

July 2, 2004

Friends,

I'm sending out this email to you because I thought you might be interested in the topic of fire in southern California and may want to gain a better understanding of its impact on all Californians. If you don't want to get periodic notes like this 'cuz it clogs up your already busy life, let me know and I'll take you off the list. Email addresses are all sent via blind cc so they won't appear in the header.

There are a tremendous number of misconceptions concerning fire and I figure one of the best ways to help correct these is to start sharing the true details with friends. If you are so inclined, feel free to forward any of these to folks you may know. We live in a fire-prone environment in California and it is important for everyone to know how to make that fact part of their daily lives.

The article below is an excellent example of a typical summer fire burning under calm weather conditions. These are easily managed by helicopters and fire crews. The basic problem here is that the public generally does not understand the distinction between these and those fires burning during SEVERE fire weather conditions (Santa Ana winds, extremely low humidity).

To take a quote from below: "'When I woke up, it was on the other side of the hill,' she said. But within a half hour, the fire had crept within 100 feet of her ranch style house."

If this fire had burned during strong Santa Ana winds, the term "crept" would not have been part of this story. All of the huge, catastrophic conflagrations in California have been during severe fire weather. Those are different beasts all together from the one below and cannot be controlled. They go out when the wind stops. That's why it is important to view these things like earthquakes; we can't control them but we can retrofit the infrastructure to reduce damage and fatalities.

Look around your home. Would it survive a Santa Ana wind driven fire? Remember, most structures ignite during these by flying embers...embers from as far as a mile away.

Rick

Fast-moving fire creates scare near Pala, Route 76 July 2, 2004 By Shannon Tangonan and Brooke Williams UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITERS

PALA INDIAN RESERVATION - Water-dropping aircraft and more than 300 firefighters rushed to battle a wildfire that whipped through bone-dry brush near state Route 76 yesterday.

The fire was reported about 3:45 p.m. and had burned about 100 acres within an hour. Officials estimate the fire burned 200 acres by nightfall and was 25 percent contained as winds and temperatures began dropping.

The late afternoon sun shines through smoke as a large fire fighting helicopter passes behind homes on Sycamore Road, about to make a water drop on the fire's hot spots at the Pala Indian Reservation.

No homes had been lost by early evening. One firefighter was slightly injured, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry said.

Sheriff's deputies went house to house along Pala Temecula Road, strongly advising residents to evacuate by early evening. Many had already started packing.

Sgt. Ed Wells said residents along the north end of the road to the Riverside County line were directed to leave northbound. He estimated the number of houses scattered through brush-covered hills as a few hundred up to 1,000.

Three Red Cross volunteers set up an evacuation center at Fallbrook Union High School on Stagecoach Lane. No residents had showed up by late night.

The volunteers will be serving breakfast to emergency workers this morning, Red Cross spokeswoman Gayle Falkenthal said.

The Pala band of Mission Indians set up a separate evacuation center for tribal members at the Pala Resort Hotel on Pala Mission Road.

By 9 p.m., much of the threat had passed as the winds grew calm. Some residents were returning to their homes, said North County Fire Department spokesman John Buchanan.

"The fire isn't moving at all" Buchanan said.

Forestry department spokesman Matt Streck said hand crews would be working fire lines and setting backfires through the night.

Twenty engines, 10 hand crews, four air tankers and four helicopters were immediately dispatched to the scene, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said.

One of the helicopters, County Copter 2 operated by the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department, had just started its first day in service out of Fallbrook.

Authorities shut down Pala Temecula Road, which leads to Riverside County.

The flames threw a scare into several Pala residents.

Christine Castillo said she came home to her Sycamore Lane house about 5 p.m. to find flames on the hillside behind her property. She immediately gathered "generations and generations of stuff" and packed it into a truck.

Annette Walsh, who lives at the north end of Sycamore Lane, said she was asleep when her cousin called from the tribal office to warn her about the fire.

"When I woke up, it was on the other side of the hill," she said. But within a half hour, the fire had crept within 100 feet of her ranch style house.

She packed pictures, clothes, bathroom supplies, 4 televisions and a PlayStation game into her SUV while still in her pajamas. She then drove down the street to safety.

When Juanita Luna got home about 4:30, "all you could see was smoke." When she turned toward the east, "there were flames all along the hill."

For the first two hours, strong winds had fire crews concerned, but numerous water drops and lower temperatures began giving firefighters the upper hand by nightfall, Rainbow fire Capt. Tom Klimas said.

There was no estimate on when the fire would be contained.

"I've been in a lot worse," said Rainbow firefighter Sharon Crowson.

The cause of the fire has not been determined.

Staff writer Pauline Repard contributed to this report.

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