



# City of Westminster

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May 7, 2003

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

## **RE: Orange County Grand Jury Report, Wood Roofs are Dangerous**

Dear Judge Horn,

We have received the Grand Jury report that covers the issues related to wood roofs in Orange County. The recommendations based on the findings propose that the City of Westminster (and all of Orange County) enact a more stringent requirement for future roofs and re-roofs to require a minimum of a Class "A" rating. The findings cited in the report conclude that all of Orange County is subjected to the same danger from the Santa Ana winds, which create a combination of high winds and low humidity. The report then outlines how there is a lack of uniformity in local ordinances in each of the jurisdictions. While we appreciate the efforts of the Grand Jury and support code uniformity in the County, based on our research we believe that a more stringent ordinance for roofs and re-roofs is not needed in our community.

We do not believe that combining Orange County jurisdictions into one "very high fire hazard" zone is appropriate. Different areas of the County have different fire hazard designations based on wildland vegetations, geographic and topographic conditions. The findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury pertain to high hazard areas of the County where it makes sense to have the most stringent roofing standards. Westminster is close to the ocean and it is not as hot or dry as some inland communities. In addition, we do not have the hills, narrow streets, large vegetation areas or other physical attributes that inhibit access for fire fighting.

In light of the above, we believe that we have adopted an appropriate standard in our jurisdiction, which requires all new roofs and re-roofs to be a minimum of Class "B" assembly. This means that the small number of wood roofs that exist in our community are predominantly being replaced with asphalt shingles, tile or composite tile materials and any future wood roofs that may be installed would be fire resistive Class "A" or "B" roof assembly. The old non-rated or Class "C" roofs are disappearing due to age, cost of maintenance, higher insurance rates, and new styles of homes.

Per the letter from Foreman Carlos Olvera, we are required to respond to four findings and two recommendations. Both are listed in the following two pages with a short response to each based on the logic already stated.

## Findings

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

Response: We acknowledge that there are different standards being used in Orange County concerning roofs based on different conditions that exist in the County. Although the environmental conditions are similar throughout the County, the geographic and topographic conditions differ considerably. The perceived “lack of uniformity” actually has a very logical basis as to allowing each locale to determine the level of mitigation of hazards necessary to provide for the degree of safety that is “equal” to other areas of the County.

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

Response: The standards for fire retardant pressure treatment of wood, used for up to a Class “A” roof assembly, to the best of our knowledge, has proved to be consistent with the State Fire Marshal’s recommendations and requirements. We do not have any data that would support Finding 2 in our jurisdiction. Nevertheless, local jurisdictions do not establish testing criteria and qualification standards. National testing agencies such as the International Code Council (ICC), American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), and Underwriters Laboratories (UL) are the appropriate agencies to respond to this 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: This may be the case with some jurisdictions; however, we believe that we have adequately considered these conditions as they relate to our community. City of Westminster has adopted Class “B” as the minimum standard roof assembly for all occupancies, where the State codes would have allowed non-rated or Class “C” installations.

4. *Fire conflagrations stress finite fire fighting resources especially during the period of Santa Ana Winds.*

Response: This is primarily true of communities with wildland/urban interface, designated as Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. Westminster and surrounding cities do not have any such zones and the record of the past decades does not support this finding as it relates to our area. We recognize that some areas of the County, that may include heavy brush and vegetation, have caused this referenced demand on available resources of the adjoining jurisdictions with mutual aid agreements. Orange County Fire Authority would be able to respond in detail on this issue.

## Recommendations

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

Response: We have considered the recommendation and believe that Class "B" roofing is adequate for all residential structures in our jurisdiction. However, we will reconsider this recommendation during the next cycle of the code adoption in 2005, due to the widespread use of Class "A" for new construction.

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: City of Westminster has adopted a minimum Class "B" for all re-roofing, regardless of percentages of the roof being replaced. We believe that Class "B" roof assembly is adequate for existing structures in our jurisdiction for the reasons stated above.

In conclusion, our analysis indicates that a Class "B" roof assembly is appropriate for Westminster. However, we intend to support the efforts of the Grand Jury in code uniformity and take part in the Orange County Uniform Code Program for the amendment and adoption process of the California State Building Code through the involvement of our Building Official with Orange Empire Chapter of ICC. We will continue working within the guidelines of developing uniform codes for safer buildings that our society is willing to accept and able to afford. If you have any questions, please contact our Building Official, Soroosh Rahbari at (714) 898-3311 x 250.

Sincerely,



Margie L. Rice, Mayor  
City of Westminster

cc: Council Members  
Carlos N. Olvera, Foreman, Orange County Grand Jury  
Don Vestal, City Manager  
Don Anderson, Community Development Director  
Soroosh Rahbari, Building Official