



NEWS



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A couple has been charged for their role in the deadly El Dorado wildfire that was sparked during a gender reveal in 2020

(CNN)A Southern California couple whose gender reveal party allegedly sparked the deadly El Dorado wildfire in 2020 has been charged with 30 crimes, including involuntary manslaughter, authorities announced Tuesday.

A smoke bomb set off by the couple in Yucaipa, California, on September 5 as part of a gender reveal sparked a fire that went on to burn more than 22,000 acres across two counties, San Bernardino County District Attorney Jason Anderson said during a news conference.

One firefighter was killed while battling the flames and two others were injured, according to Anderson. The fire destroyed several homes and burned more than 22,000 acres, his office said.

Cal Fire determined the cause of the fire was a "smoke-generating pyrotechnic device."

The couple both pleaded not guilty during their arraignments Tuesday. They were released on their own recognizance until their next scheduled court date in September, Anderson said.

CNN reached out to an attorney for the couple but has not heard back.

"You're obviously dealing with lost lives, you're dealing with injured lives, and you're dealing with people's residences that were burned and their land that was burned. That encompasses a lot of, not only emotion, but damage, both financially and psychologically," Anderson said at the news conference.

The charges were filed after a grand jury heard 34 witness interviews over four days, he said.

Ultimately 434 exhibits were presented to the grand jury, leading to the indictment that was unsealed Tuesday, which includes one felony count of involuntary manslaughter, three felony counts of recklessly causing a fire with great bodily injury, four felony counts of recklessly causing a fire to inhabited structures and 22 misdemeanor counts of recklessly causing fire to property of another, Anderson said.

The fire "had a tremendous impact on the community of San Bernardino," Anderson said, adding that at least six agencies "were involved in containing, extinguishing and investigating" the deadly blaze.

Couple Charge in death of firefighter

Firefighter Charles Morton, a Big Bear Interagency Hotshot squad boss, was battling the El Dorado Fire when he was killed, CNN previously reported.

The 39-year-old "died while engaged in fire suppression operations," the US Forest Service said in a news release following his death.

Hotshots are the firefighters on the frontlines who walk directly into dangerous fire on steep terrain to strategically plan the best course of action to tackle the flames.

Morton had worked as a firefighter for 18 years, including 14 years with the Forest Service, the release said.

"Charlie was a well-respected leader who was always there for his squad and his crew at the toughest times," US Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen said in the release. "Our hearts go out to Charlie's loved ones, coworkers, friends and the Big Bear Hotshots. We will keep them in our thoughts and prayers."

Anderson said Tuesday that part of the reason the investigation and ultimate prosecution took so long was because authorities wanted to make sure justice was fully served.

"Given the scope and the impact of the El Dorado Fire on the land and lives of so many, particularly Charles Morton and his family, it was imperative that every investigation be completed within both federal and state agencies to provide a full, fair presentation to the members of our community," Anderson explained.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/21/us/gender-reveal-el-dorado-wildfire-charges/index.html>