

# Cal Fire: Unattended campfire started blaze

Criminal charges or fines  
possible responsible party

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DAVENPORT — An unattended campfire sparked the massive Lockheed Fire that burned about 8,000 acres of North Coast forest land in August, Cal Fire officials said Friday.

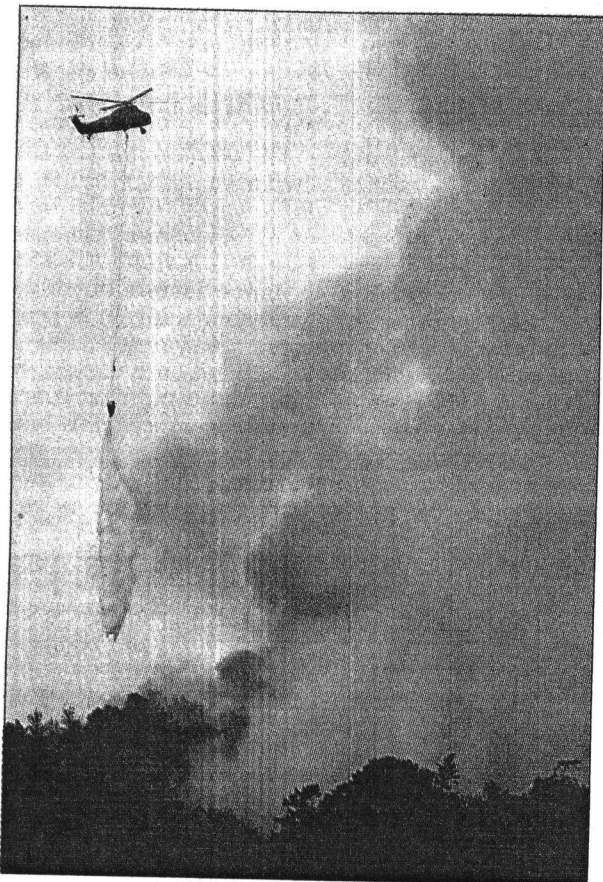
The fire broke out just after 7 p.m. Aug. 12 on a small parcel of private land at the end of Lehi Road, a private road west of the Lockheed-Martin facilities. Fanned by strong winds, it quickly spread into the narrow canyons of the Scott Creek drainage.

When the campfire got out of control, people drove to the Lockheed Martin guard station near Empire Grade Road to call 911 because there is no phone service at the property, according to Cal Fire Division Chief Rich Sampson of the Santa Cruz-San Mateo unit.

The fire threatened dozens of houses and prompted evacuations in Swanton, along Last Chance Road and in Bonny Doon. Although it burned no homes, 13 structures, three vehicles and two travel trailers were destroyed.

It took nearly two weeks for fire crews to contain the blaze, cost \$26.6 million and involved more than

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The Lockheed Fire north of Davenport started Aug. 12, 2009, and burned nearly 8,000 acres.

## FIRE

Continued from A1

2,000 firefighters.

North Coast residents affected by the blaze had speculated on the cause for months.

"There were all these rumors going around. One was there was somebody burning the remains of that guy (Elias Sorokin) who was missing," said Lud McCrary, who has lived at a ranch on Swanton View Road for nearly six decades but refused to evacuate when the fire scorched his pastures and threatened his home. "Other people said they thought it was the sheriffs burning pot."

Sorokin, a Los Angeles businessman, was last heard from on July 20 while driving from Oakland to Santa Cruz. His burning vehicle was found just off Empire Grade Road on July 28. His body has not been found, though three men are facing charges in connection with his death.

On Friday, Cal Fire officials answered few questions about the wildfire and the subsequent probe.

"I can't say who reported it and I can't give any information about the property it was caused on," Sampson said.

He also did not explain why it took investigators six months to disclose the cause of the blaze.

"We're still continuing with the investigation but we wanted to release the cause," Sampson said.

However, McCrary was skeptical of Cal Fire's explanation.

"That doesn't sound right," he said. "It wasn't the type of night you'd want to be sitting out on the ridge. The wind was blowing."

Campfires are allowed on private property, so long as they are kept under con-

## BY THE NUMBERS

### LOCKHEED FIRE

ACRES BURNED: 7,718

STARTED: 7:15 p.m. Aug. 12

CONTAINMENT: Aug. 23

LOCATION: Swanton Road to Bonny Doon

CAUSE: An unattended campfire on a Lehi Road property spread into the wildland.

### STRUCTURES DESTROYED:

No houses, but 13 structures, three vehicles and two travel trailers were destroyed.

FIRE CREWS: More than 2,000 firefighters battled the blaze.

COST: \$26.6 million

SOURCE: Cal Fire

trol, according to Sampson. People can face criminal charges or be charged the cost of fighting an out-of-control blaze, even if the fire was accidental.

No one has been charged in connection with the wildfire, according to county prosecutor Kelly Walker.

"We were involved in the investigation," Walker said. "They have not requested us to file anything."

The Lockheed Fire was the first of two major wildland blazes in the county last year. The other, the Loma Fire, erupted early on Oct. 25 near the Santa Cruz-Santa Clara county line, not far from where the Summit Fire burned more than 4,000 acres in May 2008.

On Friday, Cal Fire battalion chief Jim Crawford said investigators had yet to determine what caused the Loma Fire.

However, even as fire crews battled the Loma Fire, a fire official said it was likely that winds stirred up burn piles left by his inmate fire crew and sparked the 485-acre blaze.