



NEWS RELEASE

Orange County Fire Authority
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OCFA INVESTIGATORS USE TIP FROM NEWS TO IDENTIFY ALLEGED ARSONIST

Suspect Admits Setting Brush Fire in San Juan Capistrano / Laguna Niguel

Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) investigators have identified an alleged arsonist after he admitted starting a fire that consumed 70 acres of brush behind the Saddleback Church grounds in San Juan Capistrano the afternoon of June 16. News coverage of the fire generated a tip passed on to the OCFA from a local newspaper, resulting in the identification, and eventual confession of the arsonist.

“This is the second time in as many months that the news media played a vital role in helping our investigations division break an active arson case,” said OCFA PIO Larry Kurtz. “A lot of effort is put into the investigation of these incidents, and if not for the media’s help in bringing the public’s attention to these fires, it’s possible that the trail may have gone cold.”

The individual responsible for the fire is a 17-year-old male, who admitted to investigators he started the fire with a cigarette lighter. The individual was released from custody to his mother. OCFA fire investigators are working with the Orange County District Attorney’s office to determine what specific charges will be filed against the juvenile.

The fire charred approximately 70 acres between Golden Lantern and Camino Capistrano, on the border between San Juan Capistrano and Laguna Niguel. Fortunately, this fire did not occur during windy conditions, which would have complicated fire control efforts. There were no homes damaged as a result of the fire.

OCFA investigators also credited the news media for a tip generated by a surveillance video broadcast following an October 4, 2015 Walmart fire. This broadcast helped to track down a suspect who had recently set a fire on May 30, in Santa Ana’s El Super Market, leading OCFA investigators to arrest the individual on June 7.

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The Orange County Fire Authority is a joint powers authority that serves more than 1.8 million residents in 23 cities