



NEWS RELEASE

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Findings of Cape Horn Fire investigation released

(COEUR D'ALENE) – Findings were announced today from an initial investigation into the cause of the Cape Horn Fire – a 1,326-acre wildfire above Lake Pend Oreille that started on July 5, 2015. The fire destroyed nine residences and five other structures, damaged another residence and cost approximately \$5.6 million to suppress.

Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) fire investigators answered questions from members of the news media about the investigation's findings during a news conference in Coeur d'Alene today.

The Cape Horn Fire investigation report is [here](#).

Some key elements of the Cape Horn Fire investigation include:

- The **fire investigation is deemed continuing in nature**. The fire was human caused but **the exact cause and the person responsible for the fire are yet to be identified**. Evidence, facts, conclusions and data will be supplemented as additional information becomes available or known.
- The Cape Horn Fire started Sunday, July 5, 2015, at approximately 12:15 p.m. It was located in the Cape Horn Peak area northeast of Bayview, Idaho, on Lake Pend Oreille. It occurred on a very steep slope and was driven by winds exceeding 30 mph.
- Burn indicators were strong showing **the start of the fire was on a rock ledge within 20 feet above a small beach**, where two women were camping.
- A wind storm in the very early hours of the morning of July 5 resulted in high waves that swamped the campers' boat. One camper called 911 to inform authorities the boat had been swamped. She then fired two signal flares. One flare was described as a "dud," which was blown back to shore landing in rocks south of the camp. The other went high and into the lake. Later that day, a fire adjacent to their campsite was spotted. Equipment at the campsite did burn, but as a result of being ignited by a hot ember from the fire, which started above the beach. The campers stated they **did not have a campfire on the beach** and boaters who picked up the women also said they saw no campfire or indicators of a campfire on the beach when the campers were rescued.

- **At the point of the fire's origin, a white object was discovered.** The object appeared to be pressed and layered, similar to a paper shotgun wad or similar item. The white object and soil samples were collected and examined by the Idaho State Police, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and a private lab. The fire spread from the area of the white object in all directions. **Based on micro-forensic testing of the white object and the underlying soil samples, there was no match with chemicals or materials used in a marine flare.** Elemental analysis of the white material found at the origin is consistent with the inorganic remains of burnt plant material that contained concentrations of calcium, magnesium, and trace amounts of potassium and phosphorus.
- It is not unusual for a fire investigation to take 12 months or longer to complete. Evidence was sent to multiple labs in the Cape Horn Fire investigation to ensure rigorous testing of the materials collected.
- Agencies involved in the investigation include IDL, U.S. Forest Service, Idaho State Police, Bonner County Sheriff's Office, Kootenai County Sheriff's Office, and the Idaho State Fire Marshal's Office.
- Anyone with information about the cause of the Cape Horn Fire is encouraged to contact IDL through Sharla Arledge, Public Information Officer, by calling 208-334-0286 or e-mailing sarledge@idl.idaho.gov.

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