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Firefighters crush 30-acre Moraga vegetation fire

By Nick Marnell



Photo courtesy MOFD

The Moraga vegetation fire the evening of Oct. 11 was a powerful reminder for residents to complete their exterior abatement projects by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District deadline of June 1.

The Irvine Fire, a one-alarm grass fire first reported before 6 p.m., required a response from four fire agencies, including MOFD, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and the East Bay Regional Park District. The Sanders Ranch blaze occurred in a Mutual Threat Zone, meaning that it started in the MOFD local responsibility area but had a high probability of spreading into the state responsibility area. Hence, the response from Cal Fire and the park district.

According to MOFD, the fire was caused by a resident who was mowing tall grass behind a house.

"In short, it is too late to complete fuel reduction work for this year, and we ask that residents use the winter to plan their late spring work to protect their homes during next year's fire season," MOFD Chief Dave Winnacker said. "In my time with the district, three of the four significant vegetation fires have been caused by residents carrying out late season fuel mitigation work and it has been only thanks to the timely response and aggressive attack by our firefighters that the loss of homes has been avoided."

The Sanders Ranch fire burned 30 acres and took two hours to contain. No structures were threatened, as the fire burned away from houses, unaided by wind or severe weather.

"The biggest challenge was the hilly topography," said MOFD's Steve Gehling, the on-scene battalion chief. The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District and the park district provided aerial suppression support, preventing the fire's forward progress into areas inaccessible to the firefighters.

Winnacker again stressed the need to complete exterior abatement by June 1 of next year. He reminded residents to cut annual grasses and weeds to less than 3 inches; to limb up trees to create at least a 6-foot air gap between the ground, ground fuels or roofs; and to maintain roadside vegetation to create a 3-foot horizontal and 15-foot vertical clearance.

MOFD has the authority to issue citations for violations of the fire code and health and safety code, and also has the authority to seek cost recovery for fires within their jurisdiction. "The fire district is not seeking cost recovery nor have we issued a citation," said Fire Marshal Jeff Isaacs of the Irvine Fire.

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