



NEWS



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Fire causes major damage to motel in San Bernardino and destroys two vehicles

Mike Myers, Fontana Herald News

Posted: July 22, 2016, 9:56 AM



Two vehicles were destroyed by a fire at a motel in San Bernardino on July 21. (Contributed photo by Mike Myers)

A fire caused major damage to a motel in San Bernardino on the night of July 21, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**.

Just before 9:45 p.m., the Fire Department started receiving calls of a vegetation fire that was burning on the westbound shoulder of the Interstate 10 Freeway at Waterman Avenue.

Eric Sherwin of the Fire Department said that when firefighters arrived on scene, they found "a well established fire" that was burning next to the motel and between the freeway. The fire moved into palm trees and the wind carried the fire onto the roof and attic of the Super 8 Motel.

About 70 firefighters were on scene battling the three-alarm fire, which caused damage to about 40 percent of both Super 8 Motel buildings. At least two vehicles were destroyed by the flames.

The motel was completely evacuated, and there were no injuries to civilians or firefighters.

Investigators were on hand to try to determine the cause of the fire.

Sherwin said that considering how hot it has been and how thick the vegetation was, "it could be a contributing factor in how fast the fire traveled."

The American Red Cross arrived to assist the motel guests in making other arrangements for the night. It was not immediately known how many guests were staying at the motel.

http://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/news/fire-causes-major-damage-to-motel-in-san-bernardino-and/article_4cef31fa-502d-11e6-8ece-3b11d6902d92.html

San Bernardino Motel Closed After Fire

Ryan Hagen, The Sun via Firehouse

Posted: July 23, 2016

July 22--SAN BERNARDINO -- The Super 8 Motel remained closed Friday after fire officials say a three-alarm fire damaged about 40 percent of the motel.

The blaze was reported shortly before 9:45 p.m. Thursday as a vegetation fire next to the 10 Freeway, then spread to the Super 8 Motel at Hospitality Lane and Commercenter Drive, according to San Bernardino County firefighter Eric Sherwin.

The fire burned west along the freeway, hit palm trees and spread to the hotel roof. It also threatened nearby structures.

Next-door at La Quinta Inn, Barbara Spenrath said her fire alarm started going off.

It had to be a malfunction, thought Spenrath, whom Red Cross had relocated to La Quinta because of a fire that morning at Bernardine Senior Independent Living on East Gilbert Street. She went to talk to the desk about having it fixed, then saw the flames.

"I thought, 'Oh, no, not again,'" Spenrath said Friday morning. "It looked like it was getting pretty close."

The Super 8, where 42 of the 79 rooms were occupied, was successfully evacuated, and Red Cross assisted in relocating the displaced guests, according to **San Bernardino County Fire's** Facebook page. Staff of the DoubleTree, on the opposite side of Super 8 from La Quinta, evacuated guests as a precaution but they returned to their rooms after the fire.

Seventy firefighters responded and were able to control the fire after about 90 minutes, according to fire officials.

No civilians were injured, but one firefighter suffered minor injuries, fire officials said.

The fire damaged 32 rooms and destroyed two vehicles, according to the post.

The cause of the fire remained under investigation Friday. Hot dry conditions with thick brush was likely a factor, Sherwin said.

Assessments and repairs were ongoing Friday, and firefighters were on the shoulder beside the freeway spraying down hot spots.

Steve Moonly, staying at La Quinta until construction work is finished on his Redlands condo, stood watching the mop-up work Friday.

Moonly, 56, said his 8-year-old grandson Ethan was visiting when the fire started last night and was frightened.

"He asked firefighters if they would stay all night, and they were very cool," Moonly said. "He really liked that, so we offered them some chocolate."

Super 8 officials at the local and corporate offices did not return phone calls Friday.

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<http://www.firehouse.com/news/12235628/san-bernardino-motel-closed-after-fire>

San Bernardino County sends firefighting resources to help battle the Sand fire

John M. Blodgett, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Posted: July 24, 2016, 7:03 PM



Firefighters with San Bernardino County fire's "Old Cajon" Crew 6-1 work the Sand fire this weekend. (Photo courtesy San Bernardino County Fire Department)

SAN BERNARDINO >> Numerous San Bernardino County firefighting resources, including strike teams and management personnel, are being tapped to help fight the Sand fire, a fire official said.

Chief officers and a hand crew from **San Bernardino County Fire Department** already are at the Sand fire, firefighter/spokesperson Jeff Allen wrote in a text message.

Allen also noted that resources from Apple Valley, Big Bear, China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, Chino, Fort Irwin, Morongo Valley, Ontario, Rancho Cucamonga, Redlands, Rialto, San Manuel and Upland are or have been deployed.

The county's firefighters join a tally of more than 1,600 others battling the raging Sand fire Sunday. So far, the blaze has scorched about 34 square miles in the Angeles National Forest and Santa Clarita area, left one man dead and destroyed 18 homes, authorities said.

The wildfire, which began Friday near the northbound 14 Freeway and Sand Canyon Road near Santa Clarita, has prompted numerous mandatory evacuation orders.

<http://www.dailynews.com/general-news/20160724/san-bernardino-county-sends-firefighting-resources-to-help-battle-the-sand-fire>

SAND FIRE: County Fire Dispatches 3 Strike Teams (UPDATE)

Michael P. Neufeld, Rim of the World News

Posted: July 24, 2016, 7:19 PM



The Sand Fire — which now involves firefighters from San Bernardino County Fire — has grown to over 30,000 acres. (Photo by Inciweb)

UPDATE: Monday, July 25 – 5 a.m.



Public Information Officer Marc Peebles (File Photo)

Santa Clarita, CA – San Bernardino County’s resources at the Sand Fire near Santa Clarita include several management personnel including Public Information Officer Marc Peebles, a Battalion Chief from Lake Arrowhead.

This morning, Peebles posted: *“Infrared flight conducted shows new acreage of 33,117 acres and still ten (10) percent contained.”*

ORIGINAL STORY

San Bernardino County – The devastating Sand Fire is now approximately 30,000 acres and 10 percent contained. United States Forest Service, Los Angeles County Fire and Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Office are in “Unified Command.”



A San Bernardino County Fire hand crew is involved in fighting the Sand Fire. (Photo by Brandon Barsugli/County Fire)

San Bernardino County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig told ROTWNEWS.com that three (3) strike teams and one (1) hand crew from County Fire have been dispatched to assist other agencies in fighting the fire.

Chief Hartwig also noted that numerous single resources have also been sent to the fire including management team members.

Inciweb is indicating that over 1,673 firefighters are engaged in initial attack. Resources include 122 engines, 39 hand crews, 15 helicopters and 8 dozers.

The fire is burning in the Angeles National Forest and near the 14 Freeway.

WIND SHIFT

Evacuations remain in place due to a change in wind direction that cancelled plans to allow some residents to return to their homes.

Current evacuations involve roughly 1,500 homes. Eighteen homes have been destroyed and an additional home badly damaged by the fire.

Smoke from the fire continues to be visible from several mountain communities and the drift smoke is causing unhealthy air quality.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On Monday, there will be no Metrolink service to or from Vincent Grade/Acton, Palmdale or Lancaster stations, according to Metrolink.

A drone was reported over the fire, according to the Incident Command Post.

<http://rotwnews.com/2016/07/24/sand-fire-county-fire-dispatches-3-strike-teams-and-1-hand-crew/>

SAN BERNARDINO SHOOTING: Lucas Oil off-road race to honor victims of Dec. 2 terrorist attack

Events at Glen Helen Raceway this weekend will honor those who died in the Dec. 2 attack.

Doug Saunders, Press Enterprise

Published: July 22, 2016



President of Lucas Oil, Bob Patison stands at the Glen Helen Raceway before the Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series begins. Over the weekend, 14 drivers will honor the 14 victims of the Dec. 2 terror attack in San Bernardino. Eric Reed , Contributing Photographer

#SBStrong will be on many minds Saturday, July 23, at Glen Helen Raceway when 14 cars on the dirt track will carry the names of the 14 victims killed Dec. 2 at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino.

“This attack hit close to home,” said Bob Patison, executive vice-president of Corona-based Lucas Oil. “We wanted to do something for the survivors and to honor the victims of this terrible event.”

The event is part of the Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series.

“This is a great way for us to give back to our community and pay tribute to those who lost their lives that day,” said Greg Adler, head of Woodland Hills-based 4 Wheel Parts and a driver in the event.

That day impacted everyone, Patison said, and it made many realize that terrorism can strike anywhere and at anytime.

“Many of our employees live in this area,” he said. “This is our home, and it now shows us that nobody is immune to terrorism.”

Patison’s Lucas Oil Products Inc. is also making a donation to the San Bernardino United Relief Fund, a charity account earmarked for survivors of the attack.

“We would like to encourage everyone else to follow our lead,” he said, “by donating to these families in their time of need.”

The terrorist attack at on Dec. 2 left 14 dead and 22 others wounded. Syed Rizwan Farook, a San Bernardino County health inspector, and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, carried out the attack on a gathering of his co-workers hours before they were killed in a shootout with police.

The #SBStrong movement came shortly after the attack. The #SBStrong hashtag grew in popularity on Twitter and Facebook as the world offered strength and support for the city of San Bernardino.

At the event on Saturday, organizers are holding a ceremony before the start of the first race to honor first responders and the families of those who were killed and wounded. There will also be a moment of silence.

“It is with tremendous respect and reverence that we honor the 14 fallen and the survivors of the San Bernardino tragedy,” said Ritchie Lewis, director of the Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series. “Our entire organization is focused on investing in and giving back to the communities we visit.”

Community leaders are taking part in Saturday’s events, too. San Bernardino Mayor Carey Davis will attend, along with two members of his staff, as well councilmembers Benito Barrios, John Valdivia, Henry Nickel and Bessine Richard.

Capt. Ray King, Sgt. Rob Young, Detective Josh Cogswell and Officers Byron Clark and Miguel Cintron will be there to represent the San Bernardino Police Department. **San Bernardino County Fire** Chief Mike Hartwig also will attend and have a fire truck there.

“The events of that day are tragic,” said driver Carl Renezeder. “As a community, anything we can do to honor those who died and their families left behind we shouldn’t think twice. They gave so much. We’re honored to do our part.”

The drivers whose vehicles and helmets will be carrying the names of the victims include RJ Anderson, Ryan Beat, Jerrett Brooks, Christopher Polvoorde, Darren Hardesty Jr., Sarah Burgess, Jeremy Stenberg, Mike Valentine, Brad DeBerti, Gavin Harlien, Casey Currie, Rodrigo Ampudia, Renezeder and Adler.

IF YOU GO

When: Saturday, July 23: Gates open at 2 p.m.; meet-and-greet/autograph signing with the 14 drivers for San Bernardino honorees from 5:45 to 6:30 p.m.; Special pre-race opening ceremonies at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, July 24: Chapel service at 10:30 a.m.; Gates open at 2 p.m.; opening ceremonies at 7:30 p.m.

Where: Glen Helen Raceway, 18585 Verdemon Ranch Road, San Bernardino

Information: lucasoiloffroad.com, glenhelen.com

THE DRIVERS AND THE NAMES THEY CARRY

DriverVictim

RJ AndersonRobert Adams

Ryan BeatIsaac Amanios

Jerrett BrooksBennetta Betbadal

Christopher PolvoordeHarry "Hal" Bowman

Darren Hardesty Jr.Sierra Clayborn

Sarah BurgessJuan Espinoza

Jeremy StenbergAurora Godoy

Carl RenezederShannon Johnson

Mike ValentineLarry "Daniel" Kaufman

Brad DeBertiDamian Meins

Gavin HarlienTin Nguyen

Casey CurrieNicholas Thalasinis

Rodrigo AmpudiaYvette Velasco

Greg AdlerMichael Wetzel

<http://www.pe.com/articles/bernardino-808916-san-attack.html>

Reunion helps accident victim conquer boating fear

Emergency responders help - again

Jennifer Denevan, Needles Desert Star

Posted: July 24, 2016, 2:13 PM



Patricia Rocha poses with one of her heroes, Division Chief Tom Marshall, in a special reunion in June. Marshall was the captain in charge of an incident that nearly killed Rocha near Pirate Cove in May 2013. She decided she wanted to reach out to responders who helped her and it meant meeting up with several who helped during that accident.

NEEDLES — Patricia Rocha of Rancho Cucamonga, never through twice about getting on the river with her family. She didn't have to until after a boating accident May 25, 2013, permanently changed her life.

Rocha recently met up with several of the first responders who helped save her life after the accident. The reunion has meant making a lifelong friend and getting the courage to go back to the water.

Rocha said she'd been boating all her life and loved the water but the accident was so traumatic that she almost couldn't get back into a boat. On the day of the accident, she was out in one boat with a few of her nephews and her husband when another boat came racing toward them. Rocha said she had only seconds to think and she managed to knock one of her nephews out of the way. She fell on her right side, exposing her left side to the other boat's propeller.

The aftermath has been significant with 23 surgeries to help piece Rocha back together. She has a 24th surgery planned for later this year and hopefully it'll be her last, she said.

The physical fight for her life was only one part of the entire ordeal. The emotional side was yet to be faced.

Rocha said back in June she and her family attempted to go back to their home in Topock and to get out on the Colorado River. The night before they left their home in Rancho Cucamonga, she had a total meltdown. She locked herself in the bathroom and wouldn't leave, she continued.

After a few days and gathering some strength, Rocha said, she and her family opted to try again to go to the river. Before taking the trip, a little voice in her head told her she should contact the first responders who had saved her, she added.

Rocha made a call to the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** and left a message. Later she was contacted by a firefighter who told her he would look into it for her and would contact Tom Marshall, who was the responding captain at the time. He's now the division chief for District 5, which includes Needles.

Less than 12 hours from that time she heard back from Marshall, Rocha said. How quickly he responded and how he responded were surprises to her, she added.

Marshall ended up driving from Barstow to Topock to come see Rocha and to help her get comfortable with getting on a boat again, she said. "I was overwhelmed by the response and caring he showed (and it meant so much) to be with someone who understood what my situation was," she continued.

Marshall said when he found out who was trying to contact him, he was stunned. He really thought it must be from another person from another incident because he was convinced that Rocha didn't survive, he added.

When the fire station contacted him about Rocha, he became excited, he said. It's highly uncommon in a first responder's career to hear from someone after an incident, he continued.

Marshall has been with SBC fire for 18 years. He's been a firefighter for 26 years and this was the first time he's ever been reached out to in that way, he said. He's received cards and other notes but never met anyone in person.

The initial reunion was emotional enough, but it would be magnified.

Marshall is an avid boater himself, so when he heard that Rocha was having difficulty getting back into one, he quickly offered to help, he said. He offered to take not only Rocha but her whole family for a ride and help her get comfortable with an old love of hers.

He also decided it wasn't enough for only him to be there. Marshall hunted down some of the other responders from that day and a few of them were part of the reunion, including members of Baker Ambulance Emergency Medical Services in Needles.

Some responders couldn't make it, but several did and met up with Marshall at Pirate Cove, near where the accident occurred. He said when Rocha and her family pulled up, it was clear she was nervous but then was able to open up when she saw everyone there.

"What he did for me was so amazing and helped me so much," Rocha said. She cried when she met up with everyone, she added.

She and Marshall were able to create an instant bond and one she intends to keep for a lifetime, she said. "Tom's been such a vital part in my healing and filling a void I didn't even know I had," she continued.

Rocha expressed much gratitude to Marshall, the other first responders, her family and friends for all their support and in helping her get through her recovery.

http://www.mohavedailynews.com/needles_desert_star/reunion-helps-accident-victim-conquer-boating-fear/article_640b48bc-51e3-11e6-b8de-33c3d409177f.html

Roblar Fire grows to 3 square miles at Camp Pendleton

The Associated Press via KPCC

Posted: July 22 2016



An image released by Cal Fire on Twitter shows smoke rising over Camp Pendleton. As of about noon Friday, July 22, 2016, the Roblar Fire had burned 2,000 acres and was 10 percent contained. CAL FIRE

Firefighters are battling a wildfire at the Marine Corps' Camp Pendleton in San Diego County that grew overnight to more than 3 square miles.

Lt. Abigail Peterson said CalFire and military crews, assisted by aircraft, had the fire tearing through a training range about 30 percent contained Friday.

She says there has been no threat to personnel or structures since the Roblar Fire started Thursday afternoon on the sprawling base north of San Diego.

The region is in the grip of high heat and forecasters are warning of high fire danger.

A vegetation fire Thursday night along Interstate 10 in San Bernardino County spread to a two-story motel, forcing guests to flee. Forty percent of the structure was damaged before the fire was extinguished. No one was hurt.

<http://www.scpr.org/news/2016/07/22/62879/roblar-fire-wildfire-grows-to-3-square-miles-at-ca/>

'Nothing normal' about the Sand fire in the Santa Clarita Valley, officials say

Matt Hamilton, Marisa Gerber, LA Times

Posted: July 25, 3:00 AM



Before the flames of the Sand fire ripped through the Santa Clarita Valley this weekend, destroying homes and charring hillsides, officials had been on high alert.

They had every reason to be worried.

The National Weather Service had issued a red flag warning across Southern California, advising that an unrelenting heat wave, low humidity and powerful, gusty winds along the Interstate 5 corridor would create a dangerous environment for a wildfire.

Then a half-acre blaze broke out Friday afternoon next to the 14 Freeway at Soledad Canyon Road, and firefighters have struggled since to gain the upper hand as it raced through the canyons. The blaze mushroomed Saturday, scorching more than 33,000 acres by Sunday evening.

“These conditions were ripe for explosive and rapid fire growth,” said Todd Hall, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Oxnard.

What sparked the Sand fire, named after Sand Canyon, is under investigation. What officials do know is that after it erupted, the blaze spread southeast into the northern flanks of the Angeles National Forrest, a terrain of steep arroyos and dry chaparral.

The area has seen fires in recent years, but much of the brittle brush and shrub has not burned in some 60 years, said John Tripp, a Los Angeles County deputy fire chief. The vegetation — dry from the years-long drought — fueled the fire, whose flames whipped 20 to 50 feet high and seemed to jump ahead by a quarter mile at a time, officials said.

“Five years ago, if we had a similar fire, we would have probably caught [it] at the ridge,” Los Angeles County Fire Department Chief Daryl L. Osby said during a news conference this weekend.

Firefighters had to cope with heavy winds, with gusts of up to 40 mph that pushed flames into remote pockets of the hilly region. The wind pattern that initially fed the blaze began to shift Sunday, with a sea breeze blowing toward the north for much of the afternoon, then reversing about 9 p.m. The erratic shift in winds pushed the fire northeast toward Acton, where evacuations were ordered Sunday.

The weather service forecast temperatures of 96 to 100 degrees in the Santa Clarita Valley on Monday, with winds of 10 to 20 mph in the afternoon.

Hall, the meteorologist, said the weather should improve in the next few days and aid firefighters, with higher humidity that will help tamp down the flames and contain the blaze. Later in the week could bring monsoonal moisture and thunderstorms that could bring additional moisture but frustrate firefighters if accompanied by lightning strikes.

The variables of weather have already led officials to extend evacuation orders even after they were initially canceled. Los Angeles County Sheriff's Capt. Roosevelt Johnson made a plea for residents to be patient.

"People need to be really flexible with us," Johnson said. "There's nothing normal about this fire."

<http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-sand-fire-causes-20160724-snap-story.html>

Trees are dying all over Southern California and there is no remedy. Here's why.

Aaron Orlowski, *The Orange County Register*

Posted: July 24, 2016, 7:36 PM



John Kabashima of the UC Cooperative Extension walks through what is left of an oak tree infested with the goldspotted oak borer beetle that had to be chopped down and debarked in the Orange County forest. Paul Rodriguez — Staff Photographer



Tunnels created by the goldspotted oak borer beetle mar the bark of an oak tree in the Orange County forest. Paul Rodriguez — Staff Photographer

Thousands of trees across Southern California are dying because of an invasive beetle for which there is no remedy.

The polyphagous shot hole borer is attacking hundreds of tree species and can reproduce in 41 of them, including some of the trees most favored by gardeners, city landscape designers and universities, such as maples, elders, cottonwoods and oaks.

The first infections were discovered in 2003 in the Whittier Narrows in L.A. County, and the beetle was implicated for the mass deaths of box elder trees in Long Beach in 2010. In Riverside County, the beetle has attacked trees near Martha McLean-Anza Narrows Park along the Santa Ana River and in De Anza Park in Ontario.

Now, in Mason Regional Park near UC Irvine, the sycamores and willows also look sickly, with black stains caused by the beetle shotgunned across their trunks.

“We’re in an epidemic now in Southern California. We let it get away from us. This beetle fell through the cracks,” said John Kabashima, a former UC Cooperative Extension advisor who is working on beetle issues. “We don’t normally see this reaction from these trees, because we don’t have a pest like this.”

There’s no known cure and, and the pricetag for dealing with the pest is quickly mounting since it costs about \$1,000 to remove a tree. Many homeowners don’t have that kind of money.

The potential damage to crops, especially avocados, is more severe. The California Avocado Commission is funding research on the beetle and avocado groves infested by a closely related beetle in San Diego County are being monitored.

ARRIVING FROM OVERSEAS

The shot hole borer infests riparian trees that grow near waterways – often the same types of trees citydwellers and landscape architects favor. Pregnant females land on trees, burrow holes the size of a pen tip through the bark, and dig tunnels.

The beetles bring with them a fungus that feeds on the tree’s cambial layer – between the bark and the wood. The beetles feed on the fungus, which actually does the job of killing the trees.

It takes two to three years from infection to when the tree starts to die, even though the shotgun wounds appear much sooner. Multiple generations of the minuscule beetles will live and mate in a tree until it dies, when tens of thousands of beetles take off to find new trees.

The beetle arrived in the U.S. in wood products from Southeast Asia. A monoculture of nonnative trees grown for wood products got hit by the beetle, which flourished in those uniform stands of trees.

“It could have come in on a wooden pallets for all we know. There could be hundreds of beetles in a pallet,” Kabashima said.

In San Diego County, along the Tijuana River, 100,000 willows have been struck by a closely related beetle. “It’s like Armageddon,” said Kabashima, who worries that the same thing could happen in the riparian areas of the Santa Ana River.

Another beetle -- the goldspotted oak borer -- is attacking stands of oak trees already weak, thirsty for water after four years of drought, in L.A., Riverside, San Diego and Orange Counties. More dead trees raise the risk of wildfire during what is starting out as a summer of record-breaking heat.

Together, the two beetles are creating “a contiguous swath of dead trees,” Kabashima said.

Kabashima worries that fires that feed on trees in wild areas will more easily jump to urban areas because of the dead trees there. Normally, well-watered trees along creeks and river beds act as an impediment to fire. But if those trees are hit by the beetle and die, the fire defense fades.

WILD OAK DANGER

In a small glade in Orange County’s Weir Canyon, next to a 3-foot-wide stump, a coastal oak tree lies on the ground, hacked apart and stripped of its bark.

Hatchet in hand, Kabashima chips at the top layer of a 5-foot-long log. Painted blue spots mark the tiny D-shaped exit holes where the beetles have burrowed their way out of the tree. Underneath, he uncovers a warren of black trails through which a small BB might roll.

The snaking spaghetti trails surround the tree, dug by the goldspotted oak borer. Orange County Fire Authority crews then cut the tree down and apart, their chain saws working like scalpels to remove a tumor from Orange County’s emblematic coast live oak woodlands.

“We’re not sure we caught it in time,” Kabashima said.

The goldspotted oak borer, originally from southeast Arizona, is already rampant across San Diego County, where it was discovered in 2008. Scientists believe the beetle arrived near El Cajon in San Diego County in the mid-1990s – a hypothesis they developed by examining tree stumps. It started to spread, aided by humans who transported the beetle in infested firewood.

The beetle soon made it to coastal San Diego County and La Jolla, then Idyllwild in Riverside County in 2012, then Orange County in 2014. In 2015, it showed up in northeast Los Angeles County, in Green Valley.

Response to the goldspotted oak borer was, at first, minimal. The U.S. Department of Agriculture considered it a native species, since it lived in other parts of the U.S.

“It’s becoming more and more clear there’s a need to address the native oaks and sycamores down here,” said Brian Norton, a battalion chief for the Orange County Fire Authority.

“We need to stop transporting firewood from one area to another.”

In its native home of Arizona – a place it never left for hundreds or possibly thousands of years – the beetle doesn’t pose much of a problem since another insect that flourishes during monsoonal storms controls the beetle population. There is no such control here in Southern California.

DRY SUMMER

Forests across Southern California are stressed by four years of drought.

In Orange County's Weir Canyon, the canopies are thin and meager, and the green leaves are scant enough that gray bark in the upper reaches shows through. A thick mat of grass – three crops from the winter rains – lies golden and crisp on the forest floor. Many of the trees stand tall, but they're dry and dying.

George Ewan, a wildland defense planner for the Orange County Fire Authority, maneuvers his truck down a bumpy gravel road. If the canopies are green, he said, they're OK; if they're gray, the trees are in serious trouble.

"There is a combination. Is it drought or beetle, or that the drought has weakened the trees so the beetles can hit it?" Ewan said.

Ewan samples shrubs weekly and tests them to see how dry they are. In June, the plants were already reaching critically dry levels – months ahead of normal, in September or October.

Dead trees ignite easier than live ones, and the trees act as fire ladders. This enables flames to reach higher and throw embers farther afield. The trees also burn longer and hotter than smaller fuels, such as grass or shrubs, and their radiant heat can be so intense that it pushes nearby shrubs and grass to their flash points.

DEAD FORESTS

In the San Bernardino and Sierra Nevada Mountains, trees are perishing en masse because of native bark beetles that have flourished during four consecutive years of drought and heat.

Since 2010, at least 66 million trees have died across the state, according to aerial surveys. And the problem is ramping up: While 40 million of those trees died between 2010 and October 2015, 26 million died in the southern Sierra Nevada alone between October and June.

"Drought is definitely a big stressor, particularly consecutive years of drought," said Kevin Turner, who works on beetle issues for the UC Cooperative Extension. "Trees that normally pitch insects out can't produce enough sap to push them out."

Those native beetles are also attacking conifers, white firs and pines at higher elevations in Southern California forests, but not at nearly the same rate as farther north, in the Sierra Nevada. The vast stands of dead trees can fuel raging wildfires.

The beetles release a pheromone that draws other beetles to the tree until it succumbs, Turner said.

"That pretty much goes on until the drought ends."

<http://www.sbsun.com/environment-and-nature/20160724/trees-are-dying-all-over-southern-california-and-there-is-no-remedy-heres-why>