



NEWS



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Fires cause concern: Authorities confirm the number and proximity of 4 blazes 'is suspicious'

Jose Quintero, Victor Valley Daily Press
Posted Sep. 8, 2016 at 3:28 PM



San Bernardino County Fire Investigator Mike Ward watches smoke from the Bluecut Fire expand on its first day. Fire officials are concerned and suspicious of so many large fires starting in such a relatively small space, and short time frame. (James Quigg, Daily Press)

HESPERIA — After four major fires in the San Bernardino Mountains, Cajon Pass and Summit Valley area in the past month, a fire official said Thursday there is cause for concern and the amount is suspicious.

San Bernardino County Fire Department spokeswoman Tracey Martinez said the department is working with the San Bernardino National Forest Service, Cal Fire and the Sheriff's Department in investigating the recent Pilot, Bluecut, Ken and Spring fires. She confirmed the Pilot Fire was not started by arson.

“We do have arson investigators and task forces that are made from all fire agencies on these cases,” Martinez said. “When you have so many fires breaking out in such close proximity and it’s consecutive it does cause a concern and is suspicious.”

The Spring Fire, which erupted on Wednesday afternoon in south Hesperia, was the latest in the series of fires to hit the area. The Pilot, Bluecut and Ken fires burned more than 45,000 acres over the last month, authorities said. The BlueCut Fire began Aug. 16 and scorched more than 36,000 acres in the region, prompting evacuation orders for more than 82,000 residents and destroying an estimated 110 homes, 216 outbuildings and more than 200 vehicles.

The Spring Fire was reported a little before 5 p.m. Wednesday by Hesperia resident Vernetta Hansen, who lives off Highway 173, and it quickly spread to more than 30 acres in a little over an hour. It grew to about 50 acres before firefighters got a handle on it.

Hansen claims her husband came across a man driving in a white “newer model” pickup truck on Las Flores Ranch Road who said he was “driving back from LAX.”

“My husband thought that was strange. Then the guy said, 'There's a fire over there, must be a controlled burn,’” Hansen told the Daily Press.

Hansen said her husband reported the truck’s license plate number to authorities.

“It's very odd for a nice vehicle to be coming off of that road. That road is pretty rough along most of it, and unless they work at the ranch or are on a heavy duty four-wheel drive or dirt bike, I can't imagine what he'd be doing in that area,” she said.

“Pure speculation on my part, but after you've been through three fires, you start to get a little paranoid. It concerned us enough that we felt the need to report it to the State Parks Ranger.”

Messages left with the Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area on Thursday about the Hansen's report were not immediately returned.

County Fire spokesman Jeff Allen said “nothing is confirmed” and “everything at this point is speculation.”

The Spring Fire began just days after authorities announced they had arrested a convicted arsonist on parole in the Cajon Pass for allegedly possessing flammable materials that "appeared to be set ready for immediate use" near a patch of land unscathed by the Bluecut Fire.

Authorities said Larry Missirilian, 61, of Ontario, was arrested on suspicion of arson and violation of his parole terms and he was booked without incident at West Valley Detention Center in Rancho Cucamonga.

However, booking records do not yield any bookings for Missirilian, who was allegedly found in a parked vehicle trespassing on Union Pacific Railroad property north of Cajon Boulevard and Cleghorn Road on Sept. 3. He was parked roughly 10 feet from "a large, dry unburned area where the BlueCut Fire had not burned," authorities said.

"They conducted a vehicle search and discovered Missirilian had a 5-gallon can of gasoline, large butane torches, lighter fluid, and new cigarette lighters underneath the driver's seat," sheriff's officials said. "The items appeared to be set ready for immediate use."

Missirilian was arrested roughly 12 hours before the Ken Fire burned 20 acres near Kenwood Avenue. Sheriff's officials did not suggest a connection between Missirilian and the start of the two earlier fires.

The cause of all the fires remains under investigation and anyone with information can call 1-800-47-ARSON. Those wishing to remain anonymous may call the WeTip hotline at 800-782-7436 or visit www.wetip.com.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/article/20160908/NEWS/160909779/0/SEARCH>

Spring fire in Hesperia stopped at 50 acres

Rich Brooks, The Sun

Posted: September 8, 2016, 4:39 PM



Firefighters and supporting aircraft tackled a fast-moving blaze Wednesday afternoon near south Hesperia that was later stopped at about 50 acres. (Courtesy of San Bernardino County Fire Department)

Fire crews stopped Spring fire at 50 acres Thursday in the high desert city of Hesperia near the Silverwood Lake spillway.

Firefighters were expected to reach containment around the wildfire about noon Thursday, and crews are continuing to mop up hotspots.

“No further fire growth is expected,” **San Bernardino County Fire** officials posted on Facebook. The cause remains under investigation.

The Spring fire occurred just west of where the Pilot Fire threatened numerous homes on Aug. 7. The Pilot Fire burned over 8,000 acres and was contained several days later.

The Spring fire was reported shortly before 5 p.m. near the dam, which is east of the junction of highways 138 and 173.

The fire was spotting ahead of itself early on, said San Bernardino National Forest spokeswoman John Miller.

The crew of a forest service fire engine was the first to arrive, but San Bernardino County Fire Department was responsible for the incident because the flames were burning within the city of Hesperia.

Cal Fire air tankers and several water-dropping helicopters hammered the fire during its early stages.

Winds at 15 to 20 mph initially spurred the flames, Cal Fire officials said. However, no buildings were threatened, according to reports from the scene.

By 7 p.m., the wind had diminished to nearly 5 mph, with gusts to 15.

Earlier Wednesday afternoon, a two-acre fire was stopped in Barton Flats, near Lobo Ono group camp off of Highway 38 south of Big Bear City.

<http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20160908/spring-fire-in-hesperia-stopped-at-50-acres>

Father, husband loses life in lake

Gail Fry, *Alpenhorn News*

Posted: September 9, 2016



Members of the Fire Search and Rescue and Sheriff's Dive Team looking for Jose Sotelo-Vizcaino in Grass Valley Lake on Monday, August 29 (Photo by Gail Fry)

On August 29, *The Alpenhorn News* witnessed fire trucks; ambulances; patrol cars; helicopters, delivering scuba divers; a California Highway Patrol Car and a little boy, sitting in a **San Bernardino County Fire Department** Ambulance, watching as Fire Search and Rescue and Sheriff's Dive Team members looked for his father. At some point, the little boy was seen carried away by an unknown woman.

Members of the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department Scuba Dive Team went into the lake to search for the body of a man who had reportedly disappeared while retrieving a remote control boat.

The man, later identified by the San Bernardino County Coroner's Office, as Jose Soltelo-Vizcaino, was at the park with his young, 6-year old son when, according to witnesses at the scene, Soltelo-Vizcaino waded into Grass Valley Lake to retrieve a radio-controlled boat when it floated away from shore.

Witnesses at the scene shared that Soltelo-Vizcaino's six-year old son approached an adult at the park and reported, "I can't see my dad anymore." The adult then called 911.

Grass Valley Lake Park is owned by Arrowhead Lake Association (ALA). At the entrance a sign is posted "Arrowhead Lake Association members only" and in several places along the shoreline are signs warning, "No swimming."

ALA General Manager Jim Grant told *The Alpenhorn News*, "Upon advice from our attorneys, it would be in our best interest to have the public agencies investigate and handle the matter."

San Bernardino County Sheriff Department Public Information Officer Gil Flores explained, "The victim's son, who is 6-years old, was present and he was there when the victim entered the water on Monday afternoon." Flores voiced members of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and members of its scuba team began searching for Soltelo-Vizcaino's body on Monday afternoon, August 29, and continued the search until it got dark.

They continued the search on Tuesday morning. A resident's video surveillance had captured the incident and helped the sheriff's department locate the body.

The San Bernardino County Coroner's Office Press Release stated, "On Tuesday, 08/30/2016, at approximately 9:45 AM Jose Sotelo-Vizcaino, a 39-year-old male resident of Rimforest, was found submerged in Grass Valley Lake in Lake Arrowhead by the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Dive Team."

"He was pronounced dead at the scene," the press release revealed, explaining, "911 was called on 08/29/2016, at approximately 5:30 PM, after Jose swam into the lake to retrieve a disabled radio controlled boat and did not return to shore."

"Fire Search and Rescue and Sheriff's Dive Team members looked for Jose until dark and resumed the search on Tuesday, 08/30/2016," the press release said, explaining, "Deputies from Twin Peaks Station are investigating the incident."

Sotelo-Vizcaino's wife, Robin Rizzo, told *The Alpenhorn News*, "Jose Sotelo was a good man and a good father and a loving husband. He is loved by his wife and children and will be missed and mourned for deeply."

In response to questions by *The Alpenhorn News* on whether Sotelo-Vizcaino could swim, Rizzo responded, "Yes, he swam very well."

A Gofundme campaign was started to raise money to cover funeral expenses and support the family due to loss of income: <https://www.gofundme.com/josesotelo>

<http://alpenhornnews.com/father-husband-loses-life-in-lake-p7474-154.htm>