

## Appendix 2 – Fire Operations Analysis Summary

On October 26, 2006, at approximately 1:11 a.m. (Pacific Daylight Time) a fire was reported at the base of San Gorgonio Peak immediately southeast of the town of Cabazon in Riverside County, California. The fire was initially burning in light, flashy fuels and soon became established in steep, rocky terrain. It quickly spread to the west and southwest up very steep slopes to Cabazon Peak, driven by northeast Santa Ana winds.

The first on-scene engine was Medic Engine 24. Fire Captain 24 was identified as the Esperanza Fire Incident Commander. Upon arrival, Battalion Chief 3113 (BC 3113) assumed command from Fire Captain 24.

Fire potential was estimated at 25,000 acres. Multiple resource orders were placed based on the fire potential. The initial span of control was set up with two divisions, A (east flank) and Z (west flank). Battalion Chief 3116 (BC 3116) was assigned as the Operations Section Chief for oversight of division assignments.

The Riverside Sheriff's Office was engaged early on concerning the possible threat of evacuations. The fire was estimated at approximately 100 acres and burning up slope on Cabazon Peak. The Esperanza Incident Command Post (ICP) was at Station 24 in Cabazon and later expanded to the Community Center, located next to the CAL FIRE Riverside County Fire Department Station 24.

At 1:15 a.m. Division Chief 3106 was notified of the fire and responded from home. Division Chief 3106 (DC 3106) arrived at the Esperanza ICP at approximately 2:00 a.m. DC 3106 met with BC 3113 and was briefed on the situation and confirmed resource orders that had been submitted. DC 3106 assumed the Esperanza Fire Incident Commander (IC) role from BC 3113. Esperanza IC directed BC 3113 and BC 3116 (Operations) to review and organize all resource orders currently in the system.

Between 3:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m., the fire activity increased and significant fire spread was observed from the ICP. The fire size was estimated to be between 500 to 800 acres. The decision was made to expand the organization from two Divisions into two Operational Branches with a structure group in the Twin Pines area. The north side or bottom portion was designated Branch I and the south portion, and at the top on Twin Pines was Branch II.

BC 3113 was assigned as Branch I. During this time period, BC 19 and BC 3114 arrived each with an engine strike team. BC 19 was re-assigned as Branch II and BC 3114 was assigned as Twin Pines Structure Protection Group Supervisor under the command of Branch II.

During this timeframe, there was a significant amount of fire activity, resource orders being placed, resources checking-in and being assigned and a tremendous amount of

radio traffic, coordination and decision making regarding the fire potential at sunrise and discussions of evacuations in the Twin Pines area.

At 4:00 a.m., the decision was made to evacuate the Twin Pines area. Five BDF Type III engines arrived at the ICP as five single resource engines. They received an assignment to proceed to the Twin Pines area for structure protection. As the five BDF engines were leaving the ICP, they identified a new fire start along Interstate 10. One BDF engine pulled off to suppress the new fire start, containing it at ½ acre. The remaining four BDF engines continued on to Twin Pines and arrived around 4:50 a.m.

### ***Timeframe Highlights (1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. PDT)***

- Fire activity was clearly visible to firefighters traveling to and from the ICP.
- The forecasted Red Flag Warning for Santa Ana winds was reportedly known by all.
- Existing detailed maps of the area were not used/made available to brief the engines when they checked in at the ICP.
- Instructions were passed on from one engine captain to the other.
- The engines were assigned as single resources without a strike team/task force leader.
- One engine was temporarily delayed in meeting up with the rest in the Twin Pines area due to a reported second fire along Interstate 10.
- Several other command staff and suppression resources also reported to the fire, including: a Forest Service Agency Representative/Battalion Chief; Forest Service Division Chief; CAL FIRE Deputy Chief; San Bernardino Forest Fire Chief/Duty Officer; and several CAL FIRE engines; water tender; and dozer.
- Two CAL FIRE command officer's responded each with an engine strike team. One was reassigned as Branch II and one was reassigned as Twin Pines Structure Group.
- An order was placed for an Incident Management Team.

At approximately 5:00 a.m., Forest Service engines started to arrive in the Twin Pines Road area. Engines 57 and 52 were the first engines to drive down Wonderview Road to perform structural triage and assist with an evacuation. Engine 57 took the lead and initially stopped at the Tile House before finally taking up position at the Octagon House. Following the completion of an evacuation assignment, Engine 52 selected the Tile House to defend. The remaining other 3 Forest Service engines and a March Air Force Base - Brush 10 fire engine (MB-10) attempted to travel down Wonderview road. They discovered the road was cut-off by the fire so they were redirected by Branch II to travel down Gorgonio View Road and locate a defensible structure.

### ***Timeframe Highlights (5:00 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. PDT)***

- The fire had reached the lower areas of the dispersed Twins Pine community, had crossed one of two access roads, and extreme fire behavior was observed by all.
- Fireline supervisors directing operations in the Twin Pines area included a CAL FIRE Operations Section Chief, Structure Protection Group Supervisor, and Branch II Director.
- Briefings were given to a few individual engine captains, some information was passed on from captain to captain, and some instructions were relayed from other overhead or over the radio.
- Branch II traveled down into the lower portions of Wonderview and Gorgonio View Roads and had sized up the areas.
- Five Forest Service engines and a March Air Force Base – Brush 10 fire engine (27 firefighters collectively) were assigned a structure protection mission that required them to travel nearly 2 miles down (500 foot drop in elevation) a steep (12 percent grade) winding dirt road — in the dark.
- A wide range of buildings and property were scattered throughout the area, including: single family homes, double/single wide manufactured homes, travel trailers/motor homes, outbuildings, vehicles, and equipment.
- Approximately 20 structures were dispersed along poorly marked roads and many were not defensible even under “normal” conditions
- The area surrounding the Octagon House included a notable amount of ornamental fuel loading, outbuildings, vehicles, and other scattered property.
- The assignment involved a defensive position at the head of an advancing 500 plus acre fire burning in heavy brush and exhibiting extreme fire behavior in and adjacent to a long steep drainage (chimney) with Santa Ana winds forecasted to arrive at dawn.

Engines 51, 54, 56, and MB-10 arrived at the Doublewide and immediately took action to defend their position. Branch II met with one of the engine captains at the Doublewide. Shortly after, Branch II discovered the location of Engine 57 at the Octagon House, located approximately 1,500 feet down the road from the Doublewide. Branch II and Engine 57 Captain met at the Octagon House and discussed the situation. Branch II then drove up Gorgonio View Road and briefly met with one of the BDF Captains at the Doublewide and advised them of Engine 57’s location. Branch II drove back up to the Twin Pines Road at approximately 6:30 a.m. Between 6:30 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. resources at the Doublewide and Octagon House were overrun by the fire.

The fire passed by Engine 52’s location at the Tile House first. Engine 52 was positioned in the most defensible location, but eventually took refuge in the engine during peak fire activity, smoke blanketing, and ember showers. After the smoke cleared, firefighters at the Tile House observed the fire blow up the upper reach of the “unnamed creek drainage” and overrun the Octagon House and Doublewide engine positions.

The firefighters at the Doublewide took vigorous protection measures to defend the structure and secure an area of refuge, including a critically timed burnout just prior to

the fire front hitting. Attempts to contact Branch II on assigned command frequency prior to the burnout were unsuccessful. Some fire hose and incidental property were burned by the fire, but the main building survived following an aggressive fire fight. Before it was over, all the firefighters withdrew to the safety of the engines.

Engine 57 Captain made several radio contacts on a Forest Service radio tactical frequency not assigned to the fire with the firefighters at the Tile House and Doublewide prior to the burnover. Reports by those who talked to Captain 57 during this time indicate that he was secure at his location. He informed others that he had a good water source available. A portable pump was set up in the swimming pool. Its ignition switch was on and in a full throttle position. A 1½ inch hose was connected to the pump and extended to the east side of the building with a 1 ½ inch combination nozzle attached in the closed position. A 1½ inch hose, attached to the engine's rear discharge, was also found partially unfolded on the ground.

When no radio contact could be made with Engine 57 following the passage of a fire run that hit the Octagon House, a search began by fire personnel from both the Tile House and Doublewide. Initial attempts to contact command to report the medical emergency were unsuccessful on the assigned fire radio frequency. However, radio contact was promptly established with the San Bernardino National Forest Dispatch and an evacuation response was initiated.

### ***Timeframe Highlights (6:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. PDT)***

- Refer to Appendix 3 for LCES Summary Analysis
- Santa Ana winds surfaced at precisely the (Red Flag) forecasted time, location, and strength.
- Within the first seven hours of the initial operational period, the Esperanza Fire was out of the box. Almost all resources, including other engines along Highway 243 and in the Twin Pines Road/McMullen Flats area, were overrun by the fire.

At 8:05 a.m., during a conference call with California Southern Operations Center (South Ops), CAL FIRE Agency Administrator is notified about a possible engine burnover. South Ops advise they heard this information from the BDF intercom. The IC overheard radio traffic on an outside speaker at the ICP on BDF Forest Net regarding an engine burnover. Branch II notifies IC on a cell phone and confirms a BDF engine was burned over and at this time there were two burn victims and three firefighters missing. D3104 was assigned as IC to manage the incident within the incident. Rescue attempts began and two burned firefighters were transported by helicopter to Banning Airport. Branch II was relieved and replaced by a CAL FIRE command officer.

All BDF and MB-10 engines are released from the fire and relocate to the USFS station at Vista Grande.