

# Spread of fire slows; control a week away

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SANTA CRUZ — A brush and timber fire continued to threaten homes in the Santa Cruz Mountains today, and firefighters say it could be a week or more before they gain control.

The blaze, which began Sunday afternoon near Lexington Reservoir, has consumed upwards of 18,000 acres and has destroyed at least seven structures. Fire officials this morning said they do not know if the structures were homes or outbuildings, and they don't yet have addresses compiled.

The spread of the fire slowed Tuesday after growing from 400 acres to nearly 14,000 acres Monday night.

Firefighters are drawing the battle lines along Summit Road to the northwest and the Loma Prieta peak area to the southeast.

Embers blown about like rain by gusty winds caused the fire to breach Summit Road at 3:30 this morning. Firefighters quickly extinguished that and other smaller spot fires in

the populated area near Woodwardia Road.

Firefighters stood by engines bearing names including Union City, Hayward and Corte Madera in every driveway, ready to protect homes along Summit Road and Loma Prieta Avenue as the gusty winds swirled the thick gray smoke.

Santa Cruz, Central and Aptos/La Selva Beach firefighters were charged with keeping the flames above the Burrell fire camp from coming down the hill. Other Santa Cruz County firefighters were protecting buildings near Loma Prieta.

A shift in the wind Tuesday kept the core of the fire in the Summit area, and sheriff's deputies warned residents on the west side of Highway 17 to stand by for evacuation. A major breach of the defenses on the western line of the fire by blowing embers remains the biggest fear for fire officials.

As of this morning, 1,560 firefighters were battling the blaze.

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## ■ Santa Cruz Mountains fire ■

### Fire

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Fifty-six firefighters have suffered minor injuries. There were 78 fire engines committed to the fire, and Department of Forestry spokesman Frank Lewis said this morning 37 more were coming in from as far away as Humboldt County.

The Department of Forestry had requested 125 engines, but Lewis conceded that many engines would be "a tremendous resource" to take out of Northern California with the number of fires burning and the continued threat up and down the state.

Five air tankers and four helicopters are being used to attack the front line of the fire.

And, many of the 44 bulldozers in use are working to build a fire break to stop the fire near the base of Loma Prieta. The break this morning was reported to be seven bulldozers' wide.

Gov. Geoge Deukmejian Tuesday night declared a state of emergency for Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties, the first step toward qualifying the two counties for federal disaster aid.

More than 4,500 residents on both Santa Cruz and Santa Clara County sides of the Summit have been forced to flee ahead of the flames. Santa Cruz County Administrator George Newell said this morning 176 residents spent the night at a shelter at Soquel High School.

Sheriff's Lt. Jim Bonar, who supervised Tuesday's evacuations, said most residents complied. "Some people were determined to stay. If people insisted, we did not force the evacuation," he said. A couple of elderly residents were

moved out by ambulance.

Sheriff Al Noren called for mutual aid from city police departments Tuesday afternoon to man posts on closed roads so his deputies could get back to patrolling county streets and roads.

Bonar said deputies are on 12-hour work schedules and their ranks are being supplemented by detectives and detention officers.

A major concern, he said, are sightseers who have clogged Highway 17. "People are running back and forth across the highway to get better vantage and there have been reports of lots of close calls," Bonar said.

Newell this morning asked sightseers to stay out of the area. "We do not take kindly to people rubber-necking," said Noren.

Forestry officials say they believe the cause of the fire is arson. They said they have ruled out all possible natural causes for the fire, which began about 2 p.m. Sunday. Firefighters were finally getting a line around the blaze at about 400 acres Monday afternoon when a stiff offshore wind shot the fire ahead at a pace of an acre and minute.

Lewis of CDF said the main portion of the fire is burning toward Mount Umunhum and Loma Prieta in an area that was consumed by fire in 1961. More than 8,000 acres were burned in that nine-day fire. After 20 years, the brush is thick and burns rapidly, he said.

If the fire gets past the fire break at Loma Prieta, he said, the blaze will roar into wide-open land in the watershed of the upper Soquel Creek and Nisene Marks.