



## Ventura County Fire Protection District

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# FIRE INVESTIGATION REPORT

**FI Report #** 13-12091

**Date:** May 28, 2013

**Incident #** 13-0032052

**Incident Location:** 755 Chantry Circle, Simi Valley, CA 91360

**Incident Type:** Vegetation Fire

**Area:** Station 45

**Investigator:** Jon Bergh, Investigator 12

### LOCATION/DESCRIPTION:

A vegetation fire occurred in an open space area between Verdemont Circle and Chantry Circle in the City of Simi Valley, California. The open space area is owned by Oakridge Estates Homeowners Association. The fire burned 7.5 acres of native vegetation - coastal sage and grasses.

### ARRIVAL/CONDITIONS:

I arrived on scene at 1224 hours. The following weather conditions recorded at 1430 hours: The dry bulb temperature was 83°F and the wet bulb temperature was 64°F with a relative humidity of 35% and NW winds at 10-12 mph. The weather contributed to a rapid lateral spread.

### SCENE EXAMINATION:

I observed active fire along the northern perimeter of the fire. The fire had been contained along the west, south and east flanks. The fire patterns on the vegetation indicated the general area of origin was behind 778 and 784 Verdemont Circle. I located multiple sections of recently deposited severed string from a string trimmer (aka "weed whip") within the general area of origin.

### INTERVIEWS:

The following contacts were made and statements are summarized:

**Fire Captain Steve Biggs, VCFD E-45:** He was the first fire officer to arrive on scene. The fire was approximately one acre upon arrival and spreading rapidly toward the south and east, with a 2-5 mph NW wind. The main body of fire was located behind homes along Verdemont Circle and had not spread to the north behind homes along Hemlock Ridge.

**Richard Holoff:** The initial reporting party who resides at 755 Chantry Circle. He stated that two landscape maintenance workers were across the ravine from his location when he noticed the fire. One worker was watching the other attempt to extinguish the fire. After the failed attempt, they drove away in a white pickup truck.

**Bobbie Redmond:** She resides at 781 Verdemont Circle. Sometime after the fire started, she saw two Hispanic male maintenance workers, hired by the HOA, leave the scene through the gated easement at the north end of Verdemont Circle.

**Palma Garcia:** She is an agent for MRI Property Management. She manages open space for the Oakridge Estates Homeowners' Association (HOA). Marina Landscape, located in Orange County is under contract to provide weed abatement services for the open space areas. She was not aware of any work being done on the day of the fire but informed me to contact Tony Gonzales.

**Tony Gonzales:** He is a maintenance manager for Marina Landscape and oversees the services provided for Oakridge Estates. He confirmed there were two employees working in the area at the time of the fire. On the day of the fire, his crew foreman, Francisco Floref, had called him that there was a fire at their worksite and they were leaving the scene. Francisco stated that the fire had started further north of his location (behind Hemlock Ridge homes) and denied any involvement with the ignition of the fire. The open space area along Hemlock Ridge is owned and maintained by another HOA.

**PHYSICAL EVIDENCE:**

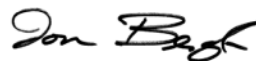
I photographed the fire scene and obtained a surveillance video from 743 Chantry showing the start of the fire.

**CAUSE DETERMINATION AND CONCLUSION:**

The following opinion is based on my training, experience, physical evidence, and statements made by witnesses. The cause of the fire is accidental. Within the general area of origin were two individuals conducting fire hazard reduction operations (weed abatement) using portable mechanical equipment. Possible ignition scenarios include: a rock strike with a metal blade, hot exhaust particles from a combustion engine or placing hot equipment onto combustible vegetation. The fire occurred with no apparent intentional act and an attempt was made to extinguish the fire.

Other accidental heat sources at the scene were considered and eliminated. There were no overhead energized electrical conductors or other mechanical equipment in the origin area. I did not observe any evidence of cigarette butts, and with a moderate level of relative humidity recorded that day, cigarettes were eliminated. Other than the worker's pickup truck, there were no motorized vehicles reported nearby. Campfires are not permitted and no evidence of homeless encampments were found.

A suspicious person on a bicycle was reported to Simi Valley Police Department. Contact with the individual was made and eliminated as having any involvement with the cause of the fire. There was no occurrence of lightning in the vicinity. The status of this case is closed.



Jon Bergh

Fire/Arson Investigator

Ventura County Fire Department