



NEWS



News Headlines 11/5-7/2016

- Crews contain vegetation blaze to 2 acres
Firefighters Extinguish Vegetation Fire Before it Could Spread
- UPDATE: 2 Killed, 1 Seriously Injured in Fiery Highway 395 Crash
- Hesperia moves toward county control of fire services
- Massive fire engulfs San Bernardino pallet yard, spreads to neighboring strip mall
- Being prepared to save your life
'Huge challenge': Investigators still don't know how Pilot, Bluecut fires started
- Open house held to assist victims
- Valley Voices: Time to rethink how we use firefighters

Crews contain vegetation blaze to 2 acres

Daily Press

Posted: November 6, 2016, 2:47 PM



San Bernardino County Fire officials knocked down a vegetation fire at 2 acres Sunday morning that had ignited in the river bottom just north of this city, Capt. Jeremy Kern said. Photo courtesy of County Fire.

VICTORVILLE — **San Bernardino County Fire** officials knocked down a vegetation fire at 2 acres Sunday morning that had ignited in the river bottom just north of this city, Capt. Jeremy Kern said.

The fire was reported at 10:21 a.m. Smoke could be seen in the area, west of Interstate 15 and north of Stoddard Wells Road.

Kern said multiple units responded to the blaze, at that point a quarter-acre fire with a slow rate of spread despite medium-to-heavy fuels. Crews established wet lines around the fire to keep it from extending further in the river bottom or from touching nearby Cottonwood trees.

Ultimately, brush engines, hand crews, brush patrols and a water tender were utilized to thwart the blaze's forward momentum. Inmate crews were expected to remain on scene into the afternoon to perform mop-up duty.

One civilian was treated for smoke inhalation after attempting to stop the fire prior to County Fire's arrival, Kern said.

The cause of the blaze was under investigation.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20161106/crews-contain-vegetation-blaze-to-2-acres>

Firefighters Extinguish Vegetation Fire Before it Could Spread

Victor Valley News

Posted: November 6, 2016



(Photo courtesy of San Bernardino County Fire)

VICTORVILLE, CALIF.(VVNG.com)- **San Bernardino County Fire** quickly got a handle on a two- acre brush fire burning in the Mojave Riverbed.

At about 10:21 a.m. on Sunday, November 6th dispatch received a report of smoke showing in the area of the I-15 Freeway and Stoddard Wells Road.

When firefighters arrived on scene they located a 20×20 spot burning in the river bottom with a slow rate of spread. The fire was quickly elevated to a first alarm vegetation response.

“With that, it brought multiple units specific for this type of work,” stated Fire Captain Jeremy Kern. “It brought four wheel drive type 3 brush engines, water tenders, hand-crews, and brush patrols.”

The crews established a wet line around the fire and were able to contain it at two acres.

According to Fire Cpt. Jeremy Kern, a civilian was attempting to put out the fire prior to firefighters arrival. That person was transported locally by AMR for smoke inhalation.

San Bernardino County Sheriff and County Fire Inmate crews will remain at the scene for mop-up.

The cause of the fire is currently under investigation.

<http://www.vvng.com/firefighters-extinguish-vegetation-fire-before-it-could-spread/>

UPDATE: 2 Killed, 1 Seriously Injured in Fiery Highway 395 Crash

Victor Valley News

Posted: November 3, 2016

ADELANTO, CALIF.(VVNG.com) – A fiery head-on crash along Highway 395 left two people dead and a third seriously injured, authorities said.

San Bernardino County Fire responded to the crash at 11:15 p.m. on Wednesday, November 2, 2016 on Highway 395 north of Shadow Mountain Road and south of Mulz Road.

Per scanner reports, the collision involving a 2016 Hyundai Tucson and a 2000 VW Beetle was reported as having parties trapped with the vehicles catching on fire.

The California Highway Patrol arrived on scene to discover two cars with major damage impaled on each other, one of which was on fire.

With fire threatening to ignite the second vehicle officers attempted to separate the two cars using their patrol units. When this proved unsuccessful, they grabbed their portable extinguishers and tried to hold the fire at bay, stated a San Bernardino County Fire press release.

Medic Engine and Medic Patrol 4 from County Fire's Helendale station were the first fire units to arrive. The first vehicle was well involved with fire, and the second vehicle had an active fire in the engine compartment pushing toward the interior of the occupied car. Firefighters quickly pulled an attack line and began holding the fire at bay while additional fire personnel rapidly extracted the victim from the wreckage.

The rescued victim, an adult male, was treated for burns and traumatic injuries and flown to a local trauma center in serious condition. Two firefighters were transported to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center for evaluation of non-life threatening burns sustained during the rescue effort. They were treated and returned to duty early this morning.

Through investigation, authorities determined the driver of a 2016 Hyundai Tucson traveling southbound on U.S. 395 south of Mulz Road attempted to pass a slower moving vehicle by driving to the left of double-yellow lines. The Hyundai collided head-on with a 2000 VW Beetle, which had been traveling northbound.

Both occupants in the Hyundai were pronounced dead on scene by emergency personnel. The names will be released once identification and notifications are complete.

<http://www.vvng.com/update-2-killed-1-seriously-injured-in-fiery-highway-395-crash/>

Hesperia moves toward county control of fire services

Rene Ray De La Cruz

Posted: November 3, 2016, 5:38 PM

HESPERIA — Knowing the city is experiencing financial difficulty in maintaining or improving its fire protection service, the Council approved a resolution that would begin the process of turning over its fire protection service to the **San Bernardino County Fire District**

The resolution requests the Local Agency Formation Commission begin reorganization proceedings to annex the Hesperia Fire Protection District to County Fire for a price tag capped at \$76,530 for deposit, application, deposit and filing fees.

Mayor Pro Tem Paul Russ told the Daily Press the LAFCO process may take up to one year, but could be completed in less time since the agency became “familiar with the fire service situation” after it began an initial review process earlier this year.

“Several annexations have been completed with districts moving into County Fire Service District No. 5, where the county requires a \$148 parcel tax,” Russ said. “We said we cannot go into District 5 so they’ll be no parcel tax in Hesperia unless the county asks the citizens to vote for one.”

As for Hesperia’s unfunded liability, associated with the California Public Employees' Retirement System and estimated at \$47 to \$50 million, Russ said the city will “pick up the payment.”

“Over a horizon of 30 years-plus, as people die, that cost goes down,” Russ said. “But as people retire, that cost will go up. We have that cost no matter what or who controls the fire district. If we go with County Fire, we won’t have future liabilities in that area.”

Russ said except for pensions, all costs and assets will go to the county on day one of the annexation, with \$6 million of capital going toward fire trucks and fire stations in Hesperia only. He added that Station 301 may be remodeled in the process.

“Also, it’s not a gift of public funds when assets go from one public agency to another,” Russ said. “The city of Hesperia and the county fire district are both public agencies so it’s not considered gifts when the county takes over control of vehicles and property.”

City Manager Nils Bentsen told the Council the city did not get a formal bid for fire service from Cal Fire, but came to the conclusion that the cost of doing business with Cal Fire was not adequate after reviewing the contracts of other cities.

The HFPD, a subsidiary district of the city of Hesperia, has contracted with County Fire to provide fire suppression, ambulance and fire prevention services since June 2004. The city has contracted firefighter services with the department on a one-year basis since the 10-year contract expired two years ago.

With a growing population, an ever increasing fire service budget and several failed ballot measures to fund the HFPD, the city has seen the closure of Station 301, located at 9430 11th Ave., and the cutting of nine firefighter positions from the city's contract.

The closure of Hesperia's oldest fire station, which opened in 1957, trimmed \$752,000 from the district's then \$9.2 million budget. But even with the cuts, the city had to pitch in to help.

“Hesperia can't afford to subsidize the fire district out of general funds as some say we should,” Russ said. “We have to live within a confined budget and you can't take money out of the general fund to pay employees.”

Russ' sentiment was echoed by the entire Council, who added that they were not willing to take money out of the city's general fund to keep fire operations afloat.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20161103/hesperia-moves-toward-county-control-of-fire-services>

Massive fire engulfs San Bernardino pallet yard, spreads to neighboring strip mall

Joseph Serna and Marc Olson, LA Times

Posted: November 4, 2016, 8:05 AM



San Bernadino County Fire hand crews overhaul a four-alarm fire that broke out in a wooden pallet yard. (Mark Boster / Los Angeles Times)

A huge blaze engulfed a pallet yard in San Bernardino and damaged a neighboring building as dozens of firefighters battled the flames early Friday, officials said.

The fire started just before 4 a.m. in the 1900 block of East River View Drive, triggering a three-alarm response and pulling in 70 firefighters and 19 engines to battle the blaze, said **San Bernardino County Fire Department** spokesman Jeff Allen. The fire was contained just before 7 a.m.

Video from the scene showed the predawn sky filled with black smoke illuminated by towering flames and lights from fire trucks. Firefighters even brought in a bulldozer to aid in the effort, the fire department tweeted.

The fire spread to a neighboring strip mall but details on damage to businesses there weren't immediately available, authorities said.

The blaze is challenging because pallet fires generally grow rapidly and have a lot of fuel to burn, Allen said. Friday's was further complicated because it likely wasn't immediately reported since it ignited before sunrise and a lot of people weren't outside to notice it, he said.

Allen said it was too early to estimate when firefighters would have full control over the blaze but advised drivers to avoid the area during their morning commute.

<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-san-bernardino-pallet-fire-20161104-story.html>

Being prepared to save your life

Gail Fry, Alpenhorn News

Posted: November 4, 2016



From left to right: San Bernardino County Sheriff Department Captain Dale Gregory speaking, with San Bernardino County Fire Department Division Chief Kathleen Opliger to his right and San Bernardino County Sheriff Department Detective B. J. Whiteside in the background at annual Mountain Communities Emergency Preparedness meeting held October 25 (Photo by Gail Fry)

Earthquakes, drought, fires, evacuations, snow and rain storms, flooding, rock slides and road closures are all things San Bernardino Mountain residents should be prepared for, officials from San Bernardino County, the State of California and the National Weather Service told attendees at the annual Mountain Communities Emergency Preparedness meeting held October 25.

San Bernardino County Fire Office of Emergency Services Manager, Michael Antonucci, shared information about San Bernardino County's new Preparedness App, which features a family emergency plan, emergency services, shelters and evacuation routes. He encouraged, "don't wait; download today." The new app can be downloaded at <http://readyall.com/san-bernardino-county>.

The first speaker introduced by Antonucci was National Weather Service Manager, Alex Tardy, who explained that our region normally experiences about 15-inches of average rainfall, with last year delivering about half, constituting a continuation of the drought. Tardy described our regional temperature in the past five years as the warmest in over 100 years, predicting La Nina conditions this coming winter, which normally means flooding.

San Bernardino County Fire Department Division Chief Kathleen Opliger assured the audience its department is "prepared to serve all communities in the event of isolation," such as an earthquake. The department has established a self-contained "zone operation center," which is set up for satellite communications at Station 91.

Opliger shared the department will have three snowcats on the mountain in case of severe snow conditions where people need to be rescued as in December 2014, when 130 people were rescued after an ice storm.

Opliger reminded residents to remain vigilant as fire season has become year round; for residents to provide defensible space around their property; and if asked to evacuate, do so.

San Bernardino County Supervisor Janice Rutherford Field Representative Lewis Murray shared the contents of an emergency backpack he carries in his vehicle in case he becomes stranded. Contents included granola bars, water, medical supplies, sweatshirt, jacket, gloves, hat, boots, poncho, space blanket, flashlight and knife.

California Highway Patrol Captain Tel Preszler reminded everyone to check wiper blades, heaters, flashers, turn signals and tires. Preszler explained, if tires have insufficient tread, you will be required to chain up. He reminded attendees of a new law requiring vehicles to turn on headlights if using windshield wipers continuously.

San Bernardino County Sheriff Department Captain Dale Gregory reminded parents of students to be patient if their child is in school when an emergency occurs, as there are systems in place to, “make sure all students are accounted for.”

Department of Public Works Deputy Director – Operations, Brendon Biggs, referred residents to its website for information on snow plowing, warning residents to remove parked cars before plows arrive. Biggs advised residents to slow down and turn around if a road is flooded. The Public Works website can be found at: <http://cms.sbcounty.gov/dpw/Home.aspx>.

Director District 8 CalTrans, John Bulinski, praised the median barrier on State Highway 18, explaining, due to dialogue with the community “we ended up with a much better product.”

The annual Mountain Communities Emergency Preparedness meeting was organized by San Bernardino County Fire Office of Emergency Services Officer Cheryl Nagy.

<http://alpenhornnews.com/being-prepared-to-save-your-life-p7617-170.htm>

'Huge challenge': Investigators still don't know how Pilot, Bluecut fires started

Jose Quintero, Daily Press

Posted: November 5, 2016, 12:10 PM

Nearly three months after two of 2016's 10 largest wildfires in California were officially contained, fire officials say investigators still have not determined the cause of either blaze.

San Bernardino National Forest acting spokesman Gregg Goodland told the Daily Press that investigators continue to try to pinpoint the causes of the Pilot and Bluecut fires.

“The special agents responsible have simply advised me that (the fires) remain under investigation,” Goodland said.

While not a part of the investigation, Goodland has been a fire investigator since 2004 and said he knows all too well the “numerous” challenges associated with investigating wildfires.

“As an investigator you need to have an understanding of the unique nature of each fire investigation,” Goodland said. “When dealing with a fire investigation you need to have as much evidence as possible. A lot of times there is an absence of physical evidence and that is a huge challenge. You then have to deduce from a lack of evidence to think of the possibilities of what could have started the fire.”

The Pilot and Bluecut fires burned nearly 45,000 acres in August. The Bluecut Fire began Aug. 16 and scorched more than 36,000 acres in the region.

After the Ken and Spring fires, two smaller fires that erupted weeks after the massive Pilot and Bluecut blazes, fire officials said there was a cause for concern. They feared an arsonist was at work and issued press releases asking for the public's help in their investigations.

“We do have arson investigators and task forces that are made from all fire agencies on these cases. When you have so many fires breaking out in such close proximity and it’s consecutive it does cause a concern and is suspicious,” **San Bernardino County Fire Department** spokeswoman Tracey Martinez previously told the Daily Press.

Martinez also said that the Pilot Fire was not caused by arson.

The Pilot Fire started on Aug. 7 near the Miller Canyon off-highway vehicle area off of Highway 138. The California Highway Patrol, for some time, had rolled the wildfire into an earlier incident logged a "car fire." But CHP officials were not able to confirm whether the two incidents were connected.

A photo surfaced online days after the fire erupted that alleged the blaze may have been caused by a burning off-highway vehicle. The photo appeared to show the charred frame of a vehicle with a fire engine in the background. Fire officials declined to comment on the photo.

Both the Pilot and Bluecut investigations are ongoing and anyone with information is asked to 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.vvdailypress.com/news/20161105/huge-challenge-investigators-still-dont-know-how-pilot-bluecut-fires-started>

Open house held to assist victims

Matthew Cabe, Daily Press

Posted: November 5, 2016, 7:16 PM



Bluecut Fire victims line up around The County Community Action partnership of San Bernardino booth on Saturday during the Bluecut Fire Recovery Open House on Saturday in Phelan. James Quigg, Press Dispatch

PHELAN — Numerous booths set up at Phelan Elementary School offered a variety of county services, but many of the Blue Cut Fire victims who attended Saturday’s open house requested help from a local nonprofit.

The Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County was recently awarded \$150,000 from the Inland Empire United Way’s Blue Cut Fire Relief Fund, according to CAPSBC spokeswoman Marlene Merrill, and the nonprofit’s goal is to provide “as much support as possible” for fire victims.

“It’s far from recovered up there,” Merrill told the Daily Press. “I know if I had been affected that way, I’d want help, and that’s what we’re trying to give to these victims.”

The help CAPSBC offers ranges from basic needs like food, clothing, toiletries and child care to housing necessities such as blankets, rental assistance, shelter, property cleanup and gasoline for generators.

Victims’ needs are myriad and vary from family to family, according to Merrill, and CAPSBC has partnered with several San Bernardino County departments, including **the Office of the Fire Marshal**, Environmental Health Services, and the Department of Behavioral Health — among others — as a result.

Merrill said some have been critical of the relief effort, asking why there was such a delay in providing services to victims of a fire that burned more than 36,000 acres, destroyed 105 homes and was contained nearly three months ago.

“Well, you have to give people the chance to raise the money,” she said. “And actually this is pretty quick.”

In addition to the United Way’s Blue Cut Fire Relief Fund, which contains approximately \$386,000, the county’s Board of Supervisors approved more than \$700,000 in assistance in September.

But \$500,000 of that total will come from U.S. Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant funds that won’t be available until Nov. 15, according to a previous Daily Press report.

The HUD regulations, which have left the county to wait 90 days before using the CDBG funds — is a “frustration” for 1st District Supervisor Robert Lovingood, who requested Saturday’s open house.

“We look at the future and, at the state level, there’s room for improvement,” Lovingood said in reference to the regulations. “When the federal government won’t recognize it, it creates a greater challenge because now it’s just the county and the state. But that one thing (the 90-day waiting period) really impacts us, and we have to work collectively to work on changing that.”

In the interim, the county has worked from the onset with nonprofits and other agencies to “fill the gaps” in needed relief, according to Lovingood.

“It’s nice when the nonprofits and the county services are working together,” he said. “From vouchers, to food, to shelter, we had a lot of county services there, and our efforts haven’t ever stopped. We’ve had people out there connecting with victims, and I don’t want a single person to get passed over and that’s why this (the open house) was so critical. This is the continuation.”

And it appeared to help. Back at the CAPSBC booth, after talking with a case manager, one woman expressed gratitude on behalf of her loved one.

“Thank you,” she said. “You make her so happy.”

CAPSBC will begin case management for assistance on a regular basis starting Nov. 8 at Saint Junipero Serra Catholic Church, located at 8820 Sheep Creek Road, Phelan. Clients will be seen from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the church.

For more information about CAPSBC services or case management, call 909-7231561 or email Renee Smith at rsmith@capsbc.org.

The Inland Empire United Way continues to accept donations to the Blue Cut Fire Relief Fund. 100 percent of contributions will be directed to recovery efforts for those affected by the Blue Cut Fire. For information on how to donate, visit www.iuew.org/help.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20161105/open-house-held-to-assist-victims>

Valley Voices: Time to rethink how we use firefighters

Tom Pinard, Wrightwood resident, Daily Press

Posted: November 6, 2016, 6:34 PM

We need to revise our thinking in California, if not the USA, when it comes to identifying our firefighters. Recent wildland fires, across our mountains, canyons and High Desert underscore that the idea that we can have firefighters paid on a year-round basis to fight fire is a luxury too soon gone in 21st Century America.

The cost of fighting fire has gone through the roof, what with these huge fires raging out of control from within minutes of the spark generating the fire, engulfing thousands of acres of wooded lands that are just begging for fire to consume them, AND the tremendous cost of wages that we pay our firefighters in today's market.

We have to make some sane changes to this 20th, if not 19th, century way of doing business.

While the cost of our wages for firefighters is never going to go down, witness the Cal Firefighters Union petitioning the Legislature for higher salaries, we have to look to the one area where we can do a better job at reducing the threat of fire.

I propose that we do away with firefighter job description when it comes to all those that are in the employ of Cal Fire and re-set their job description and titles to be Fire Prevention personnel. In their new job description will come the first responsibility to prevent wild fires, those same fires that they roll out of their stations to "fight."

Fire Season in California is about six months of the year. Statewide monitoring of major brush/wild/forest fires shows that to be true. That leaves five or six months of the year when these full time Fire Prevention personnel are available on the regular work schedule to get down and dirty in the forest, brush and grasslands of California coming up with adequate fuel and fire breaks, defensible space (as they like to tell us individual property owners we need to create) around communities, using everything from D-8 Cats to weed wackers to make it happen.

A re-evaluation could also be made of the structural fire departments operating within the state as well. If the station crew is not in the business of responding to health emergencies (many are turning that over to specialized ambulance crews), then these firefighters could be re-categorized to be Fire Prevention personnel and their daily job would be doing fire prevention in their respective communities.

Weed wackers could take the place of routine polishing of the fire engines between the infrequent actual fire calls. The local on-duty fire prevention squad, if not performing those defensible space duties, could also resume the yearly or semi-annual fire inspections of businesses and public buildings. They used to perform those tasks but bureaucracies at the county or city "seat" have taken over those jobs (those personnel could come back out into the "field" to prevent fire on a daily basis).

We have allowed our fire departments and agencies, from local residential units to the county, the state and the federal (Forest Service, BLM and even now the National Monument gang) to become more and more this elite force that rolls out when a fire breaks out, but then disappears during the almost 50 percent of the year or more, when there are no fires to fight. By the way, when those present firefighters show up and work the fires for days at a time, they are being well compensated for the extra time they spend on the job.

The idea that we could prevent the multi-million dollar wildland fires, with their additional cost to individual's property (homes), by re-constituting our fire services and making them into pro-active fire prevention agencies is an idea well past doing. When the news broke recently that the "Old Cajon Fire Crew" was going to be put on a full-time basis, I dug out my notes following the Pilot and Bluecut fires. This is a good first step, but it has to be applied to everyone who is an employee of Cal Fire (the spin-off to the California Division of Forestry, chartered to fight wildland fires in California during fire season but now expanded into year-round Cal Fire crews).

The Forest Service — Congressman Cook are you listening? — should be re-configured so that their fire crews become full time and they too are designated as fire prevention crews, full time in the forest doing timber management/tree felling, along with extensive fuel and fire break efforts.

We can't afford to sit back and allow our state burn every fire season, we need to get out in front and come up with defensive foliage that will provide fuel and fire breaks to prevent the next Pilot or Bluecut Fire.

Tom Pinard is a Wrightwood resident.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/opinion/20161106/valley-voices-time-to-rethink-how-we-use-firefighters>