

# NATIONAL

NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

## Nevada fire started by two boys

■ **BLAZE:** By midday, 5,000 acres were consumed and about 100 homes were threatened

GENOA, Nev. (AP) — Two boys started a wind-whipped fire that destroyed four homes, forced thousands of people to evacuate and continued to burn out of control on Monday near the Heavenly Valley ski resort and 100 expensive homes.

Douglas County Sheriff Jerry Maple said the boys, a 13-year-old from Oregon and a 14-year-old local boy, started the blaze with gasoline. He said the boys told investigators it was an accident.

"They were playing with fire, but it was not that they intended to set the mountain on fire," Maple said.

He said the district attorney would meet with investigators to determine whether the youths could face charges as a result of the fire that started about five miles south of here in the Autumn Hills subdivision. The boys' names were withheld.

Asked whether the youths' parents could be forced to pay for fire suppression costs, Maple replied,

"From the average person, how much can you recoup?"

The fire had consumed about 5,000 acres by midday and was threatening about 100 homes near Heavenly Valley, in mountains that loom above the area where the fire started, according to U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman Jocelyn Biro.

"That's still the most threatened area," said Cliff Shaw, another Forest Service representative.

Reno television station KOLO broadcast an interview with a man who said he saw the boys start the blaze.

"They lit some gas or paper and they tried to put out the fire," said the man, who asked that he not be identified. "They tried to kick some dirt on it, but that didn't work. Then they got a bucket but it got way out of hand. Then we saw someone run across the backyard of the house yelling, 'Oh my God, oh my God, call 911!'"

An approaching unseasonal storm was both good and bad news, officials said. While temperatures were below normal and some precipitation was expected, erratic winds gusting to 50 mph

fanned the flames.

"I think the weather is a blessing and a hindrance," Shaw said.

Kathleen Thompson, a Forest Service spokeswoman, said the fire was 15 percent contained by mid-morning. One firefighter was badly burned and four others suffered smoke inhalation.

Some 3,000 to 4,000 people were evacuated as the fire moved into brush and timber after it broke out at 2 p.m. Sunday at the base of Kingsbury Grade, located 60 miles south of Reno.

Within a few hours, the fire had moved about two miles west and uphill toward Heavenly Valley, and about three miles north toward Genoa, a historic town that's Nevada's first settlement.

"I've lived here all my life and I know how these fires are," said Stacy Trivitt. "I grabbed my dogs, my 9-month-old son, my guns, a photo album and said a prayer."

"I had to turn out all the horses and all the cattle," said Janice Sorenson, whose family's ranch was threatened by the blaze. "I could feel the heat and the noise was horrendous. I was running all over the place and the smoke was so black I couldn't see."

## Study shows babies sleep safer on their backs

■ **RESEARCH:** Sudden infant death syndrome occurs less frequently in babies sleeping face up

WASHINGTON (AP) — The simple act of putting babies to bed on their backs instead of their stomachs may be the reason for a 30 percent drop in sudden infant death syndrome in America, a federal study says.

Dr. Duane Alexander, director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, said the dramatic change in the rate of sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS, has to be attributed to a campaign to bed babies on their back "because nothing else has changed."

"This has been one of the simplest and most effective public health interventions ever," said Alexander. He said at least 1,500 babies have been saved in the United States over the last two years by a "Back to Sleep" campaign in which parents, care-givers and pediatricians were all educated on how best to put baby down.

In Europe, Australia and New Zealand, where the change in sleep position was first tried, the drop in SIDS rate has been even more dramatic, said Alexander. In some countries the number of SIDS deaths was cut by half.

"The rate of SIDS in those countries was higher than here," said Alexander. "About five in 1,000, compared to about 1.1 per 1,000 in this country. So

we weren't sure that a change in sleep position would have the same impact. But it has."

Alexander said the SIDS rate among children from birth to age 1 has dropped in the United States to about .75 per 1,000.

Part of the effort included an annual telephone survey in which about 1,000 mothers of newborns were asked how they placed their baby in the crib. In 1992, 70 percent put the infant on its stomach. By last year's survey, said Alexander, 29 percent did so.

Though there are encouraging statistics of success, babies are still dying of SIDS unnecessarily, said Dr. Sally Davidson Ward of the Childrens Hospital, Los Angeles.

"I know some families who didn't know of the change in recommended sleep position and then lost a child to SIDS," she said. "They, of course, are extremely distraught."

The most emotionally wrenching story, said Ward, is of parents who practiced the "Back to Sleep" system at home, but who left their baby in a day care center where it died of SIDS while tummy sleeping.

"That was extremely hard," she said. Some grandparents, aunts and older family members have resisted the efforts to change how baby sleeps, said Ward.

Alexander said other doctors report the same thing.

Once the new statistics are known, he said, there'll probably be no holdouts.

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