

Chevy Chase Canyon Fire May Be Work of Arsonist

By AMY LOUISE KAZMIN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A fast-moving brush fire that destroyed a three-bedroom luxury house in Glendale's Chevy Chase Canyon Wednesday was the latest in a rash of fires believed to have been set in the area by a "serial arsonist," Glendale arson investigators said Thursday.

In the last month, the Glendale-La Crescenta-La Canada area has had at least eight brush fires, including three on Monday that erupted within an hour of each other at various points along the Glendale and Foothill freeways, said Arson Investigator Joe Lopez of the Glendale Fire Department.

Although no incendiary device was found Wednesday, Lopez said investigators had ruled out the common accidental causes, and said that the fire had many similarities to the others.

"There are no power lines, there is nothing electrical there," he said.

All the fires in the recent spate have been set in brushy areas, close to major roads, on weekday afternoons, Lopez said. Except for Wednesday's fire, none caused any structural damage, although homes have been threatened several times.

"It's the same type of method," Lopez said. "It's definitely a pattern."

At a fire at a vacant lot in early September, investigators found two types of time-delay incendiary devices. A third was recovered from a brush fire near Verdugo Hills Hospital a few days later, Lopez said.

Meanwhile, arson investigators from the Los Angeles City Fire Department and the Pasadena Fire Department said they had not determined whether arson was the cause of fires that broke out Wednesday at Griffith Park and Tuesday near the Rose Bowl. The investigations are continuing.

Glendale Arson Investigator

John Orr said he believes the fires could be the work of the same person who set last year's College Hills fire, which destroyed or damaged 64 homes on a hot, windy day.

That devastating blaze was preceded by a series of smaller arson fires, which investigators believed were all set by the same person. No suspect was ever identified or arrested.

Orr said that investigators do not have any definite evidence linking the College Hills arsonist with this year's fires. But he said that last year's blazes mostly started on weekday afternoons, near major thoroughfares.

He noted that the College Hills fire broke out on a Wednesday at about 3 p.m.—the same time that Wednesday's fire started, and that the temperatures on the two days were similar.

Wednesday's fire started on a brushy slope on the north side of Chevy Chase Drive. The flames quickly moved uphill and engulfed a cantilevered, three-bedroom house at 2740 Kennington Drive.

The house next door narrowly escaped damage through the efforts of Alfonso Cisneros, an off-duty Los Angeles police officer who was passing through the neighborhood visiting a friend. Cisneros battled flames with a garden hose as they came within feet of the structure.

About 10 acres of brush were charred in the blaze, and at least 25 people were evacuated.

In the hope of identifying a suspect, Glendale fire officials are videotaping the crowds at the scenes of fires, and are jotting down car license plates.

"It's a real tough thing to track down an arsonist, particularly a serial arsonist with time-delay devices," Orr said. "It's just a cat and mouse game."