



File Code: 6730

Date: October 30, 2006

Route To:

Subject: Expanded 72-hour Briefing
San Bernadino National Forest

To: Chief of the Forest Service
Director California Department of Forestry

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE:

Summary

On October 26, 2006 five wildland firefighters were entrapped during initial attack fire suppression operations on the Esperanza Fire in Riverside County, California. Three firefighters were killed at the scene, and two were airlifted to Arrowhead Regional Hospital. One firefighter died in the hospital. A fifth firefighter involved in the accident remains in critical condition with 3rd degree burns over 90 percent of his body.

Preliminary Factual Findings:

The five firefighters assigned to Alandale Engine 57 at the time of the accident were from the San Jacinto Ranger District and included Captain Mark Loutzenhiser, Fire Engine Operator Jess McClean, Assistant Fire Engine Operator Jason McKay, firefighter Daniel Hoover-Najera, and firefighter Pablo Cerda who is the survivor.

The fatalities occurred in the mountain community of Twin Pines approximately 3 miles southwest of Cabazon, California and one mile north of the San Bernardino National Forest. At the time of the entrapment, Engine 57 was engaged in structure protection operations at an isolated, unoccupied home near the junction of Wonderview Road and Gorgonio View Road.

Fuels in the area were predominately continuous heavy chaparral/manzanita best described as Fire Behavior Fuel Model 4.

A red flag warning was in effect for the area at the time of the accident. An onset of Santa Ana winds with a notable increase in velocity contributed to extreme fire behavior, including a rapid rate of fire spread and fire size growth.



Topography in the vicinity is very steep. The accident site is situated above and between two significant drainages.

The Model 62, Type 3 engine was parked facing out on a dead end dirt driveway next to an out building. The engine was totally consumed by fire.

All firefighters were outside the engine at the time of the entrapment and no fire shelters were deployed.

Narrative:

The suspected arson-caused fire was reported to Federal Interagency Communication Center in San Bernadino on October 26, 2006 at 1:22 a.m. The fire was set at the bottom of a slope near the town of Cabazon, California and Interstate 10. It spread southwest uphill toward State Highway 243 and the residential community of Twin Pines.

Engine 57 was part of an initial attack response involving multiple suppression resources from the Forest Service and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF). CDF had jurisdiction of the fire at the time. The focus of the operation was evacuation of residents and structure protection. At approximately 7:30 a.m. a five-person engine crew from the USDA Forest Service, San Bernardino National Forest was overrun by wildfire during structure protection operations.

A National Interagency Serious Accident Investigation Team is assigned with Co-Team Leaders Randy Moore, a 26-year veteran the U. S. Forest Service, who serves as the Eastern Region Regional Forester based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Brad Harris, a 22-year veteran of the California Department of Forestry, who serves as the Unit Chief for Nevada-Yuba-Placer District in Northern California. The objective of this safety investigation is to determine facts surrounding the incident, identify lessons learned, and develop recommendations for accident prevention purposes.

RANDY MOORE

BRAD HARRIS

cc:

Ruben Grijalva, Director California Department of Forestry
Dick King, USDA Forest Service

