

October 2, 2012

# LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT



BRIAN L. CUMMINGS  
FIRE CHIEF

September 20, 2012

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS  
FILE NO. 12-162

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners  
FROM: Brian L. Cummings, Fire Chief  
SUBJECT: SEPTEMBER 2012 BRUSH FIRE REPORT

FOR INFORMATION ONLY:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

## **For Information Only**

This report provides a brief summary of the Los Angeles Fire Department's emergency activities from Friday, September 14 through Sunday, September 16, 2012. During this time frame, two significant fires occurred in the Santa Monica Mountains and a third brush fire occurred in the in the Northeast region of the San Fernando Valley. These fires resulted in more than 130 acres burned and impacted the Department's deployment in a variety ways, including challenging command and control issues, increased response times, and vacant fire station first-in districts.

## **Incident Summary**

### ***Getty Incident – September 14, 2012***

On Friday, September 14, 2012 at 3:36 p.m., the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) responded to a reported brush fire along Sepulveda Boulevard near Getty Center Drive, just east of the 405 freeway. First arriving firefighters reported two acres burning in heavy brush, well over six feet tall. The blaze quickly spread beyond the capability of the initial responders, and further assistance was immediately requested.

Weather conditions included extreme heat and low relative humidity. The burning index rating was high, however the heat was sweltering and well over 100 degrees. The lack of strong wind was the only help to firefighters that day.

An aggressive attack with hose-lines and precision water drops was initiated as the fire quickly spread to ten acres. Firefighters were strategically placed to protect homes in the potential path of the fire. Additional air support was requested and the Los Angeles County Fire Department deployed helicopters, and fixed wing "Super Scoopers" to help battle the blaze. At the peak of the fire there were over 300 firefighters fighting the blaze, including several special duty officers who responded and filled crucial command and control positions.

By 7:00 p.m. the fire had grown to nearly 90 acres and was reported to be 40 percent contained. No formal evacuations orders were issued; however, residents were cautioned in the Bel Air Crest and Hog Canyon areas to prepare for possible evacuation.

The Getty Incident was declared under control and 100% contained on Sunday, September 16, 2012. Firefighters then began the arduous task of picking up several thousand feet of hose and equipment that was draped across the steep, rugged terrain.

### ***Rustic Incident – September 15, 2012***

On Saturday, September 15, 2012 at 12:28 PM, the LAFD responded to a reported brush fire at the 3000 block of North Rustic Canyon Road. Rustic Canyon is located north of Sunset Boulevard, in a very rugged area of the Santa Monica Mountains, near Pacific Palisades. First arriving firefighters reported five acres burning in heavy brush. The blaze again quickly spread beyond the capability of the initial responders, and further assistance was immediately requested. A total of 35 acres burned with no homes damaged.

Weather conditions again on this date included extreme heat and low relative humidity. The burning index was again rated as very high with temperatures hovering again well over 100 degrees. Again, the lack of strong winds was of assistance to firefighters during this fire.

By 5:00 p.m. the fire had grown to 30 acres and reported as 10 percent contained. Mop up efforts were hampered by the lack of a water source in this remote area, very tight access, and steep, rugged terrain. No formal evacuations were issued.

The Rustic Incident was declared under control and 100% contained on Sunday, September 16, 2012. Firefighters continued picking up thousands of feet of hose and equipment on September 17 and 18, 2012.

There were four non-life-threatening firefighter injuries during this incident and all required transportation to area hospitals with heat exhaustion. All four members have since been treated and released.

### ***Foothill Incident – September 15, 2012***

On Saturday, September 15, 2012 at 3:48 p.m., the LAFD responded to a reported brush fire at 11451 West Foothill Boulevard in the North San Fernando Valley. LAFD ground and air resources in combination with firefighters from the United States Forest Service were successful in containing the brush fire to two acres. At 7:00 p.m., the Foothill Incident was declared under control and 100% contained. There were no structures burned and no evacuations declared.

### **Challenges**

The affects of these incidents combined with the normal emergency workload of the LAFD revealed several areas of vulnerability.

#### ***Challenging Command and Control***

The 2011 Department's Deployment Plan reduced the number of battalion command teams with Emergency Incident Technicians (EIT) by half from fourteen to seven. Three of the battalion

command teams that responded were without EITs including Battalion 9 which encompasses the brush areas of both the Rustic Canyon and the Sepulveda Pass. The first on scene Chief Officer from Battalion 9 attempted to manage and organize the 90 acre brush fire without assistance.

#### *Response of Staff (Special Duty) Officers/Incident Management Team*

The Getty Incident resulted in the response of several staff members. Approximately 18 Chief Officers and Captains responded in their staff vehicles to the fire within the first hour. This provided much needed incident support and provided assistance in managing both these incidents.

The LAFD's Incident Management Team (IMT) was deployed as a result of this incident to assist in the long term command and control, provide additional expertise, and coordinate these efforts over multiple days. The IMT took command of the Getty Incident at 8:00 p.m., nearly 4.5 hours after the initial response to the incident.

#### *Augmented Staffing*

On Saturday, September 15 and Sunday, September 16, 2012 the LAFD augmented its suppression staffing by staffing back ten additional engine companies, ten patrols, one dozer strike team, seven emergency incident technicians and two water tenders as a result of the Getty Incident's commitment of resources and the sweltering heat prediction.

#### *Citywide Resource Coverage*

On Friday, September 14, 2012, as a result of the Getty Incident there were 15 fire stations vacant and without an available resource to fill behind. This is in addition to the 10 to 15 fire stations temporarily vacated due to normal daily incident activity. The height of activity occurred between 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. where resource availability was at its lowest.

On Saturday, September 15, 2012, as a result of the Rustic Canyon Road Brush Fire there were 16 fire stations vacant and without available resources to fill behind. This is in addition to the routine 10 to 15 fire stations temporarily vacated due to incident activity. Due to the overlap of both brush incidents, there were 54 resources committed to either incident. Several resources remained attached to the Getty Incident which impacted the total number of available resources for Metro Fire Communications to assign to incidents. The height of the activity occurred between 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. where resource availability was at their lowest.

Response times overall were increased across all categories due to incident activity. Total incidents dispatched for Friday, September 14, 2012 was 1334 and represents a 30 percent increase. Total incidents for Saturday, September 15, 2012 were 1327 and represent a 27 percent increase.

Board report prepared by Deputy Chief Mario Rueda, Emergency Services Bureau.