

Wildfires + Rain = Debris Flows

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(image courtesy of NOAA)

Debris flows can be one of the most hazardous consequences of rain on recently-burned hillslopes. The deaths of sixteen people during the Christmas Day 2003 storm that impacted recently-burned hillsides in southern California highlight the most drastic consequences of post-wildfire debris flows. The increased occurrence of catastrophic wildfires in the western United States, and the encroachment of development into fire-prone areas, has resulted in the need for tools and methods to identify and quantify the potential hazards posed by debris flows from burned watersheds. In this talk we will describe an approach developed to answer some of the questions fundamental to post-fire debris-flow hazard assessments - what, where, why, when, how big, and how often? Come and find out what is being done to understand and decrease the risk of debris flows in your area.