

Fires

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Crews from the Pacific Palisades, Malibu and Santa Monica achieved visible knock-down of the flames by 5 p.m. Firefighters remained on alert for smoldering brush and potential hot spots, dousing burn areas and monitoring nearby eucalyptus trees as *The Malibu Times* went to print press.

The fire forced the closure of both northbound and southbound PCH lanes between Temescal Canyon Rd. and Chautauqua Blvd. Southbound traffic was backed up for miles and re-routed through Temescal Canyon, leaving some motorists stuck in the logjam for hours. Authorities closed the 10 Freeway west at Lincoln Blvd., as well as the California Incline.

Authorities had not determined a cause of the fire as *The Malibu Times* went to press, but did not believe wind was a factor.

Topanga brush fire burns 2 acres, sparks several spot fires

A two-acre brush fire also burned in Topanga for nearly three hours on Tuesday beginning at 12 p.m., with investigators looking into one of the possible causes as dawned power lines.

Officials confirmed that power lines were down in an area on Red Rock Drive near the fire, but it has not been determined if the

downed lines caused the fire. "That's part of the investigation in conjunction with the fire department, [Southern California] Edison and law enforcement," said Los Angeles County Fire Inspector Keith Mora.

The fire started in the 1200 block of Old Topanga Boulevard, initially as a 20- by 25-foot spot, according to the LACFD. It eventually spread to nearly two acres in mountainous, dry terrain, and three offshoot spot fires were sparked as crews battled the blaze. One structure was immediately threatened during the fire.

All visible flames were extinguished by 1:50 p.m. but crews were faced with the threat of hot spots, as three broke out during the course of the fire, a couple of them in steep terrain: one measuring 10 by 10 feet, one measuring 50 by 50 feet and a third measuring 20 by 20 feet.

Authorities planned on monitoring the burn area until 8 p.m. on Tuesday and then implementing a "night plan," consisting of overnight monitoring until Wednesday from one fire truck, one fire patrol and one fire crew, according to dispatch.

Check malibutimes.com for updates that transpired after *The Malibu Times* went to press on Tuesday evening.



A view of the PCH Fire from Santa Monica. Smoke from the fire could be seen from much of Santa Monica, Malibu and Pacific Palisades.

Mindy Beardsley



An overhead view of a brush fire in Topanga that burned two acres and sparked several spot fires. One firefighter suffered minor injury.

Dave Lichten / TMT



Motorists sat in traffic as crews battled the PCH Fire in Pacific Palisades. Northbound lanes were completely shut down for hours.

Lillian Yee

Fire danger

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Low humidity, warm weather and strong winds have combined to cause two Red Flag Warnings in the past two weeks and, with Southern California in the midst of an historic dry spell, the fire warnings are expected to persist.

Many Malibu residents are familiar with the signs along Pacific Coast Highway that warn of the current level of fire danger in the city ("high," "low," or in the case of a Red Flag, "extreme"). But how do firefighters gauge fire danger?

Bryan Humphrey, spokesman for the Los Angeles Fire Department, recently answered that question in an article posted to the department's website and reprinted below. While it referred specifically to the City of Los Angeles, the same methodology is used in Malibu and elsewhere:

How are decisions made by the Los Angeles Fire Department to pre-deploy resources on days of high wildfire hazard?

The answer is science. The LAFD utilizes a Burning Index (BI) to determine the department's commitment to pre-deploy resources. A number of procedures occur each day to determine the BI in Los Angeles.

First, dead vegetation fuel moisture readings are taken in the early afternoon at Fire Station 108 on Mulholland Drive near Coldwater Canyon, and communicated to LAFD's North Division Headquarters located at Fire Station 88 in the San Fernando Valley.

Second, a group of federal meteorologists at the Southern California Geographic Area Coordination Center (SCGACC) in Riverside, California provide a "fire weather forecast" consisting of a predicted high temperature, low relative humidity, wind speed and direction for the next day.

Third, historical data (high/low temperature, high/low relative humidity and hours of rainfall in the last 24 hours) is mixed into the brew.

The daily BI level is stated as a numerical value:

- BI 0 to 37 = Low
- BI 38 to 47 = Moderate
- BI 48 to 110 = High
- BI 111 to 161 = Very High
- BI 162 and above = **Extreme**



All of this information is fed into equations that make up the National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS). The result is the BI. Theoretically, fire danger is elevated when BIs reach high values.

On days of Extreme Fire Danger, the Los Angeles Fire Department may pre-deploy resources at select Neighborhood Fire Stations in-and-near areas prone to wildfire.

Not all forecasts become reality, so LAFD North Division staff conduct real-time weather surveys, monitor Remote Automated Weather Stations (RAWS) in and near the City of Los Angeles and consult the National Weather Service (NWS) to stay abreast of fire weather conditions and forecasts.

The NWS and SCGACC may come to different conclusions on the forecast as well, based on which computer model each agency trusts. Ultimately, the LAFD makes decisions on pre-deployment based on all of these inputs - with a lot of experience mixed in.

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