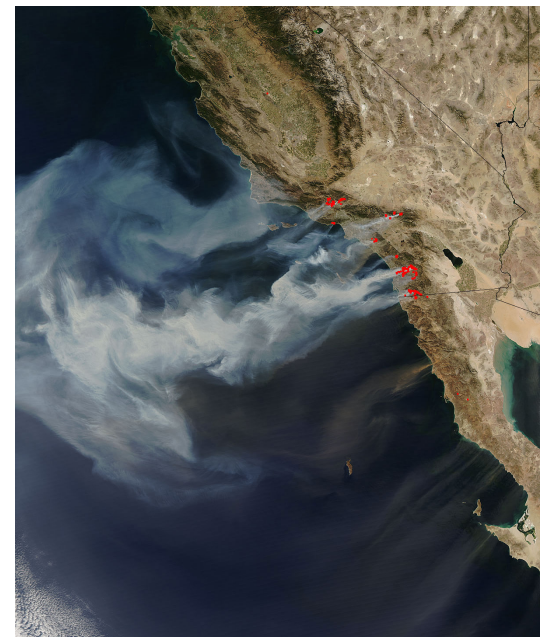




## BioSense Is Useful Tool During California Wildfires

No one expects to lose their home to a fire. CDC's National Center for Public Health Informatics (NCPHI) uses the surveillance tool BioSense to provide "real time" situational awareness during public health emergencies. In the fall of 2007, devastating southern California wildfires provided a unique opportunity to use BioSense during a tragic threat to public health. About 20 million people living in the Los Angeles, San Diego, and surrounding areas were affected by this massive event.

While the fires were burning, the CDC BioIntelligence Center provided California and San Diego County public health officials with daily reports of health activity related to the wildfires. The BioSense system noted large increases in respiratory visits to hospitals, especially visits for asthma and dyspnea (difficulty in breathing/shortness of breath), as well as increases in total visit numbers. California and San Diego County public health officials found the BioSense information to be a useful addition to their surveillance efforts. CDC and San Diego County public health officials will conduct post-wildfire analyses of BioSense data to gain a better understanding of how patients with chronic respiratory illness were affected by exposure to the wildfire smoke. Lessons learned from this experience will help not only the next time wildfires strike, but in other large-scale exposures to environmental hazards.



A NASA Aqua satellite image from 705 km above California's wildfires

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