



## Mitigation Saves House From Fire

### Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

#### *Los Alamos County, New Mexico*

**Los Alamos, NM** - When John and Cindia Hogan bought their home in 1994, they did so knowing that a major wildfire might occur in the Santa Fe National Forest that backs up to their property. John Hogan, a physical scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey, and a trained, experienced firefighter, began taking steps to mitigate their home in 1996.



In 1996, John Hogan contracted to have a metal roof put on their two-story, wood frame 2,600-square foot home located on two-thirds of an acre. He also cleared some 100 trees from the rear portion of the property, and removed flammable materials from the backyard. The cost of mitigation is estimated at about \$50,000. All costs were borne by the Hogan family.

On May 10, 2000, the Hogan family evacuated from their home, and on May 11 the Cerro Grande fire—largest wildfire in New Mexico history to date—burned through their neighborhood and other areas of the community of Los Alamos. For two days, the Hogans believed their home was consumed by the blaze, which burned and destroyed well over 200 homes, leaving more than 400 families and individuals homeless.

But when John and Cindia Hogan returned to their home, they found it and one other adjacent house intact. Homes to the west and south of them had been destroyed. "We're very conscious of fire danger," Hogan said. "We consciously chose fire mitigation as a proper move." Hogan plans on more mitigation, including removal of more trees in his yard, and adding fire retardant on cedar shake paneling on the east and west walls of his home.

Hogan knowledge of landscape ecology, based on his work with the US Geological Survey, proved invaluable. He conducts analyses of historical patterns of wild fires response to vegetation and landscape features.

The Cerro Grande fire caused one tree in the Hogans' front yard to catch fire, and burned a shed and its contents at the far rear of his backyard. The only other damage from the fire was soot that entered into the dryer vent.

The home is insured for \$270,000 for its structure and another \$200,000 for contents. The savings, even though his property is insured, is figured at more than \$450,000—the value of the structure and its contents—nine times the cost of mitigating the structure and grounds.

Of the expense of mitigating his home, Hogan said, "It was certainly worth it."

#### Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region VI**

State: **New Mexico**

County: **Los Alamos County**

City/Community: **Los Alamos**

## Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Private**  
Hazard Type: **Wildfire**  
Activity/Project Type: **Retrofitting, Structural; Vegetation Management**  
Structure Type: **Wood Frame**  
Activity/Project Start Date: **04/1996**  
Activity/Project End Date: **06/1996**  
Funding Source: **Homeowner**  
Funding Recipient: **Property Owner - Residential**  
Funding Recipient Name: **Homeowners**

## Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$50,000.00 (Estimated)**

## Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal  
Disaster? **No**  
Value Tested By Disaster? **No**  
Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

## Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/>**

## Main Points

- On May 11 2000, the Cerro Grande fire, the largest wildfire in New Mexico history to date, burned through the Hogan family's neighborhood and other areas of the community of Los Alamos, destroying well over 200 homes, leaving more than 400 families and individuals homeless.
- John Hogan spent \$50,000 to have a metal roof put on their two-story, wood frame home, cleared 100 trees, and removed flammable materials from the backyard.
- The Hogan family home survived the Cerro Grande fire. Homes to the west and south of them were destroyed.
- "We're very conscious of fire danger," Hogan said. "We consciously chose fire mitigation as a proper move." Hogan plans on more mitigation, including removal of more trees in his yard, and adding fire retardant on cedar shake paneling on the east and west walls of his home.
- The \$50,000 mitigation saved \$450,000—the value of the structure and its contents—nine times the cost of mitigating the structure and grounds.