

NATIONAL

NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Wildfires in Southwest threaten communities

■ **DANGER:** Embers from a barrel of burning trash started a blaze that destroyed 18 homes

QUESTA, N.M. (AP) — Fire crews used hand tools and helicopters Tuesday in a fight to keep a 7,200-acre fire from advancing across steep canyons and mountainsides into two communities in northern New Mexico.

Helicopters hauled huge buckets of water to drop on the flames in a steep canyon of the Carson National Forest. Ground crews chopped and burned fire breaks between the fire and the communities of Red River and Questa.

"We would hope that something could stop the fire where it's at, but in all reality, it could get very close," said Jake Pierce, administrator for the town of Red River, a mountain ski resort.

About 450 of Red River's 500 residents were evacuated. Officials allowed them to return home later Tuesday, with warnings to be prepared to leave in a hurry. The fire was still moving toward town, but firefighters said they could probably control it.

About 600 others had evacuated from La Lama, where a New Age spiritual community of about 70 families suffered heavy damage, and from La Questa, a ranching town of about 1,700 people a few miles from Red River.

The flames had already destroyed 27 buildings in La Lama, 18 of them homes. That community is about five miles north of where the fire was start-

ed Sunday when embers flew out of a barrel being used to burn trash.

A San Cristobal man "readily admitted he burned the trash," said Paul Ney, director of investigations for the state fire marshal's office.

The man could face misdemeanor charges of improper handling of a fire, as well as be sued by the U.S. Forest Service for the cost of fighting the wildfires it caused, authorities said.

No one was estimating when the fire might be contained, fire information officer Ken Palmrose said.

A serious drought, exacerbated by below-normal winter snow accumulation, has contributed to the fires, which have flared across New Mexico and Arizona weeks ahead of the region's usually severe fire season.

"We haven't seen a fire in this area since the turn of the century," said Gary Schiff, spokesman for the Carson National Forest. "That indicates just how dry the Southwest is."

Fire crews in Arizona have built containment lines around 80 percent of a 6,300-acre forest fire on Mount Graham, the site of an \$25 million astronomy observatory complex.

Observatory employees were briefly evacuated a few times since the fire began April 24. Twice during the weekend, flames got to within about 200 yards of the complex.

Because of the fire danger, the Forest Service this week will close more than 1 million acres of national forest land in northern Arizona, authorities said Tuesday.

Perfectionist discovers error in own textbook, kills spouse

■ **MURDER:** Depressed and paranoid, the mathematician believed his prestige was ruined

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — Walter Petryshyn's well-ordered world began to come apart with the terrible realization that he had made an error in a textbook.

A highly regarded Rutgers University mathematician with a reputation as a perfectionist who loved both his work and his wife, Petryshyn became depressed and paranoid, started losing weight and began obsessing over apparently imaginary health problems, longtime friend Bohdan Boychuk said.

"He felt that his prestige was destroyed, that his colleagues in mathematics would laugh at him," Boychuk said.

The obsession may have driven him over the edge. According to prosecutors, early Monday Petryshyn smashed his wife's skull with a claw hammer 30 times. Her body was found in the couple's townhouse in North Brunswick.

Petryshyn, a 67-year-old Ukrainian immigrant, was charged with murder in the death of his wife, Arcadia Olenka-Petryshyn, a 61-year-old painter who exhibited her work internationally. He was jailed on

\$500,000 bail.

It was the textbook error that "really broke him," Boychuk said.

The problems began a year ago, when Petryshyn published the textbook, *Generalized Topological Degree and Semilinear Equations*, said Boychuk, a Ukrainian poet who lives in Riverdale, N.Y.

"I noted very drastic changes," Boychuk said. "He discovered that there was some mistake in that book, and he told me that mistake was very serious, very big, and he couldn't solve it."

But Boychuk said he understood that Petryshyn's editors at Cambridge University Press in England said "the error was small, that the book was very good, well received and selling."

"That's the irony. It was all in his mind," Boychuk said.

Petryshyn's editor, Lauren Cowles, said he simply left out one assumption that was the basis for one of the book's central logical arguments — "a technicality" Cowles addressed by sending corrections to book reviewers for academic journals.

"It sounds as if his perfectionism drove him to insanity," said Rutgers mathematician Felix Browder, who has known Petryshyn for decades.



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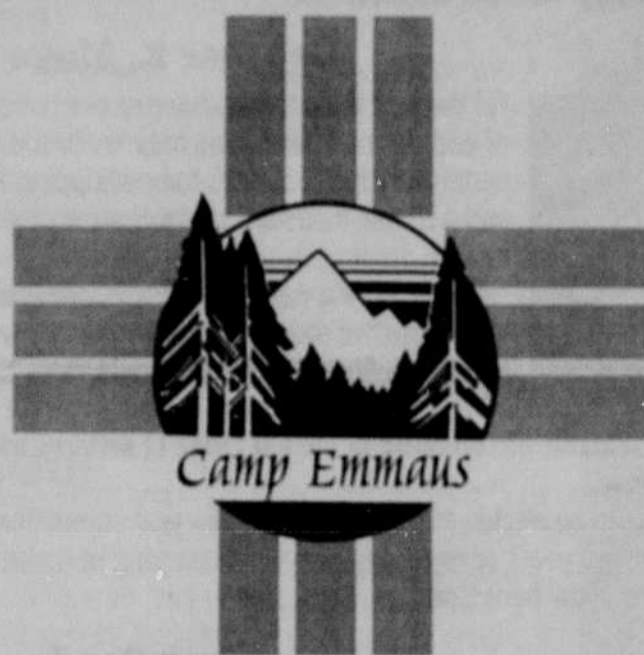
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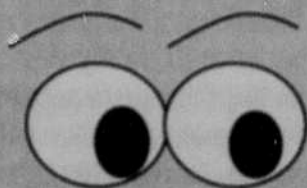
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