

“Grizzly Fire”

Incident Description

On Wednesday, August 2, 2017, the “Grizzly Fire,” started around 1:00 PM on University of California, Berkeley property on the west side of Grizzly Peak Boulevard (near signpost 15). It jumped the Grizzly Peak Boulevard and proceeded to head east towards South Park Road into Contra Costa County. There were two sections to the fire. The section in the northeast quadrant, with its steep terrain, heavy vegetation and large pine and eucalyptus trees, was the most difficult to fight.

The fire burned approximately 20 acres owned by University of California Berkeley (UCB), East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), City of Oakland and East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD, as well as under the Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) transmission lines.

The cause of the fire is under investigation by CAL FIRE, with arson the suspected cause.

Mutual Aid

Approximately 200 fire fighters from 14 agencies responded. Unified Command was established with CAL FIRE, EBRPD and Oakland Fire Department. Additional responding agencies included: Alameda County Fire Department, Berkeley Fire Department, Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, El Cerrito Fire Department, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Fremont Fire Department, Kensington Fire Protection District, Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Department, Marin County Fire Department, Moraga Orinda Fire District and Piedmont Fire Department. CAL FIRE Conservation Camps sent crews from Ben Loman and Delta Camp. CAL FIRE and EBRPD helicopters, plus Sheriff’s Department fixed wing aircraft, provided air support.

One firefighter injury (CAL FIRE) due to steep terrain.

City of Berkeley, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) and UCB Facility Services activated their emergency operations centers.

Notifications

Alameda County mass notifications system phone and text alert about the fire was sent out Wednesday afternoon cautioning hills residents to stay alert.

UCB issued an alert on Nixel.

MOFD provided a Nixel alert that Orinda residents did not need to evacuate.

Closures + Evacuation:

During the fire, PG&E alerted UCB and LBNL that transformers would be shut down (power cut across the campus and lab).



Aerial of Grizzly Fire.
Photo: Mike Martin



Multi-agency briefing to discuss night operations.
Photo: AlamedaCoFire



Multi-agency briefing to discuss night operations.
Photo: AlamedaCoFire

However, after inspection of lines PG&E issued an all clear and no power outage was required.

First responders closed traffic between South Park Drive and Centennial Road.

Evacuation took place of two children's summer camps at the Brazil Building and the Gillespie area of Tilden moved to the Tilden Golf Course parking lot to be picked up by guardians.

UCB Space Science Lab, MSRI buildings, the Botanical Garden and LBNL were evacuated.

No evacuation required for other UCB children's camps (approximately 11,000 campers in day camps throughout Clark Kerr Campus, Strawberry Canyon, Stadium and Recreation Sports)

EBRPD closed their steam train.

During the afternoon, a herd of goats grazing nearby on a fuel reduction project was moved to safety.

Conditions for success

Good multi-agency coordination. Agencies were familiar with working with each other through mutual aid, Hills Emergency Forum and Diablo Fire Safe Council.

Fire crews available. Relatively little other fire activity in the region; not required to redirect resources.

Crews remained on scene through Monday to mop up and patrol hot spots.

Favorable weather conditions: moderate temperatures, humidity, and little wind with good overnight recovery of relative humidity.

Recently completed fuel management to thin the number of stems and reduce ground fuels in EBMUD eucalyptus grove on the east side of Grizzly Peak Boulevard below communication towers. Fire did not get into the crowns of the trees.

Fuel reduction in previous years below the PG&E transmission lines, on UCB lands below Grizzly Peak Boulevard turnouts and on east side of Grizzly Peak Boulevard on EBRPD lands reduced overall fuel load and to allow firefighter to access and extinguish the fire.

Future coordination improvements

PG&E, UCB and LBNL regarding power shut off.

Regional pre-fire planning for resource locations, fresh water suitable for heli-tanker, evacuation collection points, values at risk, etc.

Evacuation corridor up Centennial Drive with Lawrence Hall of Science, LBNL and UCB Botanical Gardens.

Notification process (OES), coordination and fire perimeter security.



Smoke from a hotspot in the East Bay hills. Photo taken Thursday Aug. 3 around 8 a.m. just north of Signpost 15. Photo: Natalie Orenstein/ BerkeleySide



Firefighters douse flames from vegetation fire in hills along Grizzly Peak Boulevard in Berkeley, on Wednesday, August 2, 2017. Photo: Jane Tyska/Bay Area News Group



A line of firefighters on Grizzly Peak around 9 a.m. on Thursday Aug. 3. Photo: Natalie Orenstein/ BerkeleySide