

LOCKHEED FIRE

EVACUATIONS ORDERED AFTER BLAZE ERUPTS

At least 1,000 acres burn, 250 structures threatened



AMANDA OPITZ/SENTINEL PHOTOS

A wildland fire burns northwest of the Lockheed Martin facility off Empire Grade Road on Wednesday night.

Gusting winds send flames whipping through remote terrain

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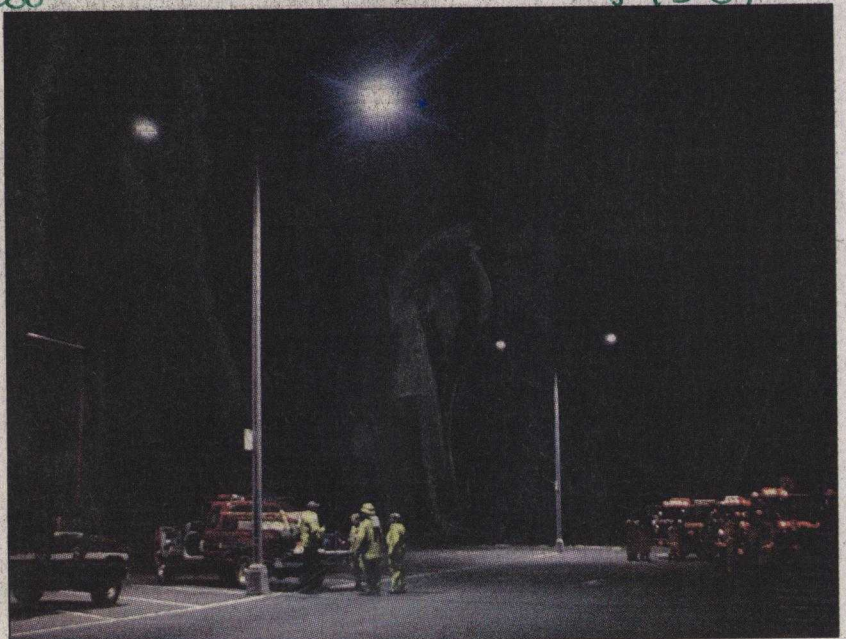
SWANTON — Flames leaped into the night sky above the ridges of the Santa Cruz Mountains on Wednesday as a wildland fire burned out of control in the rugged hills between the end of Empire Grade Road and Swanton.

The Lockheed Fire burned in heavily wooded terrain as winds howled through the canyons, whipping the fire through the dry vegetation under the cool night air. At 10:30 p.m., the out-of-control fire had consumed 1,000 acres and was growing. At least four strike teams were called in; the last was sent to Big Creek Lumber for structure protection. Minutes earlier, mandatory evacuations were ordered for the entire Swanton area, and 250 structures were threatened.

At 10:15 p.m., evacuation orders were sent via reverse emergency calls to residents on Swanton Road, Swanton View Road, Mill Creek Road, Last Chance Road, Warnella Truck Trail, Rancho Del Oso and Penstock. An evacuation area was set up at Pacific Elementary School in Davenport, according to reports.

Firefighters said around 10 p.m. that they believe the fire was burning in the area between the Lehi Camp off Empire Grade Road toward Last Chance Road. The fire was first reported about 7:15 p.m. near Empire Grade and Bertoli Drive. Wind speeds were in single digits but gusting to 19 mph.

Cal Fire crews are using the nearby Lockheed Martin



Firefighters stage near the Lockheed Martin facility on Wednesday night as a fast-moving wildfire burns nearby.

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FIRE

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Space Systems campus as one command center as they strategize how to reach the fire. Before nightfall, a lone helicopter dropped water on the fire. Aircraft were called off as darkness hit. At least two dozen fire trucks and construction equipment was staging at the parking lot of the Lockheed Martin facility.

At 10 p.m. a strike team, made up of five engines, was called to the Waddell Creek area near Swanton Road. That call came two hours after Cal Fire sent out a "mutual aid immediate need" request to fight the fire.

Looking out over the ridge from the Lockheed campus, plumes of orange and red flames jumped off

the top of the mountain.

A stream of fire trucks and dozers were making their way up Empire Grade Road around 10 p.m. to stage at Lockheed. The fire is not near the facility but on a ridge toward the coast. Lockheed Martin is 3,700 acres with defensible space around it. Lockheed safety official Fred Rust was not sure if the facility was in the direct path of the fire.

"They are still trying to access it themselves," Rust said. "We've been asked to grant access and that's all we've done."

At 10:15 p.m., fire crews had reached the southern edge of the fire and were attacking the flanks of the blaze. They reached the fire on dirt roads from the Lehi camp, which houses permanent staff.

There were at least 25 fire crews called to the scene, about 10 crews

of which are at the fire. Many of the others were sent to Big Creek Fire Station on Swanton Road.

Firefighters on the scene said conditions are dry so it is ripe for the fire to grow. Emergency dispatchers said the fire is being fueled by winds pushing the fire through the canyon to Last Chance Road, a small dirt road dotted with homes. Prisoners from the Ben Lomond Conservation Camp hiked into an area of the fire and were fighting it by hand.

On Empire Grade Road, residents and others were preparing for the blaze. A guard at the Lockheed facility said she has been ordered to let all fire crews inside the gates and to expect them in all night.

Zinnia Hinde and her husband Aaron Hinde, who live on the 1000 block of Bertoli Drive, were preparing to leave their house just before

9 p.m.

"It's dark and I can't see" the fire, Zinnia said. "My husband is turning the cars around so we can be gone from here soon."

Hinde said her son, his wife and children live just above them and are also preparing to evacuate.

"OK Lord, what do I do?" she said just before hanging up the phone.

Lehi Park, a camp run by the Mormon Church, is located just below the Lockheed Martin facility. No one answered at the camp. The Bosch Baha'i Camp is also near the area. Fire officials do not believe anyone is at either camp.

The Lehi Park is at 16000 Empire Grade Road. The camp, situated on 100 acres, hosts events like a girls' camp, father and daughter overnights, marriage seminars and young adult retreats. ◀