



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

SAN LUIS OBISPO UNIT

635 North Santa Rosa Street

San Luis Obispo, CA 93405

VENTURA COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT

165 Durley Avenue

Camarillo, CA 93010

INVESTIGATION REPORT

CASE NUMBER: 19CAVNC089158

CASE NAME: EASY

DATE: October 30, 2019

INCIDENT TYPE: Wildland Fire

INCIDENT INVESTIGATOR: Christine SAQUI, Fire Investigator – VCFD

Brian KINSLEY, Fire Investigator – VCFD

Aimin ALTON, Fire Investigator – VCFD

Gregg DELAROSA, Senior Deputy – VCSO

Sean HERNANDEZ, Fire Captain Specialist – CAL FIRE

Joe PIDGEON, Battalion Chief – CAL FIRE

1 **2 - SUMMARY:**

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3 On Wednesday, October 30, 2019, at approximately 6:09 AM, units from the
4 Ventura County Fire Department (VCFD) were dispatched to a wildland fire. The fire,
5 identified as the EASY fire, was located in the hills south of 200 West Los Angeles
6 Avenue, Simi Valley, CA, 93065, in the area of the Arroyo Simi River/Wash. The EASY
7 fire consumed 1,806 acres of brush, annual grasses and oak woodlands. Additionally,
8 two structures were damaged or destroyed by the EASY fire.

9 The Investigation Team (IT) determined the fire occurred when an insulator
10 attached to high-voltage power lines swung into a steel power pole. The insulator
11 revealed damage consistent with the insulator grounding to the steel tower. The IT
12 concluded power equipment owned and operated by Southern California Edison (SCE)
13 was the cause of the EASY fire.

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1 **9 - NARRATIVE:**

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3 On Wednesday, October 30, 2019, at approximately 6:09 AM, I was dispatched
4 as a Wildland Fire Investigator by the Ventura County Fire Department (VCFD) Fire
5 Communications Center (FCC) to a wildland fire, identified as the EASY fire, located at
6 200 West Los Angeles Avenue, Simi Valley, CA, 93065.

7 Reporting parties advised FCC the fire was threatening residences south of the
8 Arroyo Simi. VCFD Engine 45 arrived in the area and reported approximately 15 acres
9 of brush on fire with residences threatened directly south along Tierra Rejada Road
10 (*see attachment #6*).

11 Immediate evacuations were initiated along the Tierra Rejada corridor and at the
12 Ronald Reagan Library, which is located approximately 1.4 miles southwest of the heel
13 of the fire. The incident required multiple fire crews from neighboring fire departments.
14 Simi Valley Police Department (SVPD), Ventura County Sheriff's Office (VCSO), and
15 California Highway Patrol (CHP) officers were on scene assisting with mandatory
16 evacuations and traffic control. Officers closed Tierra Rejada Road to any traffic except
17 emergency personnel and evacuees fleeing.

18 I was contacted by VCFD Fire Investigator Brian KINSLEY who informed me he
19 was enroute to assist me. We met at the parking lot of L3Harris, the original reporting
20 party's location. I observed the fire burning approximately .25 miles away from our
21 location on a northeast facing slope. The strong and gusty northeast wind pushed the
22 advancing fire front towards the southwest, over the top of the ridge and laterally
23 towards the west. The fire was backing slowly down the base of the hill (northeast and
24 east) due to the strong easterly wind. I identified this area as the heel of the fire.

25 Near the heel of the fire and across the Arroyo Simi, I observed a SVPD pickup
26 truck and two officers. The officers appeared to be evacuating individuals from the area
27 near the involved brush.

28 At approximately 7:00 AM, I spoke to VCSO Detective Gregg DELAROSA. He
29 informed me he was enroute to assist in the investigation. Upon his arrival, we traveled
30 together with KINSLEY towards Madera Road and the Arroyo Simi to access the heel of

1 the fire. Unable to find a direct route in, we contacted a SVPD officer at Moreland Road
2 and Madera Road. This officer contacted a second officer evacuating individuals across
3 the Arroyo Simi. We were directed to access from the north end of Stargaze Place.

4 We met with SVPD Officers David SCHER and Travis WHITE at the north end of
5 Stargaze Place. SCHER informed me they are Homeless Liaison Officers for SVPD
6 and are very familiar with the area. He identified the area we were entering as the
7 property of Simi Valley Recreation and Parks. Due to their assignment, they were very
8 familiar with the individuals who reside in the park. Their objective was to evacuate
9 transients and keep them out for the duration of the fire and investigation.

10 We followed SCHER to the heel (*northeastern edge*) of the fire. Due to the fire
11 activity and severe smoke conditions I was not able to enter the heel of the fire. Fire
12 apparatus and crews were on scene and engaged in fire suppression activities. I met
13 with Fire Engineer and Fire Crew 12 (C12) Supervisor, Anthony OCCHIPINTI. I told
14 him my Overall Fire Area (OFA) was located within the entire hillside where we stood. I
15 told him to keep the area secure and to withdraw from any suppression efforts that
16 could damage the fire patterns. He told me of the intent to fire out grasses located
17 along the low/flat lands in the area. We agreed to fire control efforts, as I had
18 documented the area prior to the C-12 firing operation.

19 We walked with SVPD officers to several evacuated homeless encampments
20 outside the fire's eastern flank. An examination of one of the larger encampments
21 revealed items such as a mattress, food, multiple propane tanks, patio heater elements,
22 and cooking utensils. SCHER and WHITE told us several unoccupied encampments
23 and one occupied encampment located within the OFA.

24 At approximately 10:00 AM observed a white Southern California Edison (SCE)
25 work truck marked with a "Fire Patrol" magnet drive into our area. I approached the
26 truck and spoke with Buster BROWN, SCE Troublemaker. I asked if he knew of any
27 issues with the electrical equipment located within our area. He told me the equipment
28 was part of the Power Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) and was not energized.

29 I called CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Brian HAWKINS and requested additional
30 resources. HAWKINS told me CAL FIRE Fire Captain Specialist Sean HERNANDEZ

1 was enroute from CAL FIRE Southern Region Operations.

2 SCHER told me several transients who evacuated from their campsites were
3 located near the Arroyo Simi overpass at Madera Road. We proceeded to that location
4 to speak with them.

5 KINSLEY and I interviewed Debra Rios HERNANDEZ, Rudy SANTILLAN, Rudy
6 MAGANA and Finley EVANS (*see attachment #7*).

7 We returned to the heel of the fire. At approximately 12:40 PM I received a
8 phone call from Robert RAMOS, SCE Claims Representative. RAMOS told me the
9 equipment in our established OFA contains 16 kV and 66 kV lines. RAMOS told me the
10 information I acquired from BROWN earlier in the day was inaccurate. RAMOS
11 confirmed the electrical equipment located within our OFA was energized prior to the
12 start of the EASY fire. RAMOS told me there was an "event" on the 66 kV line around
13 the time the EASY fire started. RAMOS told me my point of contact would be Scott
14 HAYASHI, SCE Investigator. We observed a suspension insulator attached to the 66
15 kV lines associated with a steel pole (*identified as pole number 4244905E*) swinging in
16 the wind (*see videos MVI_0714, MVI_0715, MVI_0716*). HAYASHI told me the circuit
17 was identified as the "Moorpark Rcyal #1" circuit.

18 SCHER and WHITE went to L3Harris, the location of the original Reporting Party
19 (RP), to locate the RP and surveillance video of the fire. Because the power was shut
20 off to most of the businesses around West Los Angeles Avenue and Easy Street,
21 L3Harris was not open for business. WHITE went to Volutone and met with David
22 GRANT, who provided him with surveillance video. Volutone is located on Cochran
23 Street, one street north of L3Harris. This video showed one bright white flash mid-slope
24 on the hillside, and a fire starting seconds later.

25 HAWKINS and HERNANDEZ arrived on scene. HERNANDEZ assisted with peer
26 review and scene security, while HAWKINS provided logistics and resources. I
27 requested CAL FIRE's assistance with scene security, LiDAR and an electrical
28 engineer.

29 At approximately 5:00 PM, I observed another white SCE patrol truck driving up
30 the dirt road to access the heel of the fire. I stopped the truck and spoke with two

1 unknown male subjects, who identified themselves as being from the SCE Moorpark
2 substation. I told them the fire is under investigation and they were intruding on the
3 scene. He replied he was unaware and was assessing SCE equipment. I told him to
4 stay out of the scene during our active investigation and to inform his supervisor and all
5 other patrol trucks to not enter without our permission. Earlier in the day, I observed
6 SCE patrol trucks driving the ridge road above our OFA.

7 I met HAYASHI at the north end of Stargaze Place. I told him to keep any
8 additional SCE trucks from entering the OFA and defined the area. I told HAYASHI no
9 one shall enter without my authorization. HAYASHI and I exchanged phone numbers to
10 stay in contact.

11 At approximately 6:00 PM, I arranged for one SVPD officer to secure the heel of
12 the fire throughout the evening. The SVPD watch commander requested one additional
13 officer for safety concerns. KINSLEY, DELAROSA and I traveled to base camp,
14 located at Conejo Creek South Park in the City of Thousand Oaks. I briefed the
15 incident command team of the status of our investigation, and the need to assist SVPD
16 in securing our OFA. Arrangements were made to have VCFD Fire Captain Marshall
17 HATCH go to the OFA.

18 While at base camp I met Scott BROWN, SCE Fire Management Officer. He
19 relayed his concerns regarding a fire damaged wooden "H-frame pole" east of our OFA.
20 BROWN requested to switch out the pole, later identified as #749189E.

21 At approximately 8:00 PM, I requested to have the VCSO Unmanned Aerial
22 Systems (UAS) team utilize their drones to record the OFA. Arrangements were made
23 to have VCSO pilots arrive the following day.

24 On Thursday, October 31, 2019, at approximately 6:00 AM, I returned to the
25 OFA. I met with VCSO Deputies/Filots and they aerial video recorded the OFA. We
26 observed wooden H-frame power poles and one steel H-frame power pole supporting
27 powerlines within the OFA. All power poles and powerlines I observed within the OFA
28 were intact (*see attachment #46*).

29 SCHER contacted me and told me two occupants, Brittany PALOMAREZ and
30 Rudy ROJAS, of an encampment within our OFA were detained for another reason and

1 were located near 41 Moreland Rcad, Simi Valley. KINSLEY and I drove to their
2 location to interview them (see attachments #7).

3 An origin & cause (O&C) investigation was initiated. KINSLEY, HERNANDEZ,
4 DELAROSA and I formed the Investigation Team (IT). During the IT's examination of
5 the fire's perimeter we made the following observations: The IT made access to the
6 heel through the north end of Stargaze Place, on to a dirt road, which also serves
7 several connecting trails along the eastern perimeter. Along the southwestern perimeter
8 of the OFA, a combination of a dirt pathways and a paved road (Llevarancho Road)
9 served as access to a lookout point on the ridge. The northern perimeter of the OFA is
10 defined by the Arroyo Simi, which is a running waterway. The heel of the fire is located
11 within the property of Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District.

12 The IT walked the OFA perimeter and entered an area we determined to be
13 destroyed by advancing fire. The IT walked in an "S" shaped pattern interpreting fire
14 directional indicators. The IT observed fire directional indicators such as, staining,
15 sooting, angle of char, and protection to determine the fire spread. The IT examined
16 indicators from the south perimeter, accessing the ridge by a dirt road on the east, off of
17 Stargaze Place. As the IT entered the ridge, indicators revealed an advancing fire run
18 up the hill. We followed the ridge westerly to a connecting road, Llevarancho Road.
19 Indicators on the west aspect showed lateral fire spread to the west and advancing fire
20 to the southwest. The IT established a General Origin Area (GOA) approximately 200' x
21 700' by examining indicators. Colored flags were placed to show the direction of fire
22 travel: Red flags for advancing indicators, yellow flags for lateral indicators, blue flags
23 for backing indicators, and white flags for evidence. The established GOA was
24 corroborated by witness statements, photographs, and videos.

25 Within the established GOA we observed several encampments. Most were
26 unoccupied encampments as described by SVPD and one occupied encampment
27 along the northwestern flank. The occupied encampment was inhabited by
28 PALOMARES and ROJAS. Indicators showed backing and lateral fire movement
29 towards their encampment (low intensity). Both occupants told me they saw fire above
30 their encampment and recorded this fire activity on their cell phone. Review of the video

1 showed no fire at their encampment, with fire burning above the SCE road up to the
2 ridge (*see attachment #7*).

3 The IT continued narrowing the GOA and identified a Specific Origin Area (SOA)
4 approximately 50' x 100' near the fire's heel. The IT conducted a more detailed
5 examination within this area. The SOA encompassed a steel H-frame tower containing
6 SCE equipment. The power poles are identified as 4244905E and 4244906E. From the
7 SCE power poles, the SOA continued through a dirt road and towards a hill south of the
8 tower. We performed a detailed examination of the SOA utilizing a metal detector and
9 magnet. We were able to locate metal fragments and collected the fragments as
10 evidence items E-1 through E-8 (*see attachment #14*).

11 After further examination of power pole 4244905E, I observed a black mark near
12 the bottom phase insulator (66 kV lines). Utilizing a spotting scope, I observed damage
13 to the bottom of the lowest suspension insulator and darkening of the conductors on
14 both sides. GPS coordinates were taken at the base of the pole (N 34°16.739', W
15 118°48.434'). KINSLEY and I remained on scene overnight for scene security.

16 On Friday, November 1, 2019, DELAROSA went to VCSO Office of Emergency
17 Service (OES) and collected surveillance video (*see attachment #29*).

18 SCE arrived with equipment to support pole 749189E, east of our SOA. At
19 approximately 8:00 PM, Element Security personnel started 24 hour scene security.

20 On Saturday, November 2, 2019, SCE LiDAR contractors surveyed and
21 documented the scene. California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) James MILLER
22 examined the scene.

23 On Sunday, November 3, 2019, SCE transmission crews provided us with a
24 bucket truck and operator to photograph and examine damaged equipment on pole
25 4244905E. HAYASHI was accompanied by the following SCE legal staff: Brian
26 CARDOZA, Friedrich SEITZ, Laura MEYERSON and Kimiko ELGUEA. Later, two
27 contracted fire investigators for SCE, including Tom FEE, arrived on scene. Jim NOLT,
28 an electrical engineer contracted by CAL FIRE, was on scene to evaluate SCE
29 equipment. Additionally, two engineers from CPUC were on scene to evaluate SCE
30 equipment.

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On Monday, November 4, 2019, at 10:30 AM, SCE linemen started replacement of pole 749189E.

On Thursday, November 7, 2019, at approximately 9:00 AM, SCE linemen assisted the IT team with removal of items from pole 4244905E (see attachment #15).

1 **CAUSE EXCLUSIONS:**

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3 No rock fire rings, camp sites, camp fires or piled materials typically associated
4 with a campfire were observed in the SOA. Based upon these facts, I eliminated a
5 campfire caused fire.

6 Ventura County had a burn ban in effect which prohibits debris burning. I did not
7 observe any piles of trash within the SOA. I did not observe any drums which are
8 typically used for burning. Based on these facts, I eliminated debris burning as a
9 cause.

10 The SOA is not located along any paved roads. Additionally, I saw no signs of
11 Off-Highway Vehicle use in the area. Eyewitnesses in the immediate vicinity when the
12 fire started did not report a vehicle in the area. Surveillance video reviewed did not
13 reveal any vehicles in the SOA at the time of ignition. Based on these facts, I eliminated
14 a vehicle caused fire.

15 During my examination of the SOA I observed no motorized equipment. I did not
16 observe any grinding, blasting, cutting, or welding equipment in the area. I did not
17 observe any disturbed soils indicating equipment had been used in the area. Based on
18 these facts I eliminated an equipment caused fire.

19 Although witnesses heard a pop, saw a bright white flash, and sparks falling to
20 the ground, no remnants of fireworks were found in the SOA. Eyewitnesses told me the
21 white flash and sparks emanated from a power pole on the hill. Video surveillance
22 corroborates eyewitness statements that the flash and sparks originated from the power
23 pole. In the video, I observed no evidence of aerial fireworks. Based on these facts I
24 eliminated fireworks caused fire.

25 It is not a known or acceptable shooting area. I did not observe any bullets, bullet
26 fragments or shell casings in the SOA. There were no targets or other items indicating
27 shooting had taken place in the area. Based on these facts I eliminated a shooting
28 caused fire.

29 I did not observe any cigarette butts or other smoking materials within the SOA.
30 Based on this fact, I eliminated a smoking caused fire.

1 During my investigation I did not observe any evidence of an intentionally set fire
2 in the SOA. The witnesses did not see any persons or vehicles in the origin area when
3 they first observed the fire. I observed no incendiary devices, matches or lighters in the
4 SOA. Based on these facts I eliminated an incendiary caused fire.

5 During my investigation I examined the SCE power pole and equipment in the
6 SOA. I observed a black mark on pole 4244905E. I also observed the 66kV conductors,
7 as well as the suspension insulators, swinging with the wind. I observed discoloration
8 and deformation on the lowest suspension insulator. The damage on the pole and the
9 suspension insulator was in close proximity and consistent with an arc occurring
10 between the two. Video surveillance and witness statements support the findings on the
11 SCE equipment. The above evidence, in addition to fire patterns observed, revealed
12 that the power equipment contributed to the cause of this fire.

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1 **OPINIONS and CONCLUSION:**

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3 Fire direction indicators, witness statements, and video recordings support the
 4 fire SOA, which SCE pole 4244905E is within. The facts and circumstances revealed
 5 during the investigation indicate the fire was caused when a suspension insulator
 6 attached to an energized 66 kV power conductor swung towards a steel power pole.
 7 The insulator revealed damage consistent with grounding to the steel pole. A black
 8 mark on the pole is in line with the swinging insulator. Metal fragments (evidence items
 9 E-1 through E-8) located within the SOA near the damaged power pole (evidence item
 10 E-12) are consistent with witness statements and video recordings showing sparks
 11 emanating from the pole. This was the only potential ignition source identified within
 12 the SOA.

13 Based on my training, know edge and experience, I have conclusively
 14 determined the EASY fire was caused by faulty electrical equipment owned and
 15 operated by Southern California Edison. This is corroborated by my investigation,
 16 consultation with other fire investigators, expert opinions, data analysis, witness
 17 statements and video recordings, with the elimination of all other potential causes
 18 through scientific methodology.

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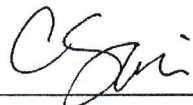
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 3/9/20

Signature

Date

Christine SAQUI

Fire/Arson Investigator

Ventura County Fire Department

