COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA — THOMAS FIRE & MONTECITO DEBRIS FLOW



Billion-Dollar Victory Sets a New Precedent in Wildfire Litigation

In December 2017, the Thomas Fire ignited and quickly became California's then-largest wildfire, scorching nearly 300,000 acres and destabilizing the terrain. When heavy rains followed and triggered a catastrophic "debris flow" that tore through Montecito, the result was 23 lives lost and widespread destruction. Southern California Edison, whose power lines sparked the fire, faced a wave of lawsuits and ultimately paid victims $1 billion in settlements.

Edison Strikes Back, Santa Barbara Turns to Meyers Nave

Rather than accepting responsibility, Edison tried something unprecedented in wildfire litigation—suing Santa Barbara County and other public entities to recover the $1 billion.

The County turned to Meyers Nave for our reputation in wildfire litigation and high-stakes crises with intense public pressure. Led by Deborah Fox, we didn't just react to Edison's allegations, we mounted a robust defense with comprehensive strategies and cutting-edge techniques that put us ahead from day one.

Innovative Approaches and Strategic Motions

We started by streamlining the massive discovery process, designing a focused protocol to sift through millions of documents and isolate the core issues. At the same time, we led an exhaustive search for top-tier experts in hydrology, geology, and LiDAR technology to assess the debris flow and build a factual narrative that aligned expert testimony with our defense strategy.

With this groundwork in place, we launched a series of strategic motions to counter Edison's claims, outmaneuver opposing counsel, and target the case for dispositive rulings. Throughout, we maintained laser focus on the facts, witnesses, and documents that mattered—resisting the temptation to engage in every battle.

A Billion-Dollar Victory

Our strategy worked. By November 2023, we had reduced Edison's demand by over $700 million. By April 2024, we eliminated another $300 million, wiping out the entire $1 billion of liability against the County. This marks a landmark wildfire victory in uncharted legal territory and brings relief to the Santa Barbara community.

Meyers Nave continues to demonstrate unmatched capability and strategy, reinforcing our reputation as go-to defense counsel for clients facing high-profile and precedent-setting crises. When the stakes are high, Meyers Nave hits the ground running with industry-leading insight, technology, relationships, experience, and commitment to legal excellence.

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