

Arson Suspected In Three 'Unrelated' Leland Fires

BY TERRY POPE

Four fires in the Leland area, three of which is suspected arson, have kept local and State Bureau of Investigation agents busy this week. As of Tuesday afternoon, no charges had been filed in the fires that destroyed two mobile homes in Woodburn, a residence and wooded area near the Northwest community and a field off of Landvale Road. Investigators have suspects in two of those fires including a 13-year-old

juvenile who is believed to have set a wooded lot on fire on King Road off of Landvale Road Sunday afternoon. Brunswick County Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan said the juvenile is wanted for questioning in the fire that "came close to setting a mobile home on fire."

"When I first got the call, that's what I thought it was," Logan said. "It could have been a lot worse than it was."

Two mobile homes were destroyed and a third was damaged in a Saturday afternoon blaze at the Walker Mobile Homes sales lot in Woodburn on old U.S. 74-76. SBI agents were called in to investigate the fires in two mobile homes that was apparently started at the same time.

Neither electricity nor propane gas was connected to the homes. Damage was estimated at around \$30,200. The company is offering a \$1,000 reward

for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible.

Anyone with information about the fires should contact the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department. All information will be kept confidential.

Logan said the fires "do not appear to be related at this time." He added there may be a connection between the burning of about two acres of land in the Northwest community and the Woodburn mobile home fires, but investigators are uncertain at this time.

The N.C. Forest Service has also called in its fire investigator in the blaze that destroyed about two acres on Dupont Road about six miles west of Leland. The land, owned by Ira Butler, was set on fire Saturday around 3:15 p.m. in several places, Logan said.

The woods fire is believed to have

been started first, Logan said. It is not known if arsonists intended for it to act as a decoy to draw fire fighters away from the area of the mobile homes. But it is one possibility investigators are considering, he added.

The Acme-Delco Riegelwood Volunteer Fire Department battled the woods fire for about 90 minutes while Leland fire fighters battled the mobile home fires, Logan said.

Officials do have a suspected vehicle in the woods fire. A witness has reported seeing objects thrown from a vehicle in the area of the fire, objects that may have started the blaze, Logan said.

In an unrelated fire Friday night, a malfunctioning kerosene heater is being blamed in the fire that destroyed a home and a family of five's belongings.

Joe and Hazel Mervin and their three children were unpacking their clothes in the home they had just rented on Blue Banks Road when a smoke alarm went off. Mervin discovered smoke coming from a closet and called the fire department.

About 90 percent of the one-story wooden house was engulfed in flames when Acme-Delco fire fighters arrived. It was brought under control in about 30 minutes. A pumper truck was also used from Leland Volunteer Fire Department.

The house, valued at around \$15,000, was owned by Sylvester Ballard of Route 1, Leland. The American Red Cross was called to assist the Mervins following the 9:15 p.m. blaze.

In all four fires in the Leland area over the weekend, there were no injuries.

County Denied Federal Aid For Winter Storm Damage

BY TERRY POPE

A winter storm that battered the Brunswick County coast last Monday night did not do enough damage to warrant federal assistance, the Federal Emergency Management Agency told county officials last Friday.

Despite pleas from local officials and Congressman Charlie Rose's office, FEMA officials denied funding for the \$750,000 to \$1 million in estimated damages due to high winds and tides along Caswell, Long and Holden beaches.

Brunswick County Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan said Caswell Beach, where a 600-foot section of the Caswell Beach Road washed away, received the most damage from the storm. At Long Beach, 27 oceanfront homes received structural damage while about 400 of the 600 oceanfront cottages received some damage to porches, decks and steps.

Although erosion was extensive at Holden Beach, where around 10-feet of the shoreline is believed to have washed away in some areas, property damage was minor, Logan said.

The state's beaches facing the southerly direction received the brunt of the storm that carried with it 45- to 65-mph winds. Those winds, along with a high tide, was responsible for washing out the roadway at

Caswell Beach.

Logan said the N.C. Department of Transportation will pay up to \$35,000 to repair the road, and will also consider relocating a half-mile section back from the oceanfront.

Last Friday, Logan inspected damages at Long and Caswell beaches along with officials from FEMA, Coastal Area Management Act and the Corps of Engineers' office in Wilmington. Following a meeting at the Long Beach Town Hall, officials announced that damages was not extensive enough to merit federal financial assistance.

Since most of the damaged homes are not permanent residences, at least 25 homes must have 40 percent damage to the living space to qualify for FEMA assistance.

A telegram from Congressman Rose's office was sent to Gov. Jim Martin and FEMA officials last Wednesday "requesting that you proceed without delay to implement procedures providing every possible assistance and recovery to aid the residents, businesses and local agencies of government" of both Brunswick and New Hanover County beaches.

Rose also sent President Reagan a telegram asking that the area be declared a disaster area if necessary in order to qualify for federal assistance.

"Beaches and property suffered extensive damage," Rose wrote the President. "A declaration as a disaster area may be requested by the Governor, the official charged with the responsibility of making such a request. And if one if forthcoming, I urge you to make the disaster declaration without delay so that assistance can begin forthwith."

Caswell Beach Didn't Sample Water Supply

Operators of the Caswell Beach public water system failed to notify their customers that they had not sampled for coliform bacteria during September 1984.

The N.C. Drinking Water Act requires such notification.

The presence of coliform bacteria in drinking water indicates the presence of contamination. If found corrective action is required. Failure to test doesn't mean the water is contaminated, but without proper and continued testing it cannot be assumed the water is safe, indicated John McFadyen, an environmental engineer with the N.C. Department of Human Resources Water Supply Branch.

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