

Cedar Fire Review and Analysis

Dan Northern

Abstract

2003 was a record setting fire year in the northwest United States was followed by fires in California. With flames bearing down on Southern California mountain towns, firefighters dug in to protect hundreds of homes while looking for help from drizzling rain and lower temperatures. In the San Bernardino Mountains east of Los Angeles, relentless flames engulfed hundreds of homes on a wind-driven march toward the resort towns of Big Bear and Lake Arrowhead. Thousands of people were evacuated. To the south, in San Diego County, the state's largest fire claimed the life of a firefighter when a crew was overcome by flames near Wynola. Three other crew members were critically injured. Steve Rucker, a 38-year-old fire engineer from the Novato Fire Protection District near San Francisco, died while battling the Cedar Fire, which has burned more than 250,000 acres and 1,400 homes. He was the first firefighter among the 20 people who have died in the week of wildfires. At their morning briefing Thursday, many firefighters wore black bands on their badges in memory of their lost colleague. And in Novato, Deputy Chief Dan Northern fought back tears as he described Rucker as a hard worker who volunteered to fight the fire that killed him. "He wasn't sent there," Northern said. "He asked to go." Retired Deputy Chief Dan Northern reviews the factors leading to this tragic incident.

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