

Fast-moving fire scares Soda Canyon residents



NOVEMBER 02, 2011 5:28 PM • [KERANA TODOROV](#)

Dozens of residents returned to their homes in the Soda Canyon area Wednesday following a hair-raising Tuesday night fire that scorched 65 acres in gusty winds, reducing a vacation house to ashes and destroying the garage and an old pigeon coop on a nearby property.

The fast-moving fire, which was reported at about 8:40 p.m. Tuesday, was declared contained at 8 a.m. Wednesday, CalFire

Assistant Chief David Shew said.

On Wednesday morning, CalFire crews continued to extinguish hot spots, with a helicopter delivering buckets of water. No one was injured in the fire, whose cause remains under investigation, Shew said at mid-day.

Dozens of residents were evacuated as high winds, estimated at 20 to 30 miles per hour, fanned the flames, threatening about 100 properties on Soda Canyon Road and along Loma Vista and Shady Oaks drives, according to CalFire.

Luckily, the hills shielded the fire from the winds, Shew said. Soda Canyon Road was closed at Silverado Trail while the fire burned.

CalFire investigators are looking at many possible causes for the fire, including downed power lines near Loma Vista Drive, Shew said. Damage estimates were still being compiled as of Wednesday afternoon.

The fire engulfed a house at 1029 Loma Vista Drive that had sweeping views of the Napa Valley. As they evacuated the area, neighbors saw flames, some four stories high, climb a hillside toward the house.

The property was unoccupied, neighbors said. The property's owners, who reside in Rye, N.Y., according to county records, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Residents returned home Wednesday morning after an ordered evacuation Tuesday night. The Red Cross was prepared to open a shelter at Crosswalk Church in Napa, but the evacuees apparently found accommodations elsewhere, Frank Lucier, the local Red Cross executive director, said.

On Soda Canyon Road, Anavon Anderson recalled how she had opened her front door in the 1300 block of Soda Canyon Road Tuesday to check the howling winds, only to see flames taller than her two-story house a few hundreds yards away.

The fire destroyed her property's garage, along with an empty pigeon coop where her husband, Clyde, had raised birds.

"It was terrifying. It really was," Anavon Anderson, 77, said as firefighters monitored hot spots nearby.

When she shouted an alarm, her husband ran outside to get their two vehicles out of the garage. He also turned on sprinklers on the roof of their two-story house and, using a hose, doused the area around the house with water.

Clyde Anderson, 80, said he lost a house on the property to fire in 1965. "I know what it can do," Anderson said.

On Tuesday, he spent the night on his property after the flames had swept by, while his wife and their dog, Marley, stayed with relatives in downtown Napa.

On Loma Vista Drive, Alex Horeczko said their 3 1/2-year-old twins were in bed, having trouble going to sleep because of the winds, when her husband, Alan, saw the fire from the kitchen window.

He yelled, "There's a fire!"

Alex Horeczko came to the kitchen. "It was like a raging bonfire," she said.

Not wanting to take chances, they grabbed their two children, Nicholas and Lara, who were in their pajamas, their two cats, Darjie and Earl, their wallets and cell phones and drove off within 10 minutes, just as the first fire truck was arriving, she said.

"We knew it was spreading pretty quickly," Alex Horeczko said.

The family ended up staying at a hotel in Napa. The two cats were kept inside the family's Toyota Highlander with a litter box because the hotel did not allow pets, the family said.

As it turns out, it was Darjie's second close-call this year. In March, the cat hid in a moving pod when the family was moving from Colorado to Napa. The cat was found dehydrated, but OK, in Napa 11 days later, generating a story in The Register.

On Wednesday afternoon, Darjie and Earl were reportedly back to their normal selves. "They're outside enjoying the weather," Alex Horeczko said.

The fire response included fire crews from Napa, Sonoma, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz, Shew said.

Fire crews were dispatched to Soda Canyon Road late Wednesday afternoon, when a vegetation fire of unknown origin burned between 1 and 2 acres in the 2300 block of Soda Canyon Road, CalFire said. The fire was contained at about 5:30 p.m., Shew said. A CalFire helicopter dropped buckets of water on the fire as fire crews staged at the Soda Canyon Volunteer Fire Department.