Fire Resistive Buildings

Jose Videla — Managing Principal, TBP Architects

1

New Construction

- Non combustible construction materials using fire rated walls, doors, windows, exterior finishes, and roofs.
- Applies to every new capital construction project.



2

Modernization

- Retrofit existing facilities to have non combustible exterior materials, rated doors, windows, and roofs.
- Harden buildings to resist wildfire threats.



3

Existing Maintenance

- Replace exterior wood siding with non combustible materials.
- Install fire resistive doors, windows, vent covers, and roofs.
- Reduce landscape fuel by planting drought tolerant native plants.

Where We Go From Here

Ryan Zajda — Director of Facilities and Sustainability, LBUSD

The District's underlying wildfire preparedness is active and working well. These next steps focus on documenting and extending it.

- 1 Maximize the existing wildfire partnerships (LBFD/OCFA inspections, fuel modification, fire resistant design guidelines)
- 2 Continue to focus on preparation and training. Leverage partnerships for school and community instruction
- 3 Update Safety Plans to include fire resistive building practices that can be used as a guide for design and maintenance work
- 4 Remove, Reduce, Replace, and Resist—remove hazardous vegetation, reduce fuel loads, replace higher-risk plants/materials with safer alternatives, and maintain fire-resistant landscaping
- 5 Build fire resistant school buildings
- 6 Provide reliable water supply and firefighter access

For a school in a wildfire-prone area, think about the protection strategy in this order:

1. **Defensible space and fuel reduction** — especially removing/reducing combustible vegetation near buildings.
2. **Building hardening** — Class A roofing, ember-resistant vents, noncombustible materials, protected eaves/windows, etc.
3. **Reliable water supply and firefighter access.**