



Smoke Damage Restoration for Nearly 70 Schools During California's Thomas & Woolsey Fires

Loss Type:	Fire Damage
Channel:	Educational
Location:	Oxnard, CA

PROBLEM:

The Thomas Fire, which concluded the nation's costliest year of wildfires in 2017, consumed more than 1,000 structures throughout Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties, all within 15 to 30 minutes north of DKI member of Oxnard, CA. While the fire was in progress, DKI received a call from the maintenance director from the Santa Paula Unified School District (SPUSD) asking us to inspect a few schools in the proximity to the fire that may have been affected by smoke odor, soot and ash intrusion.

... 11 months later, the Woolsey Fire spread 20 to 30 minutes south of our member's office, at the boundary between Los Angeles and Ventura counties, and destroyed over 1,600 properties. Due to the work our team had performed due to the damages from the Thomas Fire, we received a familiar call from the Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE).

SOLUTION:

DKI responded to both fires similarly. Thomas Fire job originally quickly grew to assisting 13 schools within two districts, and its scope of work consisted of: HEPA vacuuming, wet wiping of all contents and surfaces, carpet cleaning, air scrubbers, HVAC cleaning, deodorization, and power washing of the exterior structures and play areas. For the larger schools with 35-foot ceiling gyms and auditoriums with performance stages and crow's nests, additional equipment was required: scissor lifts and Ram board and plywood to protect the hardwood floors.

Nearly 40 schools were in need of smoke and fire restoration during the Woolsey Fire – all of which were larger than those worked on for the Thomas Fire. The scope of work consisted of: full cleaning and deodorization but varied, and some schools also required refrigeration system cleaning. In addition to its scope of work for smoke damage, one of the schools also required immediate water and mud remediation after an active mudslide flooded six of its classrooms three weeks later.

To complete the scope of work and meet the tight timelines, DKI hired temporary help and broke into groups, spending approximately 60 to 90 minutes cleaning each classroom, then following up on any details that may have been missed. During this time, air scrubbers and HVAC cleaning took place simultaneously.

Because of the continuous smoke, ash and winds surrounding the schools, DKI also sealed up each room and ran hydroxyls, which created a slight positive pressure and kept up with any potential intrusion of smoke odor.

To fully remove any lingering smoke odors and prevent further smoke intrusion, DKI used SteraMist that also sanitized (and left each room cleaner than before), and deodorized several hundred thousand square feet of porous ceiling tile and insulation material, which typically would need to be replaced. *This last benefit helped save the insurance company millions of dollars!!*

Despite the challenges and distractions (continuous smoke, heavy equipment needs, hotspots and mudslides) along the way, DKI completed the scope of work on time. In total, the team restored, cleaned, deodorized, and/or set equipment in 68 schools within five school districts, returning over 30,000 students and staff safely back to school, with only seven to 12 school days missed.

