



NEWS



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Suspected arsonist arrested in Needles after veteran's tent was set ablaze

Staff Writer, Havasu News

Posted: August 6, 2020

A suspect has been arrested one week after a homeless veteran's tent was intentionally set on fire in Needles.

Last Wednesday, **San Bernardino County** Sheriff's and **Fire** Departments responded to a report of a fire in the area of Hospitality lane and Flip Mendez Street in Needles around 11:30 p.m. A homeless veteran's tent was found in flames.

Further investigation revealed the fire was intentionally set, and Bastian Sanchez, 28, of Needles was arrested for arson. Sanchez was booked into the Colorado River Station jail with a bail set at \$50,000, according to the SBCSD.

https://www.havasunews.com/news/suspected-arsonist-arrested-in-needles-after-veteran-s-tent-was-set-ablaze/article_9f4e809a-d7b0-11ea-a277-3b068bc52d8b.html

Fire Prevention More Important

Luke Scorziell, Mountain News

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The Apple Fire seen from Red Rock Wall on the afternoon of Saturday, August 1st.

Without Rain, Fire Prevention Becomes More Important
Southern California's fire season isn't so seasonal anymore.

"We don't really define a fire season anymore in Southern California," said Steve Tracy, a Battalion Chief and Public Information Officer with the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department. "It's pretty much all year round."

Tracy, who has been a firefighter for 25 years in San Bernardino, pointed out that many damaging fires in the region have occurred even in winter months, which usually come with higher moisture and rainfall levels.

"We've had big fires in what typically would be the winter months," said Tracy. "We're always concerned about the Santa Ana winds that come in that time of year."

As temperatures rise and humidity levels fall in Southern California, it is as important as ever to protect the mountain community from fires. According to the National Weather Service's drought outlook, California and the western states can expect a continued drought through at least October this year.

The effects of the dry season are already evident. Just miles away from Big Bear in the San Bernardino National Forest, the Apple Fire in Cherry Valley has burned more than 26,000 acres at the time of writing, destroying at least a dozen structures and evacuating thousands of people from their homes.

Investigators have found that the fire was started by a vehicle malfunction.

According to Tracy, this year's fire season is shaping up to be rather average. This doesn't mean mountain residents or visitors should let their guard down, however. Just two years ago in 2018, California faced its deadliest and most destructive fire season on record. More than 7,500 fires burned over 1.6 million acres across the state, killing more than 100 people.

Those statistics toned back in 2019 with only a quarter million acres burned in a similar number of fires, but it is still important to take necessary precautions to prevent wildfires.

Contributing to this year's fire risks are low fuel moistures and a lack of rain late in the season, said Tracy. The San Bernardino County Fire Department is ready, however.

"We didn't have any late seasonal rains that normally would help contribute to a higher fuel moisture," said Tracy. "We're definitely going to be more cognizant of those fuel moistures and the hotter and drier weather."

Another risk factor the department is monitoring is the increased number of recreators and tourists to the San Bernardino Mountains. As the coronavirus and stay-at-home orders have increased cabin fever, many people are camping and using off-roading vehicles in the Pinnacles.

"Certainly when you have an increase in the number of recreators in the mountains that are recreating and hiking and/or using their all terrain vehicles in the back country and that kind of thing, the risk for a fire goes up," said Tracy.

KEEPING YOUR HOME AND LOVED ONES SAFE

Keeping our mountain safe starts with keeping our homes safe. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, otherwise known as CalFire, has a list of recommendations for homeowners on how to keep their properties and families safe from fires.

One thing residents can do is follow the "Ready, Set, Go!" guidelines.

Being "Ready" starts with creating and maintaining a defensible space around structures. This means cleaning and removing dead leaves and debris around the home.

"The biggest issue is clearance," said Tracy. "You pretty much want to have 100 feet of clearance around your home of any fuels and ensure that you don't have any large overgrown vegetation overhanging the roof area and the eaves of your home."

Additionally, homeowners need to "harden their home" by protecting weak spots around the home's exterior. This entails using ignition-resistant materials for roofing, walls, decks, eaves, fences and more. It's also important that rain gutters be cleared of debris.

There are three steps to getting "Set."

First, homeowners need to create a Wildfire Action Plan, which describes evacuation plans for the family. CalFire's website points out "The Six P's" in preparing an evacuation plan: People and pets, papers and important documents, prescriptions and medicines, pictures, personal computers, and plastics (credit and debit cards) and cash.

Second, each member of the family needs an emergency supply kit, which includes face masks, food and water for three days, changes of clothing, flashlights, battery-powered radios, and more.

Third, a family communication plan is essential, which includes important evacuation information and contact information for various family members.

Further details about each of these points can be found on CalFire's website, ReadyforWildfire.org.

Finally, residents must be prepared to "Go!" This involves obeying local orders and putting evacuation plans into action. Swift action and obedience can make a fire less dangerous and much easier to fight.

Tracy pointed to Running Springs' residents' reaction to the Mount R Fire in July as a good example of following evacuation orders.

"When that evacuation order came in for the Mount R Fire, our partners said that it went off without a hitch," said Tracy. "It was quick, the people were prepared for that, and they were adhering to those recommendations and orders by the public safety folks."

In general, Tracy commended mountain locals for their proactive approach in preventing wildfires and protecting their homes.

"The communities up [in the San Bernardino mountains] have been really proactive with the Fire Safe Council," said Tracy, who worked in the mountains as a battalion chief for much of last year. "They are probably, within the county, some of the most progressive folks as far as being prepared."

FIGHTING FIRES DURING THE PANDEMIC

CalFire and the San Bernardino County Fire Department are working hard to protect their firefighters from coronavirus, said Tracy. They've implemented several new procedures and protections, including temperature monitoring, on demand decontamination units, assigned Infection Control officers, and more.

Firefighters are no longer eating from cafeteria-style serving centers, but rather have prepackaged meals served on a particular schedule to ensure their safety and protection from the virus.

The department also has COVID Kits, which include personal protection equipment, hand sanitizer, and more designed to support more than 500 firefighters for more than three days.

"We have put a lot of time and effort in," said Tracy.

At evacuation centers CDC guidelines are also being followed, he said. Evacuees are partitioned and are required to wear masks and social distance.

<https://mountain-news.com/news/39913/fire-prevention-more-important/>

Apple Fire Chars 27,569 Acres, 30% Contained

Staff Writer, NBC 4 Los Angeles

Posted: August 6, 2020



Firefighters watch as flames approach a retardant line near a residential community during the Apple fire in Banning, California on August 1, 2020. – 4,125 acres have burn in Cherry Valley, about 2,000 people have received evacuation orders in the afternoon of August 1. Around 8PM the fire spread to 12,000 acres. (Photo by JOSH EDELSON / AFP) (Photo by JOSH EDELSON/AFP via Getty Images)

The Apple Fire raging in the mountains in the San Bernardino National Forest has blackened 27,569 acres, destroyed four homes and eight other structures, and is 30% contained this morning, authorities said.

Fire officials are estimating the blaze could be fully contained as soon as Aug. 17, according to Kate Kramer of the U.S. Forest Service.

In addition to the four homes destroyed by the flames, eight outbuildings were lost. One of the homes and two of the outbuildings were located near Avenida Miravilla, Cal Fire said. It was unclear where the other structures were located.

The head of the Apple Fire is on a mountainside in San Bernardino County, according to the USFS. A total of 20 water-dropping aircraft -- 19 helicopters and one fixed-wing -- were working to establish containment boundaries, as more than 2,500 personnel on the ground gradually attempted to encircle the brusher.

The fire was continuing to spread north, deeper into San Bernardino County, and east into the San Gorgonio wilderness, the USFS said.

One USFS firefighter suffered minor injuries, Kramer said.

All mandatory evacuations associated with the Apple Fire were lifted Tuesday in Riverside County.

In San Bernardino County, mandatory evacuation orders associated with the Apple Fire remained in place east of Oak Glen Road.

Non-mandatory evacuation warnings in San Bernardino County also remained in effect in Forest Falls, Rimrock and Pioneertown, the USFS said.

The American Red Cross closed its temporary evacuation center at Beaumont High School at 7 p.m. Tuesday, but residents under the Oak Glen evacuation order could receive assistance from the Red Cross by calling 571-595-7774.

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced the state will receive a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help ensure resources will be available to fight the fire. It will also allow local, state and tribal agencies responding to the fire to apply for 75% reimbursement of their eligible costs, Newsom said.

Officials estimated that 2,600 residences and 7,800 people have been evacuated since the blaze began.

The smoke column from the fire was visible throughout much of Southern California.

Along with **county fire** crews, personnel from the Calimesa, Morongo, Murrieta, Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Huntington Beach, Hemet, Pechanga, **San Bernardino**, Soboba, Los Angeles and Los Angeles County fire departments were sent to assist under a mutual aid request.

The fire erupted in Cherry Valley about 5 p.m. Friday in the area of Apple Tree Lane and Oak Glen Road and investigators determined it was sparked by a malfunctioning diesel vehicle that was belching burning matter from its exhaust pipe, Cal Fire said.

Anyone with further information about the start of the fires was urged to call the Cal Fire hotline at 800-633-2836. Callers may remain anonymous.

A public information line regarding the fire was established at 909-383-5688.

<https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/apple-fire-chars-27569-acres-30-contained/2408968/>