

CAL FIRE



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION
SONOMA-LAKE-NAPA UNIT
1199 Big Tree Road
St. Helena, CA 94574-9711

INVESTIGATION REPORT

CASE NUMBER: 15CALNU008670

CASE NAME: Valley

DATE: September 12, 2015

INCIDENT TYPE: Wildland Fire

INCIDENT INVESTIGATOR(s): James Engel, Deputy Chief, CNR
Shane Cunningham, Staff Chief, SAC
Mike Thompson, Battalion Chief, CNR
John Schnaidt, Fire Captain, MEU
Joe Baldwin, Battalion Chief, LNU

1 **1 - VIOLATION(S):**

2 Health and Safety 13001: Every person is guilty of a misdemeanor who, through careless or
3 negligent action, throws or places any lighted cigarette, cigar, ashes, or other flaming or glowing
4 substance, or any substance or thing which may cause a fire, in any place where it may directly
5 or indirectly start a fire, or who uses or operates a welding torch, tar pot or any other device
6 which may cause a fire, who does not clear the inflammable material surrounding the operation
7 or take such other reasonable precautions necessary to insure against the starting and spreading
8 of fire.

9
10 Title 24 California Residential Code: Section R105.1 - Section R105.1 Permits Required.
11 Except as specified in Section R105.2 of this section, no building or structure regulated by this
12 code shall be erected, constructed, enlarged, altered, repaired, moved, improved, removed,
13 converted or demolished unless a separate permit for each building or structure has first been
14 obtained from the Chief Building Official. Lake County has adopted the 2013 Uniform Building
15 Code.

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1 **2 - SUMMARY:**

2 On Saturday September 12, 2015 at approximately 1:21 PM, a vegetation fire was reported
3 behind 8015 High Valley Road. The Valley Fire burned approximately 76,067 acres of grass,
4 brush and timber. The fire destroyed 1,280 single family homes, 27 multiple residences, 66
5 commercial properties, and 585 other structures. During the initial fire suppression, four CAL
6 FIRE firefighters deployed fire shelters and suffered burn injuries. The injuries required air
7 transportation to the hospital and extended treatment. The fire cost an estimated \$56 Million
8 dollars to suppress. The investigation determined the fire was caused from thermal-resistance
9 heating at the wire nut due to a poor electrical connection. The temperature at the electrical
10 connection was at least 1,981 Degrees F. as the copper wire was melted. The wire connection
11 was in contact with dry grass and leaf litter, which ignited. The homeowner, John PINCH,
12 admitted to installing the circuit to power a hot tub, located on the side porch. The circuit
13 connection was not up to the National Electrical Code Standards, as it was only partially encased
14 in conduit, and the conduit that was used was not buried 18" and it shared the trench with the
15 water line. An inspection by an electrical engineer determined the connection was loose in the
16 wire nut and arced, causing visible pitting and melting of the copper wire. The hot tub power
17 clock was found in the on position and the 40 amp breaker had been tripped. The dry grass that
18 was there prior to the fire would have been a readily ignitable fuel for the arcing/overheated
19 wires to cause a fire. There were no other plausible causes for this fire.

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1 3 - SUBJECT(S):

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3 John Alfred PINCH

4 8015 High Valley Road

5 Cobb, CA 95426

6

7 [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]

10

11 [REDACTED]

CC# 555 59 2224

12 [REDACTED]

CD# 88258875

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]

16

17 PINCH is the owner and primary occupant of 8015 High Valley Road. PINCH admitted to
18 installing the wiring circuit that caused the Valley Fire.

19

20 Parker Charles MILLS

21 [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED]

23

24 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

25 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

26 [REDACTED]

27 [REDACTED]

28 [REDACTED]

29

30 MILLS is a partial owner in the 8015 High Valley residence.

31

1 **4 - VICTIM(S)**

2 V-1 Leonard Jay NEFT

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]

6

7 NEFT had been reported missing after the Valley Fire burned through his neighborhood. On
8 Wednesday September 16, 2015 a deceased male was located in the burned area, along a ridge,
9 above Foard Road. The deceased male was severely burned. A 2004 Honda civic belonging to
10 NEFT had been located 200' from the end of Foard Road.

11 On October 21, 2015 dental identification results confirmed the recovered body was NEFT. See
12 Lake County Case #C15090198.

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1 V-2 Barbara MCWILLIAMS

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

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6 MCWILLIAMS had been reported missing after the Valley Fire burned through her
7 neighborhood. MCWILLIAMS was confined to a wheelchair and her residence at [REDACTED]
8 [REDACTED] had been totally destroyed by the fire. Burned human remains were located in the
9 burned debris at the residence. The remains were in front of the fireplace, with the skull directly
10 in the fireplace. It appeared to the reporting officer that the deceased may have been trying to
11 crawl into the fireplace. On November 23, 2015 the recovered human remains were identified
12 by dental records as Barbara MCWILLAIMS. See Lake County Case #C15090157.

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1 V-3 Robert LITCHMAN

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5

6 LITCHMAN was reported missing after the Valley Fire burned through his neighborhood. The
7 residence where LITCHMAN lived, [REDACTED], was totally destroyed by fire.

8 LITCHMAN did not drive and relied on friends for food and transportation. LITCHMAN was at
9 his residence prior to the fire burning through. No human remains have been found near his
10 residence and LITCHMAN has not been seen or heard from since. LITCHMAN is currently
11 considered a missing person. Lake County Case #C15090237

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V-4 Bruce BURNS

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

BURNS was last seen at Burns Enterprises (18533 State Highway 29) at the beginning of the Valley Fire. When the evacuation order was given, BURNS stayed in the building. BURNS could not be located after the fire burned through. On September 16, 2015 the burned remains of the building at [REDACTED] was searched. Burned human remains were located on the backside of the building. As of this report the remains have not been identified. Lake County Case #C15090185.

1 V-5 Robert Taylor FLETCHER

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5

6 FLETCHER was last seen at his residence prior to the Valley Fire. Neighbors evacuating
7 reported FLETCHERS vehicles were still at his residence when he drove by. They also reported
8 their house was already on fire upon evacuating. On September 23, 2015 a search was
9 conducted at FLETCHERS burned residence. Human remains were located near the washer and
10 dryer. The residence was completely destroyed by fire. As of this report the remains have not
11 been positively identified as FLETCHER. FLETCHER has not been seen or heard from. Lake
12 County Case #C15090227.

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1 During the initial attack of the Valley Fire, CAL FIRE Helitack Crew 104 was deployed from the
2 nearby Boggs Mountain Helitack Base. At approximately 2:02 PM four members of the Helitack
3 104 crew were entrapped by the fire and deployed fire shelters on the left flank of the fire.
4 During the exposure to the fire the below four members suffered radiant heat burns. A
5 rescue/extraction operation was done by Division Chief Jim WRIGHT in his CAL FIRE vehicle.
6 All four victims were taken by Helicopter to UC Davis Medical Center Burn Unit. Victims six
7 thru nine were member of the CAL FIRE Helitack Crew 104 who were injured.

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9 V-6 Patrick WARD
10 CAL FIRE – Sonoma Lake Napa Unit
11 1199 Big Tree Road
12 St. Helena, CA 94574
13 (707) 967-1400

14
15 WARD was a Fire Captain assigned to Helitack Crew 104. During the initial stages of the
16 Valley Fire, WARD was burned by the fire requiring hospitalization. WARD suffered multi
17 degree burns over 27% of his body.

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1 V-7 Nikolas MATTEOLI
2 CAL FIRE – Sonoma Lake Napa Unit
3 1199 Big Tree Road
4 St. Helena, CA 94574
5 (707) 967-1400

6
7 MATTEOLI was Firefighter assigned to Helitack Crew 104. During the initial stages of the
8 Valley Fire, MATTEOLI was burned by the fire requiring hospitalization. MATTEOLI suffered
9 2nd degree burns over 9% of his body.

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1 V-8 Mark REIFF
2 CAL FIRE – Sonoma Lake Napa Unit
3 1199 Big Tree Road
4 St. Helena, CA 94574
5 (707) 967-1400

6
7 REIFF was a firefighter on Helitack Crew 104. During the initial stages of the Valley Fire,
8 REIFF was burned by the fire requiring hospitalization. REIFF suffered 2nd degree burns over
9 9% of his body.

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1 V-9 Logan PRIDEMORE
2 CAL FIRE – Sonoma Lake Napa Unit
3 1199 Big Tree Road
4 St. Helena, CA 94574
5 (707) 967-1400

6
7 PRIDEMORE was a firefighter on Helitack Crew 104. During the initial stages of the Valley
8 Fire, PRIDEMORE was burned by the fire requiring hospitalization. PRIDEMORE suffered 2nd
9 degree burns over 9% of his body.

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11 During the Valley Fire a total of 27 “Reportable” claims were submitted for injuries to CAL
12 FIRE employees. An additional 50 claims were submitted for “Record Only”.

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1 **WITNESSES:**

2 W-1

3 Greg BERTELLI – Battalion Chief

4 CAL FIRE – LNU

5 1199 Big Tree Road

6 St. Helena, CA 94574

7 Phone: (707) 481-2362

8

9 BERTELLI was the first arriving CAL FIRE unit and assumed the role of Incident Commander.

10

11 W-2

12 Andy ELLIOT

13 CAL FIRE – LNU

14 1199 Big Tree Road

15 St. Helena, CA 94574

16 Phone: (707) 481-2362

17

18 ELLIOTT was riding with BERTELLI and is from the United Kingdom. ELLIOTT saw the fire
19 just starting to burn the wood shed.

20

21 W-3

22 Jim FULKERSON

23 [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED]

25

26 FULKERSON was one of the first people to notice the fire and called 911.

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1 W-4

2 Troy NELSON

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]

6

7 NELSON was alerted to the fire by FULKERSON and tried to suppress it.

8

9 W-5

10 Kelly FLETCHER

11 [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15

16 W-5 FLETCHER lives down the street from 8015 and attempted to extinguish the fire.

17

18 W-6

19 Bill BAUMAN – Fire Captain

20 CAL FIRE

21 1199 Big Tree Road

22 St. Helena, CA 94574

23

24 BAUMAN was the captain on CAL FIRE E1487 and was the first engine to arrive at 8015 High
25 Valley Road.

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1 W-7 Robert STARK

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

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6 W-7 arrived at the fire and assisted in trying to suppress it. STARK stated there were already
7 fire suppression units at the fire.

8

9 W-8

10 Josh JONES – Fire Apparatus Engineer

11 CAL FIRE

12 1199 Big Tree Road

13 St. Helena, CA 94574

14 JONES was the company officer on CAL FIRE E6221, one of the first engines to arrive

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16 W-9

17 Eric CHRISTENHUSE

18 [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED]

20

21 W-9 CHRISTENHUSE was not home at the time of the fire.

22

23 W-10 Anthony OSTROSKIE

24 [REDACTED]

25 [REDACTED]

26 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

27

28 OSTROSKIE made a Twitter Post about the Valley Fire and a book of paper matches found
29 alongside the road. OSTROSKIE was not associated with the ignition of the Valley Fire.

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1 W-11
2 Louis SCIOCCHETTI - Division Group Supervisor
3 CAL FIRE Mendocino Unit
4 17501 Highway 101
5 Willits, CA 95490
6 (707) 391-6750

7
8 SCIOCCHETTI was the assigned Division Supervisor for Division H on 9/13/15.
9 SCIOCCHETTI confirmed a spot fire ignited during a firing operation and was not a new start.

10

11 W-12
12 Jacob JUAREZ – Fire Apparatus Engineer
13 CAL FIRE
14 1199 Big Tree Road
15 St. Helena, CA 94574

16

17 JUAREZ was assigned to CAL FIRE E622.

18

19 W-13
20 Richard Lee CORSETTI

21 [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED]

23 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

24 CORSETTI was detained by the Lake County Sheriff on suspicion of setting a roadside fire
25 during the Valley Fire. There was no probable cause to arrest CORSETTI.

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1 W-14 Jason KRAUSS

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5

6 KRUASS is the son-in-law of CORSETTI and is a police sergeant for Rohnert Park.

7

8 W-15

9 Deputy ROCHESTER

10 Lake County Sheriff's Office

11 1220 Martin St

12 Lakeport, CA 95453

13

14 ROCHESTER investigated the report of CORSETTI setting a fire.

15

16 W-16

17 Maria KANN (WELSH)

18 [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED]

20 [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]

22

23 WELSH was told by BURGESS that BURGESS'S nephew Cole NICHOLSON, was setting fires
24 in Lake County.

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1 W-17

2 Dave BURGESS

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]

6

7 BURGESS told WELCH that his nephew, Cole NICOLSON was setting fires around Lake
8 County. BURGESS does not have a current address and could not be located to confirm his
9 statement.

10

11 W-18

12 Cole NICHOLSON

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]

16

17 NICHOLSON was in Hidden Valley at the time the Valley Fire started and has no known
18 association with the cause of the fire.

19

20 W-19

21 Kelly NICHOLSON

22 [REDACTED]

23 [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED]

25

26 K. NICHOLSON was working at the time of the Valley Fire and has no known association with
27 the cause of the fire.

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1 W-20

2 John CARLISI

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5

6 CARLISI lives across the street from [REDACTED] High Valley Road.

7

8 W-21

9 Polly NYBERG

10 [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED]

12

13 NYBERG saw the initial smoke from the Valley Fire and alerted her husband.

14

15 W-22

16 Jaime CHANEY

17 [REDACTED]

18 [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED]

20

21 CHANEY contacted CAL FIRE and stated he spoke with Chip WHITEHEAD who told

22 CHANEY he saw the Valley Fire start by a lawnmower on Bottle Rock Road.

23

24 W-23

25 Bonnie BURNS

26 [REDACTED]

27 [REDACTED]

28 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

29

30 BURNS was with CHANEY when WHITEHEAD spoke about the cause.

31

1 W-24

2 Chip WHITEHEAD

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED]

7

8 WHITEHEAD made statements about the Valley Fire being caused by someone mowing off of
9 Bottle Rock Road. There is no supporting evidence of a fire originating from a mowing
10 operation on Bottle Rock Road.

11

12 W-25

13 Phil MURPHY

14 [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED]

17

18 MURPHY received statements from NELSON about the Valley Fire being caused from sunlight
19 shining through a piece of broken glass and reported it to CAL FIRE.

20

21 W-26

22 Caitanya WEST

23 [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED]

25 [REDACTED]

26 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

27

28 WEST observed a fire burning off Gifford Springs Road. WEST called 911 at 2:59 PM. This
29 was the fire originally reported as the Valley #2.

30

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1 W-27

2 Dana DEMARTIN

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED]

7

8 DEMARTIN was at home and observed a fire burning behind her house near Gifford Springs
9 Road and State Route 175. This fire was determined to be a spot. DEMARTIN did not see any
10 people around the fire.

11

12 W-28

13 Timothy CRAIG

14 [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED] 1

17 [REDACTED]

18

19 CRAIG called 911 to report a fire at Gifford Springs Road and Whispering Pines Road. CRAIG
20 stated to Investigator WEST he was told the fire was arson by an unidentified female and his
21 friend "Adam".

22

23 W-29

24 Jim NOLT

25 JH NOLT and ASSOCIATES

26 107 Blue Canyon Way

27 Folsom, CA 95630-2003

28 (916) 988-2256

29

30 NOLT assisted with the Origin and Cause Investigation.

31

1 **INVESTIGATORS:**

2 James ENGEL

3 Investigator

4 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

5 6105 Airport Road, Redding, CA 96002

6 530-226-3477

7 Shane CUNNINGHAM

8 Investigator

9 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

10 1416 9th Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

11 916-651-1429

12 John SCHNAIDT

13 Investigator

14 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

15 17501 N. Highway 101, Willits, CA 95490

16 707-459-7414

17 Michael THOMPSON

18 Investigator

19 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

20 6105 Airport Road, Redding, CA 96002

21 530-226-3477

22 Gary UBOLDI

23 Investigator

24 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

25 2210 West College Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95401

26 707-486-8572

27

28

1 Russell WEST
2 Investigator
3 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
4 2721 Napa Valley Corporate Dr., Napa, CA 94558
5 707-889-4227

6 Kyle STEIS
7 Investigator
8 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
9 2210 West College Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95401
10 707-576-2341

11 Tom OLDAG
12 Investigator
13 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
14 6105 Airport Road, Redding, CA 96002
15 530-226-3477

16 Dan GREGORY
17 LIDAR Operator
18 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
19 1300 U Street
20 P.O. Box 922246
21 Sacramento CA 94244-2460
22 (916) 324-1644

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1 Dave KAROLY
2 LIDAR Operator
3 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
4 1300 U Street
5 P.O. Box 922246
6 Sacramento CA 94244-2460
7 (916) 324-1644
8
9 Joe BALDWIN
10 Investigator
11 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
12 2210 West College Ave.
13 Santa Rosa, CA 95401
14 707-576-2341

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1 **5 - EVIDENCE:**

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3 A series of photographs was taken and is included in the attachments section.

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5 See the attached evidence log for a listing of evidence taken.

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1 **6 – CONDITION(S):**

2 During the first burn period the fire grew to over 30,000 acres. This rate of spread was the result
3 of a number of factors. A westerly wind influence was present for a majority of the period (est.
4 18 hours), wind gusts averaged 18 mph (max 36) and average winds were at 10 mph with the
5 relative humidity average at 21% with a minimum recording of 12%. Extreme fire behavior was
6 observed with critical rates of spread, high flame lengths, and long range spotting. In addition to
7 the natural fuel types, structures, vehicles and improvements became fully involved which
8 broadcast embers into a receptive fuel bed that was at an 89% probability of ignition. Fires of
9 this nature exceed suppression capabilities and require resources to look for opportunities to
10 engage in a safer environment. Fuels at the incident were a mix of Shrub 35%, Grass 22%, Grass
11 Shrub 16%, Timber Understory 13%, Timber liter 10% and other 4%. The area is also integrated
12 with numerous communities within the urban intermix. This component added a fuel type in the
13 form of structures, vehicles and improvements. These products will burn at much higher levels of
14 intensity and produce ember casts at much higher levels than natural fuels.

15 **FIRE BEHAVIOR**

16 Extreme fire behavior was observed during the first operational period and into the second
17 operational period. Flame lengths in excess of 100 feet were observed accompanied by long
18 range spotting and area ember cast. When structures began to ignite the fire behavior reached
19 unprecedented levels of intensity. The conditions exceeded fire suppression capabilities and
20 crews would move to a life safety mode assisting residents with evacuation. The fire traveled
21 west to east, an estimated 13 miles crossing HWY 29 in the east into the community of Hidden
22 Valley Lake. Acreage based on an infrared flight (0913, 0104hrs) 54,123 acres.

23 The fire behavior during the first operational period was not expected based on local weather
24 predictions. The Valley Fire has prompted investigations by the Fire Weather Research
25 Laboratory, San Jose State University. Citing from a blog post, author Neil Lareau, fire behavior
26 was affected by weather created from the remnants of Hurricane Linda.

27

28 **WEATHER:**

1 The U.S. Drought Monitor classified the Valley Incident area as being in severe drought on
2 September 15, 2015.

3 Investigator BALDWIN recorded the following weather at the fire scene upon his arrival
4 between 1:23 pm and 2:00 PM at 8015 High Valley Road.

5 Wet bulb: 62

6 Dry Bulb 92

7 Equals 15% Relative Humidity

8

9 Below is the summary taken from the Remote Automated Weather Station located at Konocti.

10 The Konocti RAWS is located approximately 5.5 miles from the Valley Fire origin and is at an
11 elevation of 2,163 feet; approximately 185 feet lower than the origin.

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13 The temperature recorded at 1:00 PM was approximately 89 degrees F. The humidity was
14 approximately 12%. The wind was recorded at 20 mph with gusts to 27 mph.

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4**Konocti California**

Daily Summary for

September 12, 2015

Hour of Day	Total Solar Rad. ° ly.	Wind			Air Temperature Mean Deg. F.	Fuel Temperature Mean Deg. F.	Fuel Moistur e Mean Percent	Relative Humidit y Mean Percent	Dew Point Deg. F.	Wet Bulb Deg. F.	Total Precip inches
Endin g at		Ave mph	V. Dir. Deg	Max mph							
1 am	0.0	9.0	274	14.0	82.0	77.0	3.0	6	8	50	0.00
2 am	0.0	11.0	273	15.0	81.0	78.0	3.0	6	8	49	0.00
3 am	0.0	11.0	267	15.0	82.0	78.0	3.0	7	12	50	0.00
4 am	0.0	10.0	275	14.0	81.0	77.0	3.0	6	8	49	0.00
5 am	0.0	7.0	297	12.0	79.0	76.0	3.0	8	13	49	0.00
6 am	0.1	8.0	285	11.0	78.0	75.0	3.0	9	15	49	0.00
7 am	2.8	5.0	333	12.0	77.0	76.0	3.0	10	16	49	0.00
8 am	12.2	2.0	222	7.0	78.0	79.0	3.0	16	28	52	0.00
9 am	22.3	5.0	302	9.0	83.0	87.0	3.0	20	38	57	0.00
10 am	39.5	12.0	267	17.0	87.0	93.0	2.9	13	30	56	0.00
11 am	50.3	13.0	272	19.0	90.0	96.0	2.9	12	31	57	0.00
12 pm	36.3	14.0	271	22.0	89.0	95.0	2.9	13	32	57	0.00
1 pm	45.9	20.0	276	27.0	89.0	94.0	2.8	12	30	56	0.00
2 pm	31.1	18.0	271	30.0	88.0	90.0	2.8	12	29	56	0.00
3 pm	16.3	20.0	261	30.0	86.0	87.0	2.9	15	33	56	0.00
4 pm	11.1	24.0	257	34.0	83.0	83.0	2.9	17	34	55	0.00
5 pm	3.1	18.0	274	36.0	80.0	79.0	3.0	20	35	55	0.00
6 pm	0.3	15.0	275	28.0	78.0	77.0	3.0	24	38	55	0.00
7 pm	0.0	15.0	263	25.0	78.0	77.0	3.0	21	35	54	0.00
8 pm	0.0	9.0	270	21.0	78.0	76.0	3.0	22	36	54	0.00
9 pm	0.0	10.0	278	19.0	80.0	78.0	3.0	17	31	54	0.00
10 pm	0.0	8.0	288	17.0	81.0	79.0	3.0	16	31	54	0.00
11 pm	0.0	8.0	277	11.0	82.0	79.0	3.1	15	30	54	0.00
12 am	0.0	4.0	272	10.0	83.0	80.0	3.1	17	34	55	0.00

5

1 **7 – VEHICLE(S)/EQUIPMENT:**

2 A 2007 Toyota Tacoma Extra Can Pickup Truck was parked at 8015 High Valley Road.

3 Color: Silver

4 License Plate #: CA 8A63128

5 VIN: 5TETU62N87Z369518

6 The above vehicle was parked at 8015 High Valley Road. The vehicle suffered some fire
7 damage. It appeared the damage came from the shed when it was burning. The vehicle had been
8 moved into an open area adjacent to the driveway when I inspected it. The vehicle was
9 registered to John PINCH. There is no evidence the pickup was involved in the cause of the fire.

10

11 There were other vehicles destroyed in the fire that were not documented in this report. I
12 personally observed burned vehicles along State Highway 29, between Lower Lake and
13 Middletown. These appeared to have been abandoned during the evacuation and then
14 subsequently destroyed by fire. Due to the magnitude of this fire, burned vehicles were not
15 captured in this report.

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1 **8 - PROPERTY:**

2 8015 High Valley Road was identified as a two story residential structure. The house was built
3 in 2007. Two building permits were found in the Lake County Records. The covered deck
4 permit was finalized by the Lake County Building Department on July 9, 2013. I reviewed permit
5 records and determined there was no electrical work included in the plans or permit. The
6 covered deck is the location of the portable hot tub.

7
8 Damage assessment data was collected throughout the fire and ended on September 24, 2015.
9 The assessment included all habitable structures and outbuildings with a footprint greater than
10 10'x12'.

11
12 A total of 2048 structures were identified as damaged or destroyed by the damage assessment
13 process. This includes structures in Lake, Napa, and Sonoma Counties.

14
15 1,322 Single Residences
16 27 Multiple Residences
17 73 Nonresidential Commercial Properties
18 626 Other Minor Structures

19
20 **The Geysers:**

21
22 Eight of the Cal Pine Geyser Thermal power plants were located in the fire perimeter. Five of
23 the eight power plants sustained major damage by the Valley Fire.

24
25 See the attached Damage Assessment Report for details about structure damages.

26
27
28
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31

1 **9 - NARRATIVE:**

2 On Saturday September 12, 2015 at approximately 1:21 PM, a vegetation fire was reported to the
3 CAL FIRE St. Helena Emergency Command Center. The Reporting Party (RP) stated the fire
4 was near 8040 High Valley Road, Cobb, Lake County, CA. Local and state fire suppression
5 units from responded. The first arriving CAL FIRE unit was Battalion Chief Greg BERTELLI.
6 BERTILLI assumed the role of Incident Commander. CAL FIRE Copter 104 arrived at scene
7 and reported the fire was approximately two acres in size.

8
9 CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Joe BALDWIN arrived shortly after BERTELLI and began a
10 preliminary investigation into the cause of the fire. The fire spread rapidly and four members of
11 CAL FIRE Helitack Crew 104 were overrun by the fire, requiring fire shelter deployment.
12 BALDWIN left the scene to assist in the rescue of the four injuries Helitack crew members and
13 did not return to the scene. The fire continued to rapidly spread and required a significant
14 augmentation of resources.

15
16 At approximately 3:11 PM, I contacted BALDWIN by telephone to see if he needed assistance.
17 BALDWIN told me the fire was still burning out of control, and due to resource depletion he had
18 been engaged in evacuations. BALDWIN further stated the fire was spreading toward
19 Middletown. I told BALDWIN I could respond the next morning to assist him.

20
21 At approximately 4:15 PM, I contacted Battalion Chief Shawn ZIMMERMAKER at the CAL
22 FIRE Mendocino Unit. I requested an investigator respond to the Valley Fire and assist in
23 securing the origin area. ZIMMERMAKER stated he would send Fire Captain John
24 SCHNAIDT to the fire.

25
26 At approximately 8:30 PM, I contacted SCHNAIDT. SCHNAIDT advised he was at the origin
27 and had secured the area. I instructed SCHNAIDT to keep the origin secure until an investigator
28 arrived to conduct an origin and cause investigation.

29
30 On September 13, 2015 at approximately 6:00 AM, I responded to the fire from the Tehama

31 County area. As I drove to Middletown, along State Route 29, south of Hidden Valley Lake, I
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1 observed several burned structures and vehicles along the roadway. CAL FIRE Battalion Chief
2 Mike THOMPSON arrived at Middletown Fire Station 60. He and I met there with BALDWIN,
3 CAL FIRE Fire Captain Russell WEST and CAL FIRE Fire Captain Kyle STEIS. BALDWIN
4 provided a briefing on the initial stages of the fire. BALDWIN stated he had responded initially
5 to determine the origin and cause of the fire. BALDWIN arrived at the fire and began his
6 investigation at the residence located at 8015 High Valley Road. BALDWIN stated he was called
7 away shortly after when the Copter 104 Helitack crew needed assistance. BALDWIN stated after
8 assisting with the treatment and transportation of the 104 crew he was assigned to conduct
9 evacuations and never returned to the origin. CAL FIRE Staff Chief Shane CUNNINGHAM
10 arrived at the Middletown Fire Station #60 shortly after BALDWIN's briefing.

11
12 CUNNINGHAM, THOMPSON, and I responded to 8015 High Valley Road (8015) and met
13 with SCHNAIDT. When I arrived at 8015, I observed a large two story house, with a silver,
14 partially burnt, Toyota pickup parked in front. The entire front yard was fenced with wire
15 fencing.

16 Upon our arrival, SCHNAIDT provided all the information he had gathered since his arrival and
17 briefed CUNNINGHAM, THOMPSON and I. SCHNAIDT stated he had stayed at the scene
18 overnight and had kept it secure. SCHNAIDT stated the following in summary:

19 SCHNAIDT arrived at the incident at approximately 6:30 PM on September 12, 2015.
20 SCHNAIDT was initially told the fire started at 8040 High Valley Road (8040), but upon
21 arrival he inspected that area and determined the fire was across the street at 8015 and
22 there was no fire at 8040. SCHNAIDT inspected the fire he located at 8015 and observed
23 macro fire spread indicators that showed the fire spread from 8015. SCHNAIDT took a
24 series of photographs showing the surrounding area as it existed when he arrived.
25 SCHNAIDT contacted the operator of Water Tender 7011 at 8015. He identified the
26 operator as Zack RINDELLE. RINDELLE stated the fire damaged silver Toyota pick-up
27 had been parked near the wood shed (that was now destroyed by fire). RINDELLE stated
28 there was no one at the residence upon his arrival. RINDELLE stated two people had
29 visited the house while he was there and identified themselves as the owners.

30 RINDELLE described them as a white female adult in her 50's and a white male adult

1 also in his 50's (this was more than likely Parker and Laura MILLS based on the
2 interview with MILLS). RINDELLE reported another couple visited the location, which
3 he described as a male in his 20's or 30's and a female also in her 20's or 30's.
4 RINDELLE stated the female appeared to be "East Indian". RINDELLE stated both
5 couples wanted to "check the place out". SCHNAIDT used flagging to secure the
6 entrance to the property at the driveway.

7
8 SCHNAIDT walked the perimeter of the property clockwise and then counter clockwise.
9 SCHNAIDT observed indicators such as angle of char, foliage freeze, stem-fall,
10 protection, and staining on rocks. Based on his observations, SCHNAIDT determined
11 two possible areas of a general origin. One near the debris pile and one near the fire
12 damaged wood shed. He flagged off the area to the south of the house, to the rear of the
13 house, from the northeast corner.

14
15 At approximately 8:00 PM, SCHNAIDT interviewed Kelly FLETCHER at the fire scene.
16 FLETCHER stated he was one of the first to arrive at 8015 after the start of the fire.
17 FLETCHER was driving a Jeep Wrangler. FLETCHER stated when he arrived the fire
18 had already burned past 8040 and was burning the house owned by the Ostrander's,
19 located uphill of 8015. FLETCHER stated the woodshed at 8015 has burning.
20 FLETCHER did not know if the debris pile was burning on the north side of the house.
21 FLETCHER did not see anyone burning a debris pile prior to the fire, including the days
22 before. FLETCHER stated Robert STARK was at the scene assisting him in trying to
23 extinguish the fire along the fence line.

24
25 At approximately 8:45 PM, SCHNAIDT interviewed CAL FIRE Fire Captain Bill
26 BAUMAN at the fire scene. BAUMAN stated he arrived at scene driving Engine 1487.
27 BAUMAN observed heavy fire spreading from behind 8015. BAUMAN arrived at 8015
28 and saw the wood pile and the shed burning; the fire was just spreading to the tool shed.
29 BAUMAN also observed a Toyota pickup parked near the tool shed. BAUMAN
30 observed Battalion Chief Joe BALDWIN there at the fire.

1 At approximately 9:40 PM, SCHNAIDT interviewed Robert STARK on the phone.
2 STARK stated he observed the fire burning the "OSTRANDER" cabin and drove down
3 to the 8015 High Valley Road house to assist in suppressing the fire. STARK stated
4 CAL FIRE was already at scene trying to suppress the fire. STARK observed a CAL
5 FIRE firefighter in yellow scraping a fire line. STARK stated the wood pile was already
6 burning on the southeast corner of the house. STARK and FLETCHER attempted to
7 extinguish the fire burning along the fence on the south side of the house.
8

9 At approximately 10:30 PM, SCHNAIDT recorded the following weather conditions:

10	Temperature:	72.5 degrees F.
11	Relative Humidity:	26.3%
12	Dew Point:	37.3 F
13	Wind Direction:	West
14	Wind Speed:	1.3 MPH
15	Maximum Wind Gust:	1.9 MPH
16	Elevation:	2394 feet

17
18 At approximately 10:35 PM SCHNAIDT interviewed CAL FIRE Engineer Josh JONES,
19 the operator of one of the first arriving engines, Engine 6221. JONES told SCHNAIDT
20 he heard Copter 104 estimate the fire was 2 acres with a potential for 20 acres upon his
21 arrival, JONES stated he observed the wind was blowing from the southwest and was
22 assigned to the Division A supervisor position.
23

24 At approximately 11:00 PM, SCHNAIDT interviewed Eric CHRISTENHUSE.
25 CHRISTENHUSE stated he was not home when the fire started. CHRISTENHUSE
26 stated a week prior to the fire another homeowner had been in an altercation with a guy
27 on an ATV and the gate to the community was ripped open in the process.
28 CHRISTENHUSE stated he did not know if anyone had been burning debris in the area
29 lately.
30

1 On September 13, 2015 at approximately 6:00 AM, SCHNAIDT walked along the
2 powerlines going away from the residence at 8015. At approximately the 600' mark east
3 of the residence SCHNAIDT observed downed powerlines. The powerlines were lying on
4 top of fire hose, indicating the fire crew had placed the hose on the ground prior to the
5 powerlines falling. SCHNAIDT also identified several macro indicators showing the fire
6 had advancing spread through the area.

7
8 At approximately 9:20 AM, SCHNAIDT inspected the Toyota Tacoma and noted the fire
9 had damaged the left rear side and tailgate of the pickup. SCHNAIDT determined the
10 vehicle was registered to John PINCH, at 8015. SCHNAIDT had not located PINCH
11 since he had arrived at the scene. SCHNAIDT also determined the Toyota formerly had a
12 number of 2"x4" boards loaded in the lumber rack and gas cans loaded in the bed of the
13 truck. The boards and gas cans had been removed by fire crews during the initial stages
14 of the fire.

15
16 Based on that information provided by SCHNAIDT we developed a plan to conduct the origin
17 and cause investigation. THOMPSON was assigned to identify and interview witnesses,
18 CUNNINGHAM and I would conduct the onsite investigation with assistance from SCHNAIDT.
19 The CAL FIRE Land Surveying Team capable of using Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR)
20 survey technology was ordered to assist with scene documentation.

21
22 At approximately 11:00 AM SCHNAIDT was contacted by FLETCHER. FLETCHER stated
23 John PINCH was one of the persons living at 8015. SCHNAIDT had previously determined the
24 Toyota Pickup parked at the residence was registered to PINCH. FLETCHER also stated Parker
25 MILLS owned the house.

26
27 On September 13, 2015 at approximately 11:47 AM, Investigator THOMPSON interviewed Jim
28 FULKERSON. FULKERSON stated he was in his motorhome at [REDACTED]. FULKERSON smelled
29 smoke and looked out the front of his motorhome and saw light wispy smoke drifting across the
30 street. FULKERSON left his motorhome and walked across High Valley Road, and toward 8015
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1 to get a better view. FULKERSON could see smoke and fire coming from behind 8015.
2 FULKERSON described the fire as being low intensity with light smoke. FULKERSON did not
3 see anyone in the area. FULKERSON observed two parts of the fire behind 8015. One part of
4 the fire up against the rear of the house, and one across in the garden area. FULKERSON said
5 he ran back to the garage at [REDACTED] and contacted NELSON. FULKERSON said he told NELSON
6 to call 911 to report the fire. FULKERSON stated he also called 911 to report the fire.

7
8 CAL FIRE Engine 1487 returned to the origin and I spoke with Fire Captain Bill BAUMAN.
9 BAUMAN stated upon his arrival the fire had spread into the wood shed and was just beginning
10 to burn the tool shed. BAUMAN described the fire as being low intensity around the house.
11 BAUMAN stated the fire had burned the house siding near the front right side of the house.
12 BAUMAN had entered the residence to check for extension of the fire.

13
14 CUNNINGHAM, THOMPSON, SCHNAIDT and I conducted a walk around. The first walk
15 around was clockwise, followed by a second counter clock wise walk around. During the walk
16 around, items of interest were identified and macro burn indicators were noted and interpreted. I
17 also began taking photographs. The front of the house had no fire damage. There was a partially
18 burned tool shed located southwest of the house (to the right, looking at the front door). Behind
19 the shed were sheets of metal roofing and the remains of what appeared to be a wood shed that
20 had been completely destroyed by fire. Still in front of the house, but towards the northwest was
21 the silver Toyota Tacoma, which SCHNAIDT had determined was registered to PINCH. The
22 Tacoma was partially burned on the driver's side toward the rear of the vehicle. No burned
23 vegetation existed around the vehicle, which indicated the vehicle had been moved from the area
24 it was burned. To the northwest of the Tacoma was a propane tank along the property's western
25 fence line bordering High Valley Road. No vegetation was burned around the propane tank.
26 Just beyond the Tacoma to the northeast, north of the structure, was a small wood shed that
27 appeared to house the water well and pump. This shed was not damaged by fire, nor was the
28 vegetation around the shed burned. To the east of the wooden shed, mowed, burned grass was
29 observed to the side and rear of the house. The burned area within the perimeter fence had fire
30 damage consistent with a low intensity fire. The powerpole with a transformer and associated
31 service line was observed in this area as well, located northeast of the house. The low intensity

1 fire is expected in mowed grass and during the initial stages of the fire burning. There was
2 unburned fuel and no viable fire damage on the west side of High Valley Road. Outdoor
3 furniture, a hot tub, building materials, and a radial arm saw were observed upon the porch. The
4 hot tub's water temperature was taken as 93.1⁰F and the timer was observed to have been in the
5 on position when last powered. Nothing upon the porch was observed to have been burnt. The
6 property was fenced in and beyond the rear yard perimeter fence was a large open burned area
7 that appeared to have trees and brush. To the rear of the house (east side), a satellite dish with
8 associated coaxial cable attached was observed. Vegetation at the base of this satellite dish was
9 burnt. Mowed grass and construction debris were observed to have burned at the rear of the
10 house and the siding on the house was scorched in places and stained from the fire having burnt
11 up to the foundation base. An electrical panel was found at the southeast corner of the house
12 along the back wall and a utility service room was observed immediately adjacent to it. Away
13 from the back wall of the house to the east, melted white irrigation PVC pipe, melted electrical
14 PVC conduit pipe and associated junction box, electrical wires with melted insulation, and
15 coaxial cable with melted insulation were observed, in addition to a metal pipe in the ground.
16 All were observed in burnt grass with an area of adjacent unburnt grass located on the bank of
17 the dry creek. A garden area and bridge crossing a dry creek bed to the garden area from the
18 house exists to the rear (east) of the house. Grass on both sides and under the bridge was burned
19 with some charring and staining evident upon the bridge structure. The posts and gate
20 surrounding the garden were charred and stained and the mowed grass within was burned. We
21 noted there were electrical outlets and lights at the garden. Grass was observed burnt down the
22 entire length of the house on the south side. Staining and charring was observed on the siding of
23 the house along this side as well. The area to the south of the house contained building debris
24 and outdoor wooden furniture which all showed charring.

25
26 CUNNINGHAM, THOMPSON, SCHNAIDT and I exited the fenced yard of 8015 and walked
27 northeast on High Valley Road, toward 8040. There was unburned fuel and no visible fire
28 damage on the west side of High Valley Road. We proceeded up (south and uphill) a driveway
29 immediately across the street from 8040, which took us east of 8015. The house at the end of this
30 driveway was completely destroyed by fire. According to Google Earth records this house was

1 addressed as 8045 High Valley Road (8045). Between the 8045 residence and the 8015
2 residence was an open field with grass, some manzanita and trees. There were patches of thick
3 manzanita, but it was mostly open allowing you to walk freely. From the elevated position near
4 the 8045 residence the macro fire spread indicators showed the fire spread uphill from near the
5 8015 residence, toward the 8045 residence. Indicators such as angle of char, damage differential
6 and white ash were visible from this location. A zig zag pattern was walked identifying fire
7 spread indicators and searching for items of interest and evidence. I observed the burn area, east
8 of the perimeter fencing for 8015. There were areas of complete burn as well as areas that the
9 brush was unburned, but the grass was burned. Several angle of char macro burn indicators were
10 observed on the ponderosa pine and oak trees. The totality of the patterns indicated advancing
11 fire spreading from somewhere behind the 8015 residence toward the east/southeast and toward
12 the residence at 8045. I located a group of three scrub oak trees (photo 209). The scrub oaks had
13 white ash and angle of char showing the fire spread from west of the fence surrounding 8015. I
14 located several patches of manzanita brush that the leaves were completely burned. The brush
15 was more burned on the side nearest the 8015 house, indicating advancing fire spread from that
16 direction (Photo 217). I determined the general origin area was within the perimeter fence of the
17 8015 property.

18 After completing our inspection of the burned area outside of the fencing perimeter at 8015,
19 CUNNINGHAM, THOMPSON, SCHNAIDT and I met at the front of the residence, located at
20 8015 and discussed our observations. All agreed the general area of origin was west and north of
21 the fenced perimeter and the fire originated from the general vicinity of the house and associated
22 features, consisting of approximately 2.5 acres. Based on our walk around and the items of
23 interest we noted, the four of us discussed possible additional resources we may need on site to
24 complete the investigation.

25
26 THOMPSON left to coordinate interviews of potential witnesses and ensure request and order
27 documentation was obtained for the investigators and LIDAR survey team. SCHNAIDT was
28 relieved and directed to get some rest after having secured the scene throughout the night.

29

1 CUNNIGHAM and I returned to the area within the fenced perimeter of 8015 and continued
2 identifying fire spread indicators in the vicinity of the power pole and garden areas. I walked
3 through and noted the fuels around the house consisted of short mowed grass. I worked my way
4 across the front of the house to the side where the fire damaged tool shed was and the remains of
5 the burned wood shed. I examined the several pieces of patio furniture lying about in no
6 particular order. It appeared they had been moved away from the house during the initial stages
7 of the fire. It appeared this area also had mowed dead grass as the primary fuel. I continued
8 working to the rear of the house to the small wooden bridge that crossed a dry creek. The bridge
9 accessed the fenced in garden area. The ground fuels in the garden area had also burned. I
10 observed a rolled up extension cord in the garden area, but it was not connected to power. I
11 located a three compartment compost bin also in the garden area. Two of the bins were empty,
12 while one had organic material covering approximately less than one inch on the bottom. The
13 material was unburned as was the inside of the redwood bins. It was evident a fire had not been
14 smoldering in the compost bin. I returned to the bridge and continued identifying fire spread
15 indicators. I observed rock staining consistent with the fire spreading from the house side of the
16 drainage ditch, across the ditch and through the garden area. I worked my way back towards the
17 shed noting the fire spread toward the shed from the rear of the house. I found several rocks that
18 were sooted and stained. The light mowed grass and lack of sloped contributed to a low intensity
19 fire. I worked my way back around the house to the covered porch side. I met with
20 CUNNINHAM and discussed the fire spread indicators we had observed and items of interest
21 (such as the fire damaged tool shed, moved wooden yard furniture, overhead powerlines, etc.).
22 CUNNINGHAM stated he had worked from the fence line east of the house and north of the
23 garden identifying fire spread indicators. The area east of the dry creek bed had not been
24 completely mowed. CUNNINGHAM said he identified areas of low intensity burning indicated
25 by the presence of stem fall and sooting. The fire appeared to have spread laterally (south to
26 north) across the east bank of the dry creek, backing into the creek and up the west bank. The
27 lateral and backing low intensity indicators would transition to advancing in an easterly
28 direction. The area around the power pole was inspected and indicators, which included
29 staining, sooting and protection were observed upon rocks, leading CUNNINGHAM to
30 determine the fire had advanced past the pole from the west. The totality of the indicators
31 observed indicated the fire had ignited toward the back of the residence.

1 CUNNINGHAM and I returned to my vehicle, located in the front of the residence and contacted
2 THOMPSON. THOMPSON was in the process of identifying witnesses and I asked him to
3 arrange for a security company to secure the scene through the night. We also decided to contact
4 an electrical engineer, given the presence of electrical wiring, outlets, lighting, power line,
5 electrical boxes, etc., identified within the general origin area, and have him start towards the
6 origin to assist in collecting information the following day.

7 On September 13, 2015 at approximately 3:50 PM, THOMPSON interviewed CAL FIRE
8 Battalion Chief Greg BERTELLI. BERTELLI stated he was the first CAL FIRE resource to
9 arrive at scene. BERTELLI stated the fire was burning directly behind 8015. BERTELLI
10 observed the fire spreading uphill behind the structure and to his left, as he was standing in front
11 of the structure. BERTELLI stated the fire was just getting into the wood shed and the fire on
12 the right side was low intensity, and higher intensity on the left side of the house. BERTELLI
13 did not see anyone at the residence upon his arrival, but did see two people in the street waving
14 him down. BERTELLI did not know who these people were.

15
16 On September 13, 2015 at approximately 3:56 PM, THOMPSON interviewed Andy ELLIOT.
17 ELLIOT was a ride along with Greg BERTELLI. ELLIOT stated he went to the right side of the
18 residence (right determined while looking at the front of the building) and pulled away a stack of
19 logs that were burning. ELLIOTT also moved several combustible items away from the
20 residence. ELLIOTT described the fire as burning between the residence and the fence line on
21 the right side, and burning upslope and away from the residence at the rear.

22
23 CUNNINGHAM and I began using pin flags to mark the fire spread indicators. We began in the
24 area outside the perimeter fence, toward the 8045 house. I also began taking a series of
25 photographs documenting my observations. I returned inside the fence and worked my way over
26 to the northeast corner of the property. I noted the fire had stayed along the dry creek bed and I
27 saw several "tool marks" in the dirt (I later determined this was Fire Captain BAUMAN's
28 attempts at containing the fire). I noted advancing and lateral indicators on the micro scale.
29 These indicators consisted of staining and sooting on rocks, protection and some grass stem fall.
30 CUNNINGHAM and I both returned to the area near the northeast corner of the house. We

1 concurred that the fire spread indicators showed the fire spread from somewhere behind the
2 house and the fenced garden area. We continued working carefully through dry drainage,
3 marking fire spread indicators. These indicators still consisted of protection, sooting and staining
4 on rocks, and grass stem fall. We observed the unburned pocket of uncut dead grass on top of the
5 dry creek embankment on the house (west) side. It appeared this fuel was not consumed because
6 the fire had burned at such low intensity at this location it died out in this area. This is a
7 characteristic of a low intensity fire. CUNNINGMAM and I continued identifying fire spread
8 indicators, transitioning to our knees several times. As we worked around the unburned pocket of
9 fuel to the top of the embankment, I noted the burned area bumped up against a small tree. I
10 noticed a burned area approximately 3'x3'. In this circular burn area was what appeared to be
11 internal residential electrical wiring and conduit. The exposed conduit was lying directly in the
12 burned grass. The burned grass was collapsed on top of it, indicating it was there prior to the fire.
13 A large extension cord was observed in this location and it traveled west, around the corner of
14 the house and entered the hot tub, located on the covered porch on the north side of the
15 residence. CUNNINGHAM and I agreed to stop and await the assistance of an electrical
16 engineer before disturbing the wiring. The fire spread indicators supported the wiring being in
17 the Specific Origin Area (SOA).

18 I observed the electrical panel on the exterior wall near the northeast corner of the house. I
19 inspected the panel and noted the meter was not turning, indicating the power was off (due to the
20 fire) and I saw no obvious deficiencies. I discover a subpanel inside the exterior utility closet.
21 The unlocked door to this closet was just to the left of the main panel. I found several rows of
22 breakers in a subpanel that were hooked to wiring. I noted a 40 amp breaker at the bottom of the
23 panel was in the "tripped position".

24 I returned to the front of the building and inspected the tool shed for items of interest. I noted two
25 gas cans lying by the shed. I looked inside the shed and saw it was a typical shed containing tools
26 and maintenance equipment. I observed the remains of a riding lawnmower located outside of
27 the shed.

28 At approximately 7:00 PM, Shawn VERDUZCO, Brothers In Law Security, assumed control of
29 the scene. VERDUZCO had instructions to restrict entry to the property and only allow

1 authorized personal. The CAL FIRE LIDAR team would still be conducting the scene
2 documentation. VERDUZCO was also instructed to contact myself or THOMPSON if the
3 property owner arrived. VERDUZCO was assigned to site security during the entire scene
4 investigation.

5 On Monday, September 14, 2015 CUNNINGHAM, SCHNAIDT and I met Electrical Engineer
6 Jim NOLT at the 8015. We were continuing the origin and cause investigation and NOLT was
7 tasked with assisting with examining the electrical equipment located in the origin area. The day
8 before, CUNNINGHAM and I had located electrical wiring in the Specific Origin Area. We
9 requested NOLT inspect the wiring before the physical investigation continued in the SOA.

10 NOLT located the electrical conductor splice in the burned area. NOLT determined the splice
11 was one of two splices made in the branch circuit conductors providing power from a 2 pole, 40
12 amp circuit breaker, operating hot tub. This circuit breaker was in the tripped position. The
13 conductors ran from the circuit breaker inside a sub-panel through the exterior wall to a single-
14 gang junction box in the SOA. These individual branch conductors were encased in white PVC
15 conduit that was installed approximately one inch below finished grade. The splice connected the
16 partially underground individual unjacketed branch conductors to a large jacketed extension cord
17 that was run along the ground surface and the deck surface to the hot tub. At the hot tub the
18 jacketed conductors were again spliced to other unjacketed conductors that were terminated onto
19 an electrical terminal strip inside the hot tub enclosure. NOLT measured the hot tub water
20 temperature with his thermometer and determined it was approximately 91⁰ F. NOLT inspected
21 the time clock mounted in the hot tub enclosure and determined it was in the "on" position and
22 had stopped operating at approximately 9:00 AM. The clock was set to operate twice daily to run
23 the heater and water circulation pump. NOLT also inspected the heating element and determined
24 it appeared to be functional. The three fuses on the printed circuit board that provides controls
25 for the hot tub were not blown. NOLT returned to the splice and tested the resistance between the
26 steel spring of wire nut and circuit breaker and determined it was approximately 2100 ohms
27 instead of less than 2 ohms. NOLT determined there was a significant electrical resistance at the
28 wire nut to the conductor interface. NOLT found the copper wire at the splice was melted and
29 had evidence of arcing. Copper melts at 1,981 degrees F. This temperature would not be reached
30 by being exposed to the short, light grass and other vegetative debris burning around the splice.

1 The damage to the copper wire was most likely caused by thermal-resistance heating at the wire
2 nut because of a poor electrical connection. The high current required by the operation of the hot
3 tub heater and pump would have contributed to this effect.

4 CUNNINGHAM and I, with NOLT'S assistance, collected the entire circuit, including the 40
5 amp breaker, conductor, conduit, hot tub cord and clock. NOLT used two 1"x4 pieces of scrap
6 decking to sandwich the spliced connection together to maintain its integrity. Once secure, I
7 placed the entire circuit in the cargo portion of my department vehicle. The cargo area is secured
8 by a locking an alarmed camper shell.

9 At approximately 4:30 PM, CUNNINGHAM and I returned to the SOA. We used string to set
10 up a lane grid on the edge of the SOA. We physically and visually inspected the burn area
11 within the grid lane. We located a piece of wood, within the first grid lane. The wood protected
12 fuels on its back side, supporting the fire spreading from the area where the conductor splice was
13 located. Additionally I found unburned vegetation present under the ash, indicating low intensity
14 burning. Low intensity fire is a characteristic found in the SOA. I also located a coaxial cable in
15 the first grid lane. Fire damage to the cable was consistent with a low intensity fire. Protection
16 and degree of damage on the oak leaves present in grid lane one were consistent with a low
17 intensity fire and the fire moving from the area where the conduit splices were located. I also
18 used a magnet to search the grid lane. CUNNINGHAM and I established grid lane two. This
19 grid was inspected the same way as the first grid lane. Low intensity burning was evident by
20 unburned fuels present underneath the burned fuel. The only ignition source found in the gridded
21 area were the previously collected electrical conductors. No other ignition sources were found.
22 The fire spread indicators showed the fire spread from the area I found the conductor splices in.

23 On Monday September 14, 2015 at approximately 9:50 AM, THOMPSON interviewed Troy
24 NELSON. THOMPSON conducted the interview at 8015. NELSON stated he lives in the
25 garage at [REDACTED]. NELSON was in his room when he heard FULKERSON yelling to call 911.
26 NELSON ran out to the outside corner of the garage and saw light smoke across the street.
27 NELSON ran up the road and saw smoke and flames across behind 8015. NELSON described
28 the flames as being a couple of inches tall, and as the fire progressed away from the house the
29 flame length grew to approximately two feet. NELSON described the smoke as wispy.

1 NESLON attempted to extinguish the fire on the right side of the house. NELSON stated the fire
2 was burning on the right side of the house, but had not contacted the wood shed yet. NELSON
3 described the fire on the right side of the house as low intensity. NELSON observed outdoor
4 wood furniture against the house and moved it away. NELSON used a garden hose to attempt
5 to extinguish a pile of burning wood that was up against the side of the residence (this would be
6 the same pile that ELLIOTT moved away from the house later). NELSON described the right
7 flank of the fire as being near the garden fence (far right). NELSON further stated 8015 High
8 Valley Road is generally groomed and the dry grass around the property is kept short. NELSON
9 stated there was a debris pile on the north side of the house, but it had been sitting for some time.
10 NELSON stated he did not see anyone burning the pile the day of the fire. NELSON stated there
11 were two vehicles in the driveway when he went to investigate the fire, a silver Toyota pickup
12 (the one belonging to PINCH) and a green Jeep Wrangler. NELSON stated both vehicles are
13 frequently at the residence and he believes they belong to the owners. NELSON stated before he
14 retreated from the residence he attempted to make contact with the owners by knocking on the
15 front door. NELSON pounded on the door hard and did not get an answer, so he retreated to his
16 residence.

17
18 On September 14, 2015 Investigator STEIS interviewed Joshua JONES. JONES is a Fire
19 Apparatus Engineer for CAL FIRE at the Boggs Station. JONES was the first arriving company
20 officer, operating South Lake County Fire Protection District Engine 6221. JONES stated he
21 responded from Fire Station #62, once on Bottle Rock Road, he observed a light grey column of
22 smoke, transitioning to dark grey. CAL FIRE Copter 104 and Battalion 1418 arrived at scene
23 prior to JONES. JONES observed a fire burning on grass and brush approximately four acres in
24 size. JONES parked on the south side of High Valley Road, west of the bridge and prepared for
25 a hoselay. JONES observed a tan colored Chevrolet 2500 extended cab diesel pickup parked on
26 the side of High Valley with its emergency flashers on. JONES did not see anyone around the
27 truck. JONES engaged in the hoselay until the fire behavior changed, and then the hoselay was
28 abandoned.

29
30 On September 14, 2015 Investigator STEIS interviewed Jacob JUAREZ. JUAREZ is a Fire
31 Apparatus Engineer for CAL FIRE at the Boggs Station. JUAREZ arrived at the Valley Fire
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1 with JONES and observed a fire burning east of High Valley Road, spreading east at a moderate
2 rate of spread. JUAREZ estimated the wind blowing approximately 2-3 MPH out of the west.
3 JUAREZ observed the same tan pickup as JONES and estimated it to be a 2008-2009 model.
4 JUAREZ did not see the driver and moved the truck out of the way at some point.
5

6 On September 14, 2015 STEIS interviewed CAITANYA WEST on the phone. WEST had
7 called 911 at 2:59 PM on September 12, 2015. WEST stated she saw a fire burning along Gifford
8 Springs Road and she had called to report it. WEST observed the fire burning in a large field,
9 south of Gifford Springs Road. Prior to seeing that fire WEST observed a fire burning on Bottle
10 Rock Road. WEST stated she was on her way to her house on Gifford Springs Road when she
11 saw the fire. WEST was evacuated her home approximately 15 minutes later due to the Valley
12 Fire. I reviewed the phone records and determined WEST called 911 an hour and thirty-eight
13 minutes after the initial report of the Valley Fire. I believe WEST observed one of several spot
14 fires that ignited in front of the main Valley Fire.
15

16 On September 14, 2015 Investigator WEST contacted Timothy CRAIG by telephone. CRAIG
17 was recorded by 911 as calling from [REDACTED] on September 12, 2015 at approximately
18 2:56 PM. CRAIG reported a fire near Gifford Springs and Whispering Pines. CRAIG stated to
19 WEST during his interview that he was at his residence off of Gifford Springs and his friend
20 "Adam" told him to call 911 and report a fire across the street. CRAIG left his house and ran
21 toward the fire. CRAIG stated some lady told him "it was arson". CRAIG'S friend "Adam" told
22 him he saw a tall Caucasian male in the area. CRAIG described the fire as being a strip or line in
23 the field. CRAIG did not see any ash or embers from the main fire so he was pretty convinced
24 someone set the fire. CRAIG returned to his house until firefighters told him to leave. CRAIG
25 observed the fire from Bottle Rock Road had burned across State Route 175 and he drove
26 through the fire on his way to Middletown.
27

28 On September 16, 2015 at approximately 2:30 PM, I met with STEIS at the Ramada Hotel in
29 Williams. I transferred evidence item #1 and #2 to STEIS. I placed the items in the back of
30 STEIS's truck, secured in the camper shell. STEIS was tasked with transporting the evidence to
31 the CAL FIRE Santa Rosa Office.

1
2 On September 16, 2015 at approximately 5:00 PM, SCHNAIDT contacted Parker MILLS, at the
3 MILLS residence in Elk, CA. MILLS stated he and his wife, Laura, were part owners with John
4 and Cindy PINCH, of the property at 8015 High Valley Road. The property is the PINCH's
5 main residence. The MILL'S use it as their second residence, and have since both families
6 purchased the residence in 2009. No other families live at the residence. MILLS stated the
7 home was sold as a foreclosure in finished condition, but MILLS and PINCH found the inside
8 needing finishing. PINCH did most of the work himself. MILLS stated the last time he was at
9 the property was on Saturday September 12, 2015 at approximately 7:00 AM. MILLS left the
10 house and was not at the residence when the fire started. MILLS returned to the residence after
11 he heard about the fire, but was ordered to evacuate the area at approximately 3:00 PM. MILLS
12 stated there has been no debris burning on the property since 2014, and the normal process for
13 getting rid of debris was to haul it to the dump. MILLS stated he was not aware of any issues
14 with the electrical system at the house. MILLS stated there was a circuit installed by PINCH
15 near the Oak Tree that was for a future motion sensing light. MILLS stated they had a future
16 plan to move the hot tub to the area near the bridge. MILLS explained that was why the wire
17 was there. MILLS stated the wire was wired to a breaker in the box and "that was not an active
18 wire". MILLS stated the hot tub was bought used in 2013 and installed by PINCH. MILLS
19 stated the hot tub quit working over the last winter and was shut off. MILLS stated the hot tub
20 had not been used in months. MILLS stated the wire that he knows about is a "Number 4 wire"
21 that was sized by an electrician, and is connected to the hot tub now. MILLS further stated
22 PINCH would be the one to contact regarding who did the electrical work and said "I wasn't
23 involved with this electrical, with this electrical connection in the back, I assume they ran to the
24 circuit breaker, and the circuit breaker was off". Laura MILLS stated a man named Jaime spoke
25 to a man named "Chip" who had tried to extinguish a fire ignited by a lawnmower. Jaime further
26 stated "Chip" was Chip from Chip Whiteheads Landscaping and said WHITEHEAD saw
27 someone mowing the dry annual grass at a house neighboring CAL FIRE Chief Jim WRIGHT'S
28 house on [REDACTED] when he saw a fire ignite from the mower.

29
30 On September 16, 2015 at approximately 7:53 PM, THOMPSON met with John PINCH.

31 PINCH was staying at the residence of Parker MILLS in Elk, California. The interview took
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1 place in the living room and Parker MILLS was also in the room. PINCH stated the following in
2 summary: Pinch is a retired painter from Sebastopol CA. PINCH and his wife Cindy PINCH are
3 the primary residents of 8015 High Valley Road. Parker MILLS and Laura MILLS are partial
4 owners who stay there on occasion. PINCH has a silver Toyota Pickup, Toyota Corolla, and
5 Ford Fiesta associated with the property. PINCH has lived at the house since 2009 and he had
6 purchased it as a foreclosure. PINCH and Cindy PINCH had last been at the residence on Friday
7 September 11, 2015. PINCH left for Santa Clara the evening of September 11, 2015. PINCH
8 had not been doing any work outside during the previous week. Parker MILLS spoke up and
9 stated he was at the residence the morning of September 12, 2015 to feed the cat. MILLS
10 estimated he was there at approximately 7:00 AM. MILLS returned to the residence later in the
11 afternoon, after he learned of the fire. Laura MILLS called PINCH when she learned of the fire.
12 J. PINCH continued his statement to THOMPSON; stating nobody smokes in the household.
13 PINCH last used a lawn tractor to mow around the property approximately three weeks ago.
14 PINCH stated there were no electrical issues at the residence. The hot tub has not been on in
15 months. Parker MILLS stated the hot tub had not been on since December. PINCH stated the
16 junction box near the oak tree at the back of the residence was there for future use of the hot tub.
17 PINCH intended on moving the hot tub. PINCH stated he installed the junction box and ran the
18 wiring. PINCH stated the 220 circuit was ran approximately one year ago. PINCH stated the
19 breaker was not hooked up to the wiring. PINCH stated the wires ran from the tub to the service
20 room where the circuit breaker box was located. PINCH stated there had been nobody there
21 recently doing electrical work. PINCH stated he does electrical work around the property, but
22 does hire out larger wiring projects. PINCH stated he hired Dave JOHNSON approximately
23 three weeks ago to install a fan and light in the house. PINCH stated the 40 amp breaker was
24 connected to the hot tub wires, but it has not connected to power in the breaker box yet. PINCH
25 stated the house wiring was completely finished when he bought the property. PINCH stated
26 when he did hook up the hot tub it had quit working. Parker MILLS stated he looked at the hot
27 tub last week and observed the light would come on and then just go off. MILLS tried turning it
28 on twice the day he worked on it. THOMPSON asked MILLS if he may have forgot to shut the
29 breaker off and MILLS stated there is a possibility he forgot to shut it off.

30

31

1 **Spot Fire Investigation:**

2 On September 17, 2015 at approximately 9:30 AM, CUNNINGHAM and I responded to the area
3 of State Route 175 and Gifford Springs Road. Another ignition had been reported in this area
4 while the Valley Fire was burning the afternoon of September 12, 2015. I drove into a large
5 meadow from a cut opening in the barbed wire fence, off of Gifford Springs. I drove back
6 toward State Route 175 on a dozer line until I was near a running spring that restricted access. I
7 observed a hose line coming from the State Route 175 side and making a big loop before going
8 back toward the highway. I saw an unburned strip of fuel along the hoseline, consistent with a
9 wet line being used as a fire suppression tactic. It appeared there was fire suppression action that
10 initially held the fire to approximately 1 acre in size. I observed a power pole in the burned area,
11 near a barbed wire fence. I walked along the edge of the spring to the south; the open burned
12 area appeared to have thick burned grass. It appeared the thick grass gained moisture from the
13 nearby spring. I observed a cluster of oak trees at the south end of the open burned area. Most
14 of the trees had burn damage consistent with long term exposure to burning duff. I did find one
15 oak tree with angle of char consistent with the fire spreading through the trees from the open area
16 where the burned power pole was. CUNNINGHAM and I identified several fire spread
17 indicators showing the fire spread to the south from the open area. I worked along the fence line
18 near the burned power pole, crossed over the fence and worked toward State Route 175. I
19 observed the fire made an advancing run toward State Route 175. This was evident by the
20 remains of the blackberry bushes being more burned through this area. The fire spread up a
21 small hill from the area near the burned power pole. I worked up to a point near the remains of a
22 single wide mobile home. The mobile home was completely destroyed by fire. Between the
23 mobile home remains and the barbed wire fence was a burned area. Some of this area the grass
24 had been trimmed prior to the fire. I located several burn indicators in this area showing the fire
25 spread through the fence toward the mobile home. These indicators included protection, damage
26 differential, and sooting on non-combustible items. I worked back across to the spring and met
27 with CUNNINGHAM. We agreed a possible General Origin Area was less than a ¼ acre and
28 was bordered on the north by the spring, west by the edge of the burn, south by the wire fence,
29 and east by the cluster of oak trees. CUNNINGHAM and I used pin flags to mark fire spread
30 indicators. In the open grassy area I found several fire spread indicators, including protection,
31 grass stem fall, damage differential. Based on the fire spread indicators I determined the

1 Specific Origin Area (SOA) was approximately 2'x10'. This area was approximately 10' away
2 from the power pole. CUNNINGHAM and I set up a grid lane search in the advancing area and
3 worked toward the backing indicators. We visually and physically searched each grid lane. We
4 also used a magnet to search for ferrous ignition sourced and found none. We continued the grid
5 lane search, identifying micro indicators such as sooting/staining on rocks and protection. We
6 continued this process in the advancing rub until we identified consistent back indicators. Based
7 on the Fire Spread Indicators I identified the Specific Origin Area as approximately 2'x10'.
8 CUNNINGHAM and I could not locate an ignition source. I found no evidence of the presence
9 of an ignitable liquid. There was a power pole approximately 10' away. The pole itself had been
10 burned by fire, but was still upright. I visually inspected the pole hardware from the ground. I
11 found no defects or areas of interest. I contacted a white female adult, who was standing in the
12 rear yard of her residence. She identified herself as Dana DEMARTIN and stated she lived at
13 [REDACTED]. DEMARTIN stated she was inside her home when she saw a reflection
14 in the window that drew her attention to the outside. DEMARTIN looked out the window and
15 observed a fire burning in the open field behind her residence. DEMARTIN described the fire as
16 being small and approximately three feet in diameter. DEMARTIN did not see anyone around
17 the fire. DEMARTIN indicated she saw the fire near where CUNNINGHAM and I determined
18 the General Origin Area to be. DEMARTIN believed the power was still on, when she saw the
19 fire.

20

21 On September 17, 2015 Investigator STEIS interviewed Jaime CHANEY on the telephone.
22 CHANEY stated he was at the Kelseyville High School with his girlfriend Bonnie BURNS.
23 CHANEY stated he was approached by an male, who identified himself as Chip WHITEHEAD.
24 WHITEHEAD stated he believed the fire started off of Bottle Rock Road and was caused by a
25 mowing operation.

26

27 On September 17, 2015 Investigator WEST was assigned to follow up a report of someone
28 setting a "backfire" in the area of State Route 29 and Butts Canyon Road, during the Valley Fire.
29 WEST contacted Sargent Jason KRAUSE with the Rohnert Park Department of Public Safety.
30 KRAUSE stated in summary he was on duty at the Rohnert Park Department of Public Safety
31 when he was notified by his wife, Jillian KRAUSE, of the Valley Fire burning toward their

1 residence in Lower Lake. KRAUSE drove toward his residence to evacuate his family.
2 KRAUSE arrived in the Middletown area and was unable to continue on State Route 29 toward
3 Lower Lake because of the fire. KRAUSE was at the intersection of State Route 29 and Butts
4 Canyon Road when he observed a person being detained in handcuffs along the side of the road.
5 KRAUSE recognized this person as Richard CORSETTI. KRAUSE contacted a Lake County
6 Deputy at the scene and learned CORSETTI has been detained while the Deputies conducted an
7 investigation into a roadside fire. KRAUSE learned CORSETTI had been accused of igniting a
8 roadside fire. KRAUSE remained at scene and eventually CORSETTI was released and left with
9 KRAUSE. WEST also contacted Lake County Sheriff's Deputy ROCHESTER. ROCHESTER
10 state he was driving northbound on State Route 29 and was flagged down by a number of
11 citizens standing along the roadway. The citizens pointed out CORSETTI and stated he had set a
12 fire near State Route 29 and Butts Canyon Road. ROCHESTER detained and searched
13 CORSETTI, finding no ignition source for starting a fire. CORSETTI denied he set the fire and
14 explained he was on foot, attempting to get back to his residence on Butts Canyon Road.
15 ROCHESTER could not determine if the nearby fire was arson caused and if CORSETTI was
16 responsible for it. Due to the Valley Fire burning all around the intersection and lack of probable
17 cause for arresting CORSETTI, ROCHESTER released CORSETTI.

18
19 WEST contacted CORSETTI at the [REDACTED]. CORSETTI stated he
20 was at home on September 12, 2015 taking a nap. CORSETTI received a phone call informing
21 him of the Valley Fire burning toward Middletown. CORSETTI proceeded to the area of Santa
22 Rosa Road in Middletown to help move a vehicle. CORSETTI became concerned over the fire
23 burning all around Middletown and left on foot to return to his residence. Near the intersection
24 of Butts Canyon Road and State Route 29 CORSETTI observed several males yelling at him
25 about starting a fire. CORSETTI observed a fire burning off the roadway near the intersection.
26 CORSETTI observed a Lake County Sheriff unit stop and talk with the group who had yelled at
27 CORSETTI. Shortly thereafter, CORSETTI was detained.

28
29 Based on the information collected by WEST and the extreme fire behavior of the Valley Fire, I
30 believe the roadside fire CORSETTI was suspected of setting was a spot from the Valley Fire. I
31 did not locate the initial spot fire to conduct an origin and cause investigation. I also determined
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1 CORSETTI had a valid driver's license and no documented criminal history.

2
3 On September 20, 2015 at approximately 5:00 PM, I returned to the General Origin Area of the
4 Valley 2 fire. I noted the power pole I had inspected earlier had fallen and was now lying on the
5 ground. I could clearly see the top of the cross arms and insulators now. I inspected them for
6 any signs of failure or arcing. I found none. I did notice one of the insulators was now broken,
7 but it was obvious it struck a rock when it landed on the ground. I could see the top of the pole
8 did have a grounding rod present. I also inspected the bottom of the pole where it went into the
9 ground more closely. I was looking for any signs electricity went to ground such as ground
10 disturbance or the presence of fulgurites. I found none. I took a series of photographs.

11
12 On September 20, 2015 Investigator STEIS interviewed CAL FIRE Forester Louis
13 SCIOCETTI about the Valley Fire. SCIOCETTI stated he was the Division Group
14 Supervisor for Division H on September 13, 2015. Division H included the area known as the
15 Bunce Ranch. SCIOCETTI stated he had authorized a firing operation around the
16 farmhouse and outbuildings on the ranch. During the firing operation a 6.6 acre spot fire
17 occurred and was contained. Based on the statement from SCIOCETTI the spot fire near
18 the Bunce Ranch was determined to be from the firing operation, not a separate start.

19
20 On September 21, 2015 THOMPSON responded to a meeting request with John PINCH and
21 PARKER MILLS. Upon contacting Lara MILLS THOMPSON was told they would not talk to
22 him without an attorney present, per their insurance company. THOMPSON left the meeting and
23 was contacted on the phone by P. MILLS. MILLS asked THOMPSON if he could provide an
24 escort to the 8015 High Valley Road property. THOMPSON provided the escort and had no
25 discussion about the Valley Fire.

26
27 On Tuesday September 22, 2015 Investigator UBOLDI was assigned to inspect an evidence
28 storage container damaged by the Valley Fire, located at the Boggs Helitack Base (11075
29 Forestry Road). The evidence storage container was located north of the employee parking lot.
30 UBOLDI determined the evidence storage container had and all of its contents had been totally
31 destroyed by fire. There were several items of evidence from recent fires that were destroyed in

1 the fire.

2

3 On September 24, 2015 Investigator VAN COR was assigned to follow up a Twitter Post from
4 ANThoney88. The post referenced the Valley Fire and a paper matchbook in several
5 photographs. Through investigative means VAN COR identified the ANThoney88 Twitter Post
6 as belonging to Anthony OSTROSKIE. VAN COR contacted OSTROSKIE near his home in
7 Ione. VAN COR determined OSTROSKIE found the matchbook near the school he attends.
8 OSTROSKIE'S family described him as "mentally challenged". OSTROSKIE uses a BMX bike
9 for primary transportation and relies on family members for transportation that is too far for a
10 bike. OSTROSKIE had not traveled to Lake County during the time period the Valley Fire
11 ignited.

12

13 On October 1, 2015 THOMPSON interviewed John CARLISI about the Valley Fire. CARLISI
14 stated he was at home located at [REDACTED], when his wife, Polly NYBERG, told
15 him about the fire. CARLISI drove his Toyota 4Runner across the street and saw the fire
16 burning next to the structure at 8015 High Valley Road. CARLISI further stated NELSON was
17 already at the fire and told him there was no one home at the residence. CARLISI stated the fire
18 had burned to the fence line on the right side of the house already. CARLISI used a garden hose
19 to extinguish some of the flames and to soak down the wood pile adjacent to the house.
20 CARLISI left after the CAL FIRE resources showed up.

21

22 On Friday November 6, 2014 Investigator UBOLDI met with Phil MURPHY. MURPHY is a
23 reporter for the Anderson Valley Advertiser. MURPHY explained to UBOLDI he was contacted
24 by Josh NELSON (who lives across from [REDACTED]). MURPHY stated he met
25 with NELSON who showed him a piece of broken glass alongside the roadway. NELSON
26 theorized sunlight shining through the glass started the Valley Fire. MURPHY questioned
27 UBOLDI on the status of the fire investigation. UBOLDI declined to provide additional
28 information. Based on the glass not being in the origin area I determined it was not a causal
29 factor.

30

31 On Friday November 6, 2015 Investigator UBOLDI met with Maria WELSH. WELSH stated
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1 she had been told be one of her salon clients, identified as Dave BURGESS, that he knew who
2 set the Valley and Rocky Fires. WELSH stated BURGESS told her that his nephew, Cole
3 NICHOLSON, was bragging to him about starting the Valley Fire. NICHOLSON stated he was
4 setting fires using a propane bomb triggered by a water heater. BURGESS further stated
5 NICHOLSON'S sister Kelly was driving NICHOLSON around to set fires. BURGESS further
6 stated to WELSH that he had never witnessed NICHOLSON set a fire, but NICHOLSON and
7 "Kelly" were absent from his property the day the Valley Fire started, but showed up after the
8 fire had started. WELSH further explained BURGESS stated NICHOLSON was setting fires for
9 insurance payments and wanted to destroy his grandparents' house by fire so the "Feds" would
10 build them a better one. BURGESS stated "Kelly" drove a compact silver car and they were
11 setting fires with a group of six or eight 20 year olds.

12
13 On March 21, 2016 I received building permit information for 8015 High Valley Road. The
14 information was emailed to me by Kathy Freeman, Lake County Building Department. A
15 building permit was issued to John PINCH on April 15, 2011 for a Permit Exempt Shed. There
16 was no final logged in the permit system. There was also building permit issued to John PINCH
17 on April 15, 2011 for a Covered Deck. The permit had a final inspection on July 9, 2013.

18
19 On May 10, 2016 I received the injury report documenting all CAL FIRE employees injured on
20 the Valley Fire. A total of 77 injuries were reported, Twenty-seven of those injuries were
21 classified as "Reportable Injuries". Four of those reportable injuries were burn injuries to the
22 crew members of Copter 104, who were involved in a burn over and fire shelter deployment on
23 the Valley Fire. The Copter 104 crew members; Fire Captain Patrick WARD, Firefighter Logan
24 PRIDEMORE, Firefighter Nikolas MATTEOLI, Firefighter Mark REIFF, were admitted to the
25 University of California Davis Burn Unit for treatment of multi-degree burns.

26
27 On Tuesday July 26, 2016 THOMPSON contacted D. NICOLSON at her residence.
28 NICOLSON confirmed she had dropped of Cole NICOLSON in Hidden Valley and was
29 returning to Cobb when she saw the smoke from the Valley Fire. NICOLSON stated she also
30 received a call from her daughter, Kelly NICOLSON, who was working at the casino. D.

31 NICOLSON stated by the time she arrived home, her neighborhood was already being evacuated

1 and the fire was burning in Cobb.

2
3 On Thursday July 28, 2016 I contacted James VAGONE at the Lake County Building
4 Department. VAGONE allowed me to inspect the permit file for 8015 High Valley Road. I
5 located the original building permit for the residence and a permit for the covered deck, where
6 the hot tub was located. I found no records of the electrical circuit being installed that powered
7 the hot tub. VAGONE confirmed the addition of the circuit would require a building permit and
8 inspection process.

9
10 On Wednesday August 3, 2016 I contacted Charles WHITEHEAD by phone. I asked
11 WHITEHEAD about statements he made about the Valley Fire being caused by a lawn mower,
12 and originating off of Bottle Rock Road. WHITEHEAD stated he had been told that by several
13 people in the initial stages of the fire. WHITEHEAD did not witness the fire originating from a
14 mowing operation and had no other information. WHITEHEAD stated he heard later the fire
15 started in a shed off of High Valley Road.

16
17 **Conclusion:**

18 Based on my education, training, experience in investigating wildland fires, and the evidence
19 documented above, I formed opinions and reached the following conclusions about the origin
20 and cause of the Valley Fire. There are contradictions in the statements from John PINCH and
21 Parker MILLS on the hot tub circuit. PINCH made statements about the hot tub cord being
22 routed directly into the breaker box and no connection being made to the junction box near the
23 oak tree. MILLS made the statements about turning the hot tub on the previous week and only
24 getting the light to come on, without the pump activating. MILLS stated to THOMPSON there
25 is a possibility he left the circuit breaker on. The verbal description MILLS gave of the hot tub
26 pump not running, but the light coming on, is consistent with a poor connection. NOLT and I
27 both checked the temperature of the hot tub and determined it was over 90 degrees F. Upon my
28 investigation I found the cord from the hot tub connected to the conductors coming from the
29 breaker box. The 40 amp breaker was found in the "tripped" position and was hooked up to
30 power from the service panel. The connection inspected by NOLT had wire nuts holding them
31 together and the copper wire had evidence of arcing. Additionally the wire nut spring, when

1 inspected and tested by NOLT showed a poor connection. PINCH admitted he had installed the
2 40 amp circuit that powered the hot tub. This was also confirmed by MILLS. This circuit was
3 not installed to meet the National Electrical Code Standards. Based on the evidence found and
4 analysis of the wiring by NOLT, I believe the loose conductor connections heated up on the
5 circuit installed by PINCH, igniting the dry grass that was in contact with the connections. There
6 was no clearance and the wire connections were found lying in the grass. NOLT found the
7 copper wire was pitted and melted. Copper wire melts at approximately 1,981 degrees F, this is
8 well above the heat generated by grass burning. I found no other ignition source. After ignition,
9 the fire then spread and burned the short grass as a low intensity fire, before spreading uphill to
10 the east. I found no records the electrical circuit was installed under the required building
11 permit.

12 The green Jeep Nelson observed was more than likely FLETCHER. The reported second
13 ignition near Gifford Springs Road was in my opinion a spot fire from the main Valley Fire. I
14 found no evidence of arson or a powerline caused fire.

15
16 It is my opinion the Valley Fire originated near the electrical connections located within the
17 SOA, and the ignition came from the loose electrical connections arcing and igniting the dry
18 grass.

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20 *I reserve the right to amend or augment this opinion if new pertinent information is provided to
21 me or is discovered by me at a later date.

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