



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fire Chief / Fire Warden*

DATE: Monday, May 05, 2014

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BRIDGE FIRE AND COLLAPSE CAUSE INTERSTATE CLOSURE

Date/Time: Monday, May 05, 2014 1:30pm

Location: Interstate 15 at Ranchero Road Hesperia, CA

Incident: Bridge Fire

At 1:30 this afternoon, San Bernardino County Fire Department responded to multiple reports of a fire at the construction site of the Ranchero Road overcrossing and Interstate 15 in the City of Hesperia. Callers stated that flames were visible on the underside of the bridge in center divider area.

First arriving units discovered a well-established fire that carried across the entire bridge project which spans the interstate. They also noted debris falling onto the freeway and immediately requested a full closure of the north and southbound lanes for commuter safety.

Suppression efforts were hampered at many points during the extended attack. Falling debris and ongoing collapses prevented crews from fighting the fire from beneath the structure. Once personnel pulled back out of the collapse zone, constant winds of 25 mph with 35 mph gusts kept hose streams from penetrating deep into the bridge and to the seat of the fire. These same winds contributed to the quick spread as flames were pushed through the construction area much like a wildland environment. Being on the interstate, access to fire hydrants was reduced, therefore a number of water tenders were brought to scene to support the large volume of water being utilized to combat the blaze.

In all, 11 engines, one truck company, one patrol, six water tenders, and one hand crew totaling over 60 personnel were assigned to the incident as well as multiple chief officers. An additional strike team of engines was deployed to the High Desert to backfill committed resources and provide uninterrupted service for additional 911 responses which included a structure fire in the City of Hesperia.

Cause of the fire was determined to be from a rebar cutting operation in which blowtorches carried fire into the falsework of the bridge thus igniting the fire. Workers reported that initial extinguishment efforts were unsuccessful due to the high wind.

There was a single reported injury to a civilian who suffered minor smoke inhalation and was treated and released at the scene.

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County Fire remains in Unified Command with the California Highway Patrol and Caltrans. Current operations include the complete demolition of the bridge with ongoing fire suppression efforts as engineers bring down sections of the project. Duration of this task ranges from 24 to 48 hours.

There is a long term closure in effect for both direction of Interstate 15. Motorists in both directions are being taken off at the Ranchero exits, which have been temporarily opened for this purpose, and placed right back on at the Ranchero onramps.

San Bernardino County Fire reminds motorists to safely slow down, pull to the right, and stop whenever they see emergency vehicles approaching.

The next press conference is scheduled for Tuesday, May 6th at 6:00am. Location will be on the Northbound I-15 south of the Ranchero Bridge.

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