



NEWS



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Gender – Reveal Party Sparked CA Wildfire

Jason Henry and Brian Rokos, Firehouse and The Sun

Posted: September 8, 2020



Firefighters watch as the El Dorado burns thousands of acres over the weekend.

More than 20,000 people were evacuated due to the El Dorado fire, a 8,600-acre blaze ignited by a gender reveal stunt at El Dorado Ranch Park in Yucaipa, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said on Monday, Sept. 7, the third day of the blaze.

The fire rapidly doubled in size to 7,050 acres Sunday, Sept. 6, then briefly slowed down overnight before picking up again about 3:30 a.m. It jumped to 8,600 acres by noon Monday, causing evacuation orders to spread into Riverside County.

The 619 firefighters working the blaze managed to reach 7% containment as of Monday, Sept. 7. Containment does not mean how much of a fire has been put out. Rather, it represents a border firefighters have created around the perimeter of a blaze to keep it from spreading. That means a border has been created around 7% of the El Dorado Fire.

Investigators determined a smoke-generating pyrotechnic device at a gender reveal photo shoot Saturday morning started the fire. Initially described as a party, a Cal Fire spokesperson later said the photo shoot only involved immediate family members. During the shoot, a small cylindrical device that burns chemicals to produce colored smoke ignited the grass, according to Bennet Milloy, a captain specialist with Cal Fire.

Cal Fire has yet to determine if the device qualifies as a “safe and sane” firework under California law, but such fireworks are not legal in Yucaipa regardless, Milloy said. The individual responsible for lighting the device has not been arrested at this time. Investigators will send a report to the district attorney’s office and charges will be filed at a later date, Milloy said.

The violations likely will include several charges that qualify as “wobblers,” laws that could be charged as misdemeanors or felonies depending on the severity.

“Our investigation is ongoing,” Milloy said. “The fire has to play out for us to figure what laws were broken.”

The flames initially spread from El Dorado Ranch Park onto Yucaipa Ridge, then split. A more active fire dropped toward the Pine Bench Area near Oak Glen Road, while a slower fire continued to burn above the communities of Mountain Home Village and Forest Falls, officials said.

Firefighters staged near at-risk communities to stop the flames. A crew from the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department fought back flames overnight Sunday to protect Oak Tree Village in Oak Glen. Working on three hours of sleep in nearly two days, the crew was able to protect residences, businesses and a petting zoo, according to the fire department.

Chris George, a spokesperson for the California Interagency Incident Management Team 11, said crews started controlled burns near Tom's Farms on Oak Glen Monday afternoon in an attempt to direct the El Dorado fire toward areas already scarred from the Apple Fire, which burned through most of August and consumed more than 33,400 acres, including four homes.

El Dorado caused damage elsewhere, though the extent is unknown still.

“There is structure damage, they have an assessment team going out there, so we don't know how many structures have been lost,” George said. It could take several days to calculate those totals, he said.

There have been no reported injuries at this time, he said.

The weather and the topography make it hard to predict how the fire might move, he said.

Firefighting aircraft assisted crews on the ground, though officials warned Monday afternoon that heavy winds could ground those efforts. Firefighters worried the winds could also create a fire plume buildup, according to the San Bernardino National Forest.

While temperatures cooled Monday, an excessive heat warning remained in effect until 8 p.m. A Fire Weather Watch will take its place Tuesday and Wednesday. There's a possibility of Santa Ana conditions later in the week.

Mandatory evacuation orders were in place for residents in the following area as of Monday afternoon: east of Bryant Street from Carter Street south to Yucaipa Boulevard, then east on Yucaipa from Bryant intersection to Fremont Street, then south to Grande View Drive, then along Avenue E southeast to the intersection of Mesa Grande, east to Wildwood Canyone Road, including all portions of Hidden Meadows, and east to Edgar Canyon Road. An evacuation order was also in place in Mountain Home Village and Forest Falls.

Shortly before noon Monday, evacuation orders spread to Riverside County, that county's Emergency Management Department said. The evacuation orders are for the Cherry Valley area, north of Cherry Street to the county line.



The El Dorado Fire burned over 8,600 acres by Monday evening.

The American Red Cross has set up an evacuation center at the Yucaipa Community Center, 34900 Oak Glen Road. Volunteers are following safety protocols and providing services while maintaining social distancing, according to the Red Cross. Anyone evacuating animals was directed to the Devore Animal Shelter, 19777 Shelter Way in Devore, or Big Bear Animal Shelter at North Shore Drive and Stanfield Cutoff.

The Red Cross said it provided hotel rooms for 53 families — 118 people total — on Sunday night and will continue assessing shelter needs.

With thousands of residents prompted to evacuate, many are finding difficulty locating hotel rooms — particularly if they have pets.

Ricardo Tomboc, a shelter supervisor at the American Red Cross evacuation center at Yucaipa Community Center, estimated Monday that 95% of evacuees had the financial wherewithal to rent hotel rooms themselves or were staying with family or friends.

Tomboc estimated that 50 families were given vouchers Sunday but that others remained on a waiting list. And seeking a hotel that accepts pets “makes it a lot harder,” he said.

That left people such as the Scalf and Myers families sitting in the park, outside in the smoky 90-degree heat, Monday as they waited for word on a room. As with the Apple Fire, the Red Cross was not putting out cots because of concerns about spreading the coronavirus. Snacks and water were available, though. There were about a dozen people inside the center about 2 p.m. Monday and another dozen outside.

The Scalfs, of Mountain Home Village, sat on a picnic bench and prayed over a lunch of In-N-Out burgers. Philip Scalf, 35, asked God to protect the community and firefighters.

“Please let everyone survive,” he prayed.

His family, which includes his wife, Candace, 36; three children; and three dogs and a cat fled Saturday as the flames crested the mountain and a helicopter crew announced mandatory evacuations.

They were prepared with a bag that included clothes, pet food and bath items. Philip Scalf and son Gunnar, 13, also grabbed their skateboards and guitars.

“We’re going to be doing a lot of skating and playing,” Philip Scalf said, anticipating a lengthy evacuation.

This has been a stressful couple of months for the Scalfs and other Mountain Home residents, with voluntary evacuations orders issued during the nearby Apple Fire.

Still, “I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else,” Candace Scalf said. “Once you live on the mountain, you don’t want to move off. We have a strong community and we take care of each other.”

Richard and Winter Myers, and their young son and daughter sat on the concrete just outside the center Monday. They played a card game while their dog lounged nearby. They also hoped for a hotel voucher after evacuating their mountain home when the fire crested the mountain.

“We love it up there but we just wish people were more respectful,” Richard Myers, 42, said. “Because they don’t live here, they don’t have anything to lose. We have everything to lose.”

Both families were disappointed that the fire that roused them out of their homes was started by people carelessly using a pyrotechnic to mark a baby’s gender reveal at El Dorado Ranch Park on a scorching-hot day next to tinder-dry brush.

“I know those people feel really bad, but they should not have done it,” said Philip Scalf.

About 3 p.m., the Myers family got good news: A hotel room was found for them and they were looking forward to taking baths. The Scalf family and their menagerie were still waiting.

The Southern California Air Quality Management District issued a smoke advisory that ran from Sunday through to Monday afternoon. The forecast indicated winds would send smoke through the San Geronio Pass and into the San Jacinto Mountains. Idyllwild, Banning and the Western Coachella Valley.

Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency Sunday for San Bernardino County due to the El Dorado Fire. The governor’s proclamation noted that because of the magnitude of fires throughout the state, local governments will require “the combined forces of a mutual aid region or regions to appropriately respond.”

In response to the fires, the U.S. Forest Service announced the closure of a number of its forests, beginning at 5 p.m. Monday and continuing indefinitely until dangerous conditions lessened. A combination of extreme heat, significant wind, dry conditions and overstretched firefighting resources prompted the decision. Rules put in place state-wide also banned campfires and closed developed campgrounds and day-sites.

<https://www.firehouse.com/operations-training/wildland/news/21153252/genderreveal-party-sparked-devastating-ca-wildfire-officials-say>

THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME A GENDER REVEAL PARTY HAS ENDED IN TOTAL DISASTER

By: Janice Williams, Newsweek

Posted: September 8, 2020 at 10:34 AM



Embers fly off burning timber as flames push towards homes during the Creek fire in the Cascadel Woods area of unincorporated Madera County, California on September 7, 2020. A firework at a gender reveal party triggered a wildfire in southern California that has destroyed 7,000 acres (2,800 hectares) and forced many residents to flee their homes, the fire department said Sunday.

An effort to determine the gender of a baby turned into an utter disaster for a California couple after the pyrotechnic device used to reveal the child's sex sparked a massive wildfire on Saturday.

Dubbed the El Dorado Fire in San Bernardino County, fire officials during a press conference on Monday said that nearly 10,000 acres of land were on fire because of the gender reveal incident, and only seven percent of the flames had been contained. A "smoke-generating pyrotechnic device" used at a party in El Dorado Ranch Park in Yucaipa—which was likely used to blast out pink or blue smoke to confirm the baby's gender—was blamed for the fire.

The El Dorado Fire is far from the worst wildfire caused by gender reveal party mishaps. A big reveal in Arizona in 2017 caused extreme damage, scorching nearly 47,000 acres of land after partygoers shot a makeshift explosive that was supposed to write, "It's a boy," or "It's a girl" once sparked.

The couple did learn that they were expecting a baby boy thanks to the big blue puff of smoke that released from the Tannerite-packed target. However, their joy was short-lived after the explosion ignited nearby brush.

It took roughly 20 different fire crews about a week to fight the flames. And the ordeal cost an off-duty US Border Patrol agent who shot the target five years of probation and a restitution bill reaching almost \$8.2 million.

Although a smaller disaster, a gender reveal party in Florida caused a 10-acre fire in April after the family used Tannerite and a weapon to confirm their baby's sex. The incident occurred in the midst of a county-wide burn ban, which prohibited outdoor activities like campfires and bonfires due to the dry air conditions and intense heat at the time.

Firefighters were able to contain the fire within hours.

Last year a gender reveal party cost one woman her life after a family in Iowa unintentionally built a pipe bomb. The device was supposed to spew blue or pink powder into the air once lit, but what happened was much worse: the entire pipe exploded sending shrapnel into the air, and a piece of it hit a grandmother, ultimately killing her.

Gender reveal parties were first popularized in 2008 after Jenna Karvunidis shared the details of her event on her blog, High Gloss and Sauce. At the time, Karvunidis and her husband cut a cake that featured pink frosting on the inside to reveal they were expecting a girl. "I thought it would be really fun for everybody in the whole family to find out," she said in an interview with NPR in 2019.

Karvunidis went on to say that the events have "become a bit of a nightmare" now that people have turned to riskier methods beyond the traditional cake cutting reveal and balloon-popping, in which expecting parents pop a balloon filled with blue or pink glitter and confetti to learn the sex of their soon-coming baby.

She continued to ridicule expecting families for their dangerous behavior at gender reveal parties in a Facebook post on Monday.

"Stop having these stupid parties. For the love of God, stop burning things down to tell everyone about your kid's penis. No one cares but you," she wrote after learning of the El Dorado Fire.

Rollover crash on NB I-15 in Hesperia prompts delays Tuesday morning

By: Staff Writer, Victor Valley News Group

Posted: September 8, 2020



Photo by Lawrence Mercado

Traffic on the northbound I-15 freeway is beginning to flow again after a rollover crash prompted lane closures Tuesday morning.

For reasons still under investigation, the SUV overturned and was blocking the no. 1 lane of traffic. A couple of sheriff's deputies responded to the incident and stopped traffic on the freeway.

According to CHP incident logs, the driver was still in the vehicle and was reported to be conscious and breathing.

San Bernardino County Fire responded and assisted with a minor extrication. The driver was transported by ground ambulance to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center.

The SUV was pushed to the right-shoulder and by 8:30 AM all lanes had re-opened.

California Highway Patrol – Victorville station is investigating the cause of the crash.

<https://www.vvng.com/rollover-crash-on-nb-i-15-in-hesperia-prompts-delays-tuesday-morning/>

Fire at Mountain View Power Plant

Carl Baker, Redlands City News

Posted: September 8, 2020



Redlands Firefighters responded to a structure fire at Southern California Edison's Mountain View Power Plant Sunday afternoon. No injuries were reported.

Crews responded shortly before 1 p.m. to the fire in a mechanical operations area within the plant, located at 2492 W. San Bernardino Ave. The first crews on scene found heavy smoke coming from the second floor of the facility. It took firefighters approximately 30 minutes to extinguish the blaze which was limited to a confined area within the building. Firefighters were on scene for approximately two hours.

The cause of the fire is under investigation but it is believed to be due to a hydraulic line failure in operating equipment.

Edison crews are working to repair the issue and restore the facility to full power. Approximately 1,300 customers may be affected by power outages. The estimated damage to the structure and equipment is unknown at this time.

In addition to seven Redlands firefighters, three firefighters from the Loma Linda Fire Department and 19 firefighters from the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department responded to the incident. San Bernardino units were the first to arrive on scene.

<https://redlands.citynewsgroup.com/articles/fire-at-mountain-view-power-plant>