

Some evacuees soon *Fire & Fine Protection* may return to homes

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SANTA CRUZ — With firefighters gaining an upper hand on the five-day-old Santa Cruz Mountains fire, Department of Forestry officials were to survey the area by air today to determine if the 4,500 residents evacuated earlier this week could begin returning to their homes.

Forestry officials said they would initiate a "permit" system of allowing residents to return to their homes. Permits, they said, would be issued only to residents living in areas determined to be safe by fire officials.

Aided by a break in the weather, firefighters gained ground in their battle to contain the fire that has consumed some 14,000 acres between Lexington Reservoir and Loma Prieta.

Fire officials were saying containment could come as early as this evening with control possibly in two days.

Firefighters hoped the cool, calm weather conditions would prevail throughout the day to enable them to do more controlled backfiring to strengthen the line they are forging around the blaze.

Containment, though, is a long-term, forestry officials say. It sometimes means the fire is held back by only a very thin barrier line. Firefighters announced they had the fire 50 percent contained only 450 acres last Monday afternoon, when gusty winds came up and blew embers ahead of the fire.

Overnight, the blaze roared to more than 13,000 acres and forced the residents of some 2,000 homes to flee.

Fire officials say the fire destroyed 11 houses and a cabin. But

the story in the charred mountains is not the number lost but the number saved.

Firefighters literally stopped the blaze at the doorsteps of homes throughout the Summit area. Where homeowners had not created the recommended 30-foot clearances, bulldozers made firebreaks for them.

Home after home now sits on a nude hillside, the front yard consisting of a swath of fresh earth cut by

the blade of the bulldozer.

As anxious homeowners waited to get back in, some still had received no word whether their residences were lost or saved in the fire. Firefighters came from throughout Northern California to protect those homes. Fire engines, each bearing the name of a different city or town, were parked in the driveways of homes throughout the Summit area.

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Santa Cruz Mountains fire

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With mailboxes burned or scorched as the blaze neared, firefighters from Petaluma or Vallejo had no idea the address or even the street of the home they had just spared.

More than 60 firefighters, including two Ben Lomond volunteers, were hurt protecting those structures. Firefighter Charles Fisher reportedly suffered an eye injury from a flying ember and Nick Tovik sustained second-degree burns to his

legs when he fell through the roof of a burning house.

Residents who have been back in to take a look around have said they are shocked at the sight. Phil Bond said his neighborhood looked like it had been hit by napalm. Skeletons of trees still smoked on the ashen hillside.

Instead of being nestled in stands of redwoods and madrone, the homes faced each other as if in a brand-new subdivision.

Bond was allowed back in this morning, not to check on his home,

but to look for his wife, Sandy Geldhof, 38. She has been missing since the couple packed their cars and moved out about 6 a.m. Tuesday. He saw her last on the side of Highway 17 awaiting news on the fire. (See story Page A4).

Gov. George Deukmejian, here to address a convention of district attorneys, was to fly over the fire scene today. Wednesday, he offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the conviction of the arsonist who set the fire Sunday

afternoon.

Referring to all the fires in the state since June 27, Deukmejian said this morning: "The most sickening aspect of this disaster is that most of these major fires have been linked to despicable and unforgivable acts of arson. We will do everything we can to cooperate with local authorities to pursue those who are responsible and assure they are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. They are sick criminals with disregard for their fellow citizens."



Bulldozers at the top of Mount Bache make a huge fire break.

Michael McG...course