



CITY of CYPRESS

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Planning
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Senior Center
229-2005

April 28, 2003

The Honorable Frederick P. Horn
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear Judge Horn:

We have received the Grand Jury report relating to the dangers of wood roofs in Orange County. Before responding to the findings and recommendations as required by law, we thought it would be beneficial to give some background on our City.

The City of Cypress is a suburban community of approximately 7 square miles with a population of approximately 47,000 residents. Incorporated in 1956, the City's housing stock is relatively new, built mostly in the late 1960's through the early 1980's. The City consists largely of quality residential housing, a business park, and other mixed retail and commercial uses. The City is substantially built out, with new development consisting mostly of in-fill projects and some redevelopment. Over 10 years ago the City adopted a local amendment to the Uniform Building Code to require a minimum of "Class C" roofing materials for new construction and re-roofs. This amendment is still in place and is currently being implemented on all new construction and re-roof projects in our city.

We have conducted an analysis of our recent re-roof permits in order to assess the need in our community for a prohibitive wood shake ordinance. Our analysis shows that of the approximate 232 re-roof permits issued last year, only four (4) used a wood roof product. All four (4) complied with our local amendment for a Class C roof. Even without a prohibitive ordinance, there are very few wood re-roofs occurring in our City. This means that our existing wood roof housing stock is constantly diminishing over time. Lack of market demand is currently dictating the reduction of wood roof products all on its own. Contributing factors include material and installation costs, insurance rates, life expectancy, flammability, and durability in comparison to competing materials.

The City of Cypress environmental, geographical, and climatic conditions are mild in comparison to many areas of the county, with mostly flat suburban terrain with little open space remaining. In addition, we require a minimum 5 feet side yard setback for all residential areas, insuring 10 feet between buildings.

Frank S. McCoy, Mayor

Tim Keenan, Mayor Pro Tem
Anna L. Piercy, Council Member

Mike McGill, Council Member
Lydia Sondhi, Council Member

With the benefit of the above stated background information and analysis, we have prepared responses to the findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury report entitled "Wood Roofs are Dangerous". Our responses are provided below:

Finding #1:

There is a lack of uniformity in local building codes involving roofs for identical environmental conditions within Orange County.

Response:

In our view, environmental conditions are not identical throughout the entire county. There are several topographic and geographic conditions that increase fire hazards in specific areas, as well as different fire response times due to fire station locations and neighborhood density. The lack of uniformity in the codes is due to these varying geographic conditions within the regional environment. All cities are required to adopt the minimum code provisions of the California Building Code and Title 24. The reason for the perceived lack of uniformity is that many jurisdictions, including Cypress, have already modified the code to mitigate the specific conditions within their jurisdiction.

Finding #2:

The testing and qualification standards of wood shakes and shingles are below the environmental conditions within Orange County.

Response:

The testing and qualification standards for fire retardant wood roof products must meet minimum standards criteria in conformance with the adopted codes. The City of Cypress is not a party to that process, and can only assume that the testing criteria included our specific regional environmental conditions.

Finding #3:

The cities' and county's roofing codes do not adequately take into account the climate, particularly the Santa Ana winds, and topographical conditions unique to Orange County.

Response:

That may be true for some jurisdictions, but many jurisdictions, including Cypress, have already adopted stricter amendments to the roofing code based on climatic conditions. Although geographic and climatic conditions within Cypress are mild compared to other Orange County jurisdictions, the City has required a minimum of Class C roofing materials for years in an attempt to mitigate these local conditions.

Finding #4:

Fire conflagrations stress finite fire fighting resources especially during the period of Santa Ana winds.

Response:

Although our jurisdiction has no history of fire conflagrations, we agree that there are areas within the county that are susceptible to conflagrations during periods of Santa Ana winds, stressing resources. These areas are primarily rural hillside communities where fire overlay zones have already been adopted. The City of Cypress is a suburban flat community. This fact, coupled with our current requirement for Class C roofs, suggests that fire conflagrations are not a significant issue in the City of Cypress.

Recommendation #1:

Each responding jurisdictional agency should consider amending the building code to require the most fire retardant class of roof covering (Class A) for new construction of all residential structures (Group R) in all fire zones. (Findings 1 through 4)

Response:

In considering the adoption of a local code amendment, each jurisdiction is required to substantiate any proposed amendment by specific findings. As discussed in our introductory comments and our response to the Grand Jury findings, the City of Cypress is not a high-risk area in terms of fire hazard. We have already amended our code to require a minimum of "Class C" materials on all new roofs. We do not feel that we meet the requirement of establishing specific findings within our jurisdiction to substantiate a more restrictive code provision for "Class A" on all wood roofs.

Recommendation #2:

Each responding jurisdictional agency should consider amending the building code to require the most fire retardant class of roof covering (Class A) for re-roofing of all residential structures (Group R) in all fire zones, when more than 50 percent of the roof is replaced within one year. (Findings 1 through 4)

Response:

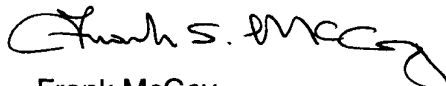
Similar to our response to recommendation #1, we do not feel we meet the criteria to justify the proposed code amendment to require a "Class A" rating on all wood re-roofs. We amended the code years ago to require minimum "Class C" materials. As stated in our response, the number of wood re-roofs occurring in Cypress is so insignificant that we feel the benefits would be minimal while the cost is significant.

Conclusion:

The City of Cypress feels that the dangers of wood roofs discussed in the Grand Jury report are already being mitigated in our city due to the many factors discussed in this report. We feel that the adoption of a more restrictive ordinance for wood roofs would be of little benefit to the city do to the small number of wood roofs remaining. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that we have met the requirement to amend the code based on specific findings do to our local climatic and geographic conditions. For these reasons, it is not our intent to amend the building code to require "Class A" materials for all wood roofs. We contend that in light of the suburban character of our community and our current requirement for Class C roofs, Cypress exceeds current code requirements and is more than adequately protecting public safety and the lives and property of its homeowners.

If you have any questions in regards to this matter or the responses provided, please feel free to contact our Building Official, Bob Decker, at (714) 229-6730.

Sincerely,



Frank McCoy
Mayor

cc: Bob Decker, Building Official