



# NEWS



## News Headlines 3/25-27/2017

- 69-year-old rock climber hurt in fall in Joshua Tree National Park
- Wyoming man rescued at Joshua Tree National Park
- 'Get prepared now': Fire officials gear up for busy fire season
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## **69-year-old rock climber hurt in fall in Joshua Tree National Park**

**Press Enterprise**

Posted: March 25, 2017, 8:58 pm

A Wyoming man was injured Saturday after he fell 25 feet while rock-climbing in Joshua Tree National Park, officials say.

Tom Hurgis, 69, of Jackson, Wyo., was climbing in the park's Hidden Valley area when he fell, according to a San Bernardino County sheriff's news release.

San Bernardino County firefighters who found Hurgis on a rock ledge and unable to move called a sheriff's helicopter to perform a hoist rescue, the news release states.

After firefighters climbed up to Hurgis and secured him in a rescue basket, flight nurse Wai Li was lowered from the helicopter to bring the injured man aboard.

Hurgis was flown to a waiting ground ambulance and taken to a nearby hospital for treatment of non-life-threatening injuries, the news release states.

<http://www.pe.com/articles/feet-828295-say-national.html>

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## **Wyoming man rescued at Joshua Tree National Park**

**kesq.com**

Posted: March 25, 2017, 10:57 pm

JOSHUA TREE, Calif. - A Wyoming man is recovering tonight after being rescued in an area of Joshua Tree National Park Saturday.

San Bernardino County Fire crews responded to the Hidden Valley area of the park, where they discovered 69-year-old Tom Hurgis had fallen close to 25 feet while rock climbing.

The man landed on a rock ledge and wasn't able to move.

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department air crews were called in to help with the rescue.

Hurgis was flown to a nearby waiting ambulance where he was then taken to a local hospital with non-life threatening injuries.

<http://www.kesq.com/news/top-stories/wyoming-man-rescued-at-joshua-tree-national-park/416232607>

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## **'Get prepared now': Fire officials gear up for busy fire season**

**Paola Baker, VV Daily Press**

Posted: March 24, 2017, 5:07 PM

While winter rains have left the High Desert lush, officials are gearing up for what could potentially be an extremely busy fire season — and urge residents to do the same.

"When it rains in winter, I call it liquid sunshine," San Bernardino County Fire Battalion Chief and wildland specialist Mike Wakoski said. "But it doesn't take long for the desert to dry out. All those beautiful flowers and grass will die off, and it'll all be dead fuel, ready to burn."

While the storms brought much-needed moisture to the area, the fresh foliage comes with hidden dangers. The Mojave River bed area, as an example, is thick with new brush and vegetation — more so than in several years, according to some officials.

"This is probably the most grass I've seen up here in 10 years," Apple Valley Fire Protection District Fire Chief Sid Hultquist said. "It's definitely great to see, but what it means is this year, we have a potential for more wildfires to occur because of the increased vegetation."

Barstow Fire Protection District Interim Chief Jamie Williams agreed with Hultquist's assessment, and said BFPD is also focused on preparation.

"With the increase in rain, we've got lots of desert grass — those light, flashy fuels — that burn faster and spread quicker," Williams said. "So we are gearing up and anticipating an increase in wildfires this year."

With that in mind, public safety officials say they're committed to mitigating the hazards by getting an early start preparing for what could be an earlier, and longer, fire season. County Fire's Wakoski said the department has several resources available throughout the region aimed specifically at handling these risks.

"We've really sharpened our wildland resources in the last few years or so," Wakoski said. "We've got several hand crews available, bulldozers to clear the brush, water tenders and helicopters. County Fire is prepared."

The department also works closely with local cities to create "buffers" between the wildland and urban areas, as well as periodically clearing brush in the Mojave River. AVFPD has a weed abatement ordinance in place, which Hultquist said has significantly reduced fires in the region. While BFPD doesn't conduct any clearing operations, Williams said the district "pre-plans" areas of the river bottom to better identify the areas most at risk for fires and the best ways to contain them.

Nevertheless, fire officials stressed the need for residents to also prepare.

"It's extremely critical that residents prepare for fire season," Hultquist said. "All it takes is two inches of grass to spread wildfire from one yard to another — and that's what we're trying to avoid."

Some suggestions for residents include maintaining an 100-foot clearance from structures by clearing brush and vegetation around homes. Hultquist stressed the importance of also clearing any brush from alleys or easements near homes, where many fires that eventually spread into homes first begin.

Both BFPD and AVFPD allow burn permits, which can easily be obtained and can help ease weeds and brush around homes. County Fire's Wakoski said the department has a wide range of fire-safety information for residents, such as their "Ready-Set-Go!" program, available at their website.

"We hope the community gets ahead and starts preparing ahead of time," Hultquist said. "If you wait until things dry up, it's too late. The key is to get prepared now."

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20170324/get-prepared-now-fire-officials-gear-up-for-busy-fire-season>

## **Time for the Upland fire annexation is now: Guest commentary**

**Jim Richardson, Daily Bulletin**

Posted: March 24, 2017, 2:10 pm

Too many years of austerity measures have all but crippled Upland's Fire Department.

The best part of our city's option to join the San Bernardino County Fire District is an immediate staffing increase of three firefighters. The economics make as much sense, but more help, better equipment, response times, necessary capital improvements are all big pluses. The firefighters union says all the current workers will be fine.

Without annexation, most of our financial experts are willing to allow for Upland's solvency only through 2018.

Some may disagree with these innumerable assessments over the years. Bear in mind the recommendations of fiscal professionals with entire careers as reference, contrasted with the non-specialists. We all have valuable opinions, but recognize that at times, it helps to hear from experts when we've hit a logjam. This is one of Upland's multi-year logjams. It is not reasonable to halt the process to begin anew each time a person thinks of another question, or comes to their first meeting. Taking all available options into account, the decision to annex Upland's Fire Department with the county's is the very best.

Fire services require cutting-edge, highly skilled resources that demand substantial reinvestment. We have not, as citizens, kept our side of the bargain. Everybody deserves better. The infrastructure is falling apart. Additionally, complex laws regarding staffing cause overtime to be a tremendous burden both to the firefighter and to a strained budget.

Conservative estimates place our deferred maintenance costs at \$6 million with another \$3 million needed in the near term for basic equipment. On one recent day, three fire engines broke down.

I remind my friends in San Antonio Heights that county annexation makes Upland intrusion and annexation of the Heights all the less likely and more difficult. It is the opposite of staking claim to the area when we affirmatively cede control of fire services here, while stepping away from another possible claim to be up there. It is cutting a tie, if you will.

Mainly, we're allowing an organization with the scale and depth of experience to lead our teams with the resources they deserve. We need to allow the professionals to go to work. That is the conclusion every panel and committee reaches, but it won't get anybody elected. Thankfully, we now have a full council more concerned with what is right than what may be perceived as "not right."

Even this fire annexation will not solve all of Upland's fiscal challenges. It is one major step in the right direction. Estimates are that it will save \$50 million over 10 years while increasing the staff by three firefighters! It will remove a slice of the CalPERS pension accrual, disability costs, workers' comp costs, building and equipment maintenance costs — all of which are among the fastest-growing components of our general fund expenses.

Using data from the 2017 budget on Upland's website, I calculate that since 2013 the annually compounded growth of PERS was 8.95 percent; maintenance, 12.89 percent; and the overall Fire Department, 5.13 percent — all while deferring millions in maintenance, a hiring freeze, a trial merger with Montclair's Fire Department and more! Those numbers far exceed any revenue increases.

The main factor is time and it's not on our side as machines fail and budgets deplete. The wrong decision is to keep stalling. That consequence is the one not measured in money.

<http://www.dailybulletin.com/opinion/20170324/time-for-upland-fire-annexation-is-now-guest-commentary>

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