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## Local fire marshal describes Waldo Canyon experience

*Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District Fire Marshal John Vincent provided this account of his experience during the Waldo Canyon Fire.*

There were less than 30 firefighters who were responsible with providing structure protection to all of Cascade, prevent the fire from crossing Highway 24, and of course keep the fire away from Chipita Park and Green Mountain Falls during June 23-25—and we did!

We could not stop the Waldo Fire from coming, but we would do our best to keep the fire from burning down homes. How do we do this with the type of flame length and height that the Waldo Fire was presenting us? We stay out of the way until the worst of it has passed and then move quickly to ensure no homes were on fire. It is very dangerous for a firefighter to get in the way of a fire that is taller than 4 feet from ground level. A firefighter with a shovel is not going to do much to this fire except get hurt or killed.

We had aircraft assigned to our Cascade Structure Protection Group. We had a light and heavy helicopter, a single-engine air tanker (SEAT) and a lead plane and heavy tanker. We prep the area with the heavies ... use the SEAT and helicopters to direct attack fire/spot fires. The slurry from the heavy and the SEAT do not put

out fire ... it lowers the intensity of the fire so that you, the firefighter, can engage at close proximity to attack the fire. The light helicopter was used for spot fires. We had three spot fires inside the "paint"—slurry that the heavy tanker had applied to knock the fire down as it approached the eastern-most homes in Cascade.

You call in a description of the house— roof color, wall color. The division supervisor contacts the helicopter assigned to your division and you direct the helicopter to the target. The helicopter attacks the target until it is either out, or until firefighters can reach it.

Aircraft are prioritized for incidents. The higher-priority area gets the aircraft. The first few days was to protect values at risk (structures, watersheds) and ensure evacuation so all we had to do was focus on the fire and not rescue. Highway 24 was shut down for quite a few days. It really helped us that there was no civilian traffic on the highway. We would engage the fire and then have to disengage—then re-engage and disengage, etc.

Now I have to go back to work. I am off to the Mountain Shadows area today to observe and see what lessons can be obtained and brought back to agencies here in Tri-Lakes. ■

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**Above:** Photo from Cascade to the Rampart looking North taken by Fire Marshal John Vincent while providing lookout duties above Cascade on June 24.

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