



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION**  
**SAN LUIS OBISPO UNIT**  
635 North Santa Rosa Street  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93405  
**VENTURA COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT**  
2400 Conejo Spectrum Street  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

# INVESTIGATION REPORT

<b>CASE NUMBER:</b>	24CAVNC094825
<b>CASE NAME:</b>	MOUNTAIN
<b>DATE:</b>	November 6, 2024
<b>INCIDENT TYPE:</b>	Wildland Fire
<b>INCIDENT INVESTIGATORS:</b>	Ryan MILLER, Fire Investigator – VCFD
Aimin ALTON, Firefighter (PM) – VCFD	Ryan WALLACE, Battalion Chief – CAL FIRE
Joe GREEN, Battalion Chief – CAL FIRE	Christine SAQUI, Fire Investigator – VCFD
Jace CHAPIN, Assistant Chief – CAL FIRE	Dan TUROCK, Senior Deputy – VCSD
Andrea STANLEY, Fire Investigator – VCFD	Robert JOHNSON, Fire Captain Specialist – CAL FIRE
Fred LIBBY, Fire Captain Specialist – CAL FIRE	Ken RUSSELL, Battalion Chief – CAL FIRE
Tom CRASS, Battalion Chief – CAL FIRE	Bennet MILLOY, Fire Captain Specialist – CAL FIRE

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**1- VIOLATIONS:**

**PENAL CODE § 452 (c)**

A person is guilty of unlawfully causing a fire when he recklessly sets fire to or burns or causes to be burned, any structure, forest land or property.

(c) Unlawfully causing a fire of a structure or forest land is a felony punishable by imprisonment in the state prison for 16 months, two or three years, or by imprisonment in the county jail for not more than six months, or by a fine, or by both such imprisonment and fine.

**PENAL CODE § 454**

(a) Every person who violates Section 451 or 452 during and within an area of any of the following, when proclaimed by the Governor, shall be punished by imprisonment in the state prison, as specified in subdivision (b):

(1) A state of insurrection pursuant to Section 143 of the Military and Veterans Code.

(2) A state of emergency pursuant to Section 8625 of the Government Code.

(b) Any person who is described in subdivision (a) and who violates subdivision (a), (b), or (c) of Section 451 shall be punished by imprisonment in the state prison for five, seven, or nine years. All other persons who are described in subdivision (a) shall be punished by imprisonment in the state prison for three, five, or seven years.

(c) Probation shall not be granted to any person who is convicted of violating this section, except in unusual cases where the interest of justice would best be served.

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**PENAL CODE § 594 (a)**

(a) Every person who maliciously commits any of the following acts with respect to any real or personal property not his or her own, in cases other than those specified by state law, is guilty of vandalism:

- (1) Defaces with graffiti or other inscribed material.
- (2) Damages.
- (3) Destroys.

**PENAL CODE § 602**

A person who willfully commits a trespass by any of the following acts is guilty of a misdemeanor:

(a) Cutting down, destroying, or injuring any kind of wood or timber standing or growing upon the lands of another.

**PUBLIC RESOURCES CODE § 4421**

A person shall not set fire or cause fire to be set to any forest, brush, or other flammable material which is on any land that is not his own, or under his legal control, without the permission of the owner, lessee, or agent of the owner or lessee of the land.

**PUBLIC RESOURCES CODE § 4422 (b)**

A person shall not do any of the following:

(b) Allow any fire kindled or attended by him to escape from his control or to spread to the land of any person other than from the land from which the fire originated.

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**2 PUBLIC RESOURCES CODE § 4427**

3 During any time of the year when burning permits are required in an area  
4 pursuant to this article, no person shall use or operate any motor, engine, boiler,  
5 stationary equipment, welding equipment, cutting torches, tarpots, or grinding devices  
6 from which a spark, fire, or flame may originate, which is located on or near any forest-  
7 covered land, brush-covered land, or grass-covered land, without doing both of the  
8 following:

9 (a) First clearing away all flammable material, including snags, from the area  
10 around such operation for a distance of 10 feet.

11 (b) Maintain one serviceable round point shovel with an overall length of not less  
12 than forty-six (46) inches and one backpack pump water-type fire extinguisher fully  
13 equipped and ready for use at the immediate area during the operation.

14 This section does not apply to portable power saws and other portable tools powered by  
15 a gasoline-fueled internal combustion engine.

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**17 PUBLIC RESOURCES CODE § 4435**

18 If any fire originates from the operation or use of any engine, machine, barbecue,  
19 incinerator, railroad rolling stock, chimney, or any other device which may kindle a fire,  
20 the occurrence of the fire is prima facie evidence of negligence in the maintenance,  
21 operation, or use of such engine, machine, barbecue, incinerator, railroad rolling stock,  
22 chimney, or other device. If such fire escapes from the place where it originated and it  
23 can be determined which person's negligence caused such fire, such person is guilty of  
24 a misdemeanor.

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**26 HEALTH & SAFETY CODE § 13000**

27 Every person is guilty of a misdemeanor who allows a fire kindled or attended by  
28 him to escape from his control or to spread to the lands of any person other than the  
29 builder of the fire without using every reasonable and proper precaution to prevent the  
30 fire from escaping.

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**HEALTH & SAFETY CODE § 13001**

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

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**2 - SUMMARY:**

On Wednesday, November 6, 2024, at approximately 8:51 AM, Ventura County Fire Department responded to a report of a vegetation fire, later identified as the Mountain Fire, in the unincorporated area of Somis, within the county of Ventura, California. An initial 911 caller reported smoke was visible on a hilltop northeast of their location and indicated it was coming from "the same area as the fire from last week." Additional 911 callers reported similar information. The weather, fuel, and topography caused a fast-moving fire to extend rapidly southwest from the reported location. The Mountain Fire damaged or destroyed 369 structures and/or outbuildings and approximately 19,904 acres of vegetation. The fire was 100 percent contained and controlled on Wednesday, November 27, 2024.

Ventura County Fire Department investigators observed the Mountain Fire within minutes of its start from an ALERTCalifornia camera on South Mountain, approximately 2.5 miles northwest of the origin. The Investigation Team (IT) determined the Mountain Fire occurred due to a rekindling of a fire, identified as the Balcom Fire, which occurred on Wednesday, October 30, 2024. The Balcom Fire area was stoked by an extreme Santa Ana Wind event starting in the early morning hours on Wednesday, November 6, 2024. Ultimately, wind gusts in excess of 45 miles per hour, combined with low humidities, exposed and invigorated smoldering material. The sequence of events caused embers from the Balcom Fire to escape the burned area and be cast over a constructed dozer line (approximately 20' wide) into dry vegetation, igniting the Mountain Fire.

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**3 - SUSPECT AND SUBJECTS:**

**SUSPECT:**

S-1 Jose, MORALES-ESQUIVEL  
Equipment Operator – Venegas Farming, LLC

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

DOB: [REDACTED]

CDL: [REDACTED]

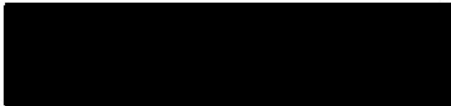
*Can testify to working for Venegas Farming on the property identified as APN# 108011004, and operating the Kubota tractor associated with the cause of the Balcom and Mountain Fires (see attachment #4).*

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**SUBJECTS:**

SB-1 Venegas Farming, LLC  
3379 Somis Road, Suite I  
Somis, CA 93066  
Phone: (805) 301-0004  
*(see attachment #4 and #6)*

Gillemo, VENEGAS Jr.  
President and CEO – Venegas Farming, LLC



Phone: 

*Can testify to MORALES working for Venegas Farming and operating a Kubota tractor on APN #108011004 the day of the Balcom Fire. Additionally, being contracted by Donald LYNCH to conduct brush clearing on APN# 108011004 (see attachment #4).*



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SB-2 Lynch Land & Cattle, LLC  
4755 East Los Angeles Avenue  
Somis, CA 93066  
Phone: (805) 386-3250  
(see attachment #7)

Donald LYNCH



Phone: [Redacted]

*Can testify to contracting with Venegas Farming for brush clearing on APN# 108011004, contacting Parker LYNCH about the Balcom Fire and Mountain Fire, sending Parker to help fight the fires in a bulldozer, and returning to the Balcom fire on Sunday, November 3, 2024, observing no visible signs of smoke or heat in the area (see attachments #4 and #10).*

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SB-3 AG Land Clearing, LLC

300 Esplanade Drive

Oxnard, CA 93036

Phone: (805) 532-2019

(see attachment #8)

James Andrew WATERS



Phone: [Redacted]

Can testify to notifying D. LYNCH of a fire on November 6th (see attachments #8 and #10).

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**4 - VICTIMS, WITNESSES AND OTHERS:**

**VICTIMS:**

V-1 Donald & Janice SCHIEFERLE  
Property Owner - APN# 108011004



Phone: 

*Can testify to owning the property APN# 108011004 and only leasing the north end of the property. Can also testify to not permitting D. LYNCH or VENEGAS any access to the property in the area of the Balcom Fire and Mountain Fire origins (see attachments #10, #15, and #27).*

For a list of additional victims and associated properties damaged or destroyed during the Mountain Fire, reference the Damage Inspection Report (see attachment #5). This list may or may not include damaged land and other miscellaneous burned properties.

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**WITNESSES:**

W-1 Adam LEWIS

Patrolman – Southern California Edison

2244 Walnut Grove Avenue

Rosemead, CA 91770

Phone: (626) 302-6972

*Can testify to the Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) and patrolling the Transmission Circuit between Moorpark substation and Santa Paula substation, and overwatching the RMTS48 Transmission Circuit which is co-located on the Balcom Distribution Circuit. Can also testify to observing the Mountain Fire in its early stages southwest of his location (see attachment #10).*

W-2 Marvin FRANKLIN

[Redacted]

Phone: [Redacted]

*Can testify to being one of the first to visually see smoke from the Mountain Fire on the ridge top, and identifies first smoke on the north side of the ridge northeast of his residence (see attachment #10).*

W-3 Parker LYNCH

[Redacted]

Phone: [Redacted]

*Can testify to operating his father's (D. LYNCH) dozer on both the Balcom Fire and Mountain Fire prior to Fire Department personnel at the scene, and his observation of fire behavior, as well as what was burned and unburned upon his arrival (see attachment #10).*

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W-4 Preslie WILLIAMS

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to being the first 911 caller for the Mountain Fire and observing the Mountain Fire from her residence southwest of the Mountain Fire origin. She places the Mountain Fire northeast of FRANKLIN's property located at [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road. Additionally, she observed the Balcom Fire in its early stages from her residence and identified the smoke as being in the same general location (see attachment #10).*

W-5 David ESPINOZA

Vice President Commercial Lines – Hub International  
3585 Maple Street  
Ventura, CA 93003

Phone: (805) 432-1060

*Can testify to being the insurance broker for Venegas Farming, LLC, taking a photo of the Kubota tractor on Thursday, October 31, 2024, and receiving a phone call from VENEGAS on Wednesday, November 6, 2024, to talk about the Mountain Fire (see attachment #10).*

W-6 William LYNCH

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to being a retired Deputy Chief for Glendale Fire Department, observing the burn scar from the Balcom Fire on Sunday, November 03, 2024, and seeing no visible signs of smoke or heat in the area (see attachment #10).*

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W-7 Barbara KIWITT

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to providing photos and videos sent to her by her housekeeper of the early stages of the Mountain Fire northeast of her residence (see attachments #10 and #12).*

W-8 Mike KIWITT

[REDACTED]

General Contractor

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to his wife (B. KIWITT) providing photos and videos to the IT from their housekeeper of the early stages of the Mountain Fire northeast of their residence (see attachments #10 and #12).*

W-9 William EDWARDS

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to being a 911 caller and seeing the Mountain Fire north of his location from [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road near the water tank.*

*Additionally, he observed the Balcom Fire in its early stages from the property and identified the smoke from the Mountain Fire being in the same general location (see attachment #12).*

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W-10 Nigel EDWARDS

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to being a 911 caller and seeing the Mountain Fire north of his location from [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road. Additionally, he observed the Balcom Fire in its early stages from the property and identified the smoke from the Mountain Fire as being in the same general location (see attachment #12).*

W-11 Manuel HERNANDEZ

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to seeing the Mountain Fire northeast of the property near a water tank (see attachment #12).*

W-12 Juan HERNANDEZ

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to seeing smoke and fire from the Mountain Fire north/behind the residence (see attachment #12).*

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W-13 Thomas GOGSWELL

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to seeing smoke and fire from the Mountain Fire northeast of his residence near a water tank at the end of a tree line. Additionally, he observed the Balcom Fire in its early stages from the property and identified the smoke as being in the same general location (see attachment #12).*

W-14 Rosario GUTIERREZ ROSAS

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to being the housekeeper for the KIWITT's, being one of the first to see smoke from the Mountain Fire east of the property, and providing photos and videos to the IT (see attachment #12).*

W-15 Karla VILLANUEVA

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to seeing smoke and fire from the Mountain Fire north/behind the residence, and providing photos and videos to the IT (see attachment #12).*



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W-16 Joshua GONZALES

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to conducting wind patrol near Balcom Canyon and Bixby Road when he saw smoke northwest of his location (see attachment #12).*

W-17 Eusebio VILLANUEVA-ROJOS

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to notifying his family of the Mountain Fire north/behind their residence (see attachment #12).*

W-18 Doug BLUMENTHAL

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to seeing smoke and fire from the Mountain Fire northeast of [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road (see attachment #12).*

W-19 Alexis RODRIGUEZ

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to seeing smoke and fire from the Mountain Fire northeast of [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road, and provided photos and videos to the IT (see attachment #12).*

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W-20 Arnoldo RODRIGUEZ-GONZALEZ

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to seeing smoke and fire from the Mountain Fire northeast of [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road (see attachment #12).*

W-21 Patty GRUBMAN

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to being a 911 caller for both the Balcom and Mountain Fires and seeing the Mountain Fire north of her residence (see attachment #12).*

W-22 Hugo VILLASENOR

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to seeing the Mountain Fire north of the property (see attachment #12).*

W-23 Jesus VIRRUETA

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to seeing the Mountain Fire north of the property (see attachment #12).*

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W-24 Julie RHOADS

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to being a 911 caller for both the Balcom and Mountain Fires and seeing the Mountain Fire north of her residence (see attachment #12).*

W-25 Talesia DOBIN

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to her mother (RHOADS) calling 911 and seeing the Mountain Fire north of her residence (see attachment #12).*

W-26 Steve BOONE

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to previously installing video surveillance cameras at [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road, verifying the cameras were not recording and only operating on a live feed function at the time of both the Balcom and Mountain Fires (see attachment #12).*

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W-27 Rodney PECK

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to leasing the north portion of the property (APN #108011004), north of the "bluff cliffs", from SCHIEFERLE (see attachments #9 and #12).*

W-28 Michael MCALLISTER

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to running cattle on PECK's leased land, being interviewed by the IT on two different occasions, and giving two conflicting statements. Additionally, giving land use/access permissions to D. LYNCH (see attachment #12).*

W-29 Inge SCHEINFARB

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

*Can testify to driving eastbound on Bradley Road, and taking a video of the Mountain Fire east of Bradley Road and Balcom Canyon Road (see attachment #16).*

Additional interviews were conducted by the IT and deemed to have no significance to the investigation. For information and documentation pertaining to these interviews, see attached BWC recordings (see attachments #11 and #15).

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**OTHERS:**

O-1 Ryan MILLER

Fire Investigator – VCFD  
2400 Conejo Spectrum Street  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320  
Office: (805) 389-9710

*Can testify to the overall fire investigation, being the lead investigator for the Mountain Fire and completing the Fire Investigation Report (FIR).*

O-2 Andrea STANLEY

Fire Investigator – VCFD  
2400 Conejo Spectrum Street  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320  
Office: (805) 389-9710

*Can testify to the overall fire investigation, being the lead investigator for the Balcom Fire and completing the FIR (see attachment #4).*

O-3 Christine SAQUI

Fire Investigator – VCFD  
2400 Conejo Spectrum Street  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320  
Office: (805) 389-9710

*Can testify to assisting with the overall fire investigations for both the Balcom Fire and Mountain Fire (see attachments #4 and #17).*

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O-4 Aimin ALTON  
Firefighter/Paramedic – VCFD  
2400 Conejo Spectrum Street  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320  
Office: (805) 389-9710  
*Can testify to assisting with the overall fire investigation, the collection of data/image analysis, and the interview with Gene FONG (see attachment #18).*

O-5 Dan TUROCK  
Senior Deputy – Ventura County Sheriff's Office (VCSO)  
800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009  
Office: (805) 654-2380  
*Can testify to conducting social media searches and aiding in the investigation.*

O-6 Joe GREEN  
Battalion Chief – CAL FIRE  
1234 East Shaw Avenue  
Fresno, CA 93710  
Office: (559) 243-4115  
*Can testify to assisting with the overall fire investigation (see attachment #15).*

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O-7 Ryan WALLACE  
Battalion Chief – CAL FIRE  
1234 East Shaw Avenue  
Fresno, CA 93710  
Office: (559) 243-4115  
*Can testify to assisting with the overall fire investigation (see attachment #12).*

O-8 Tom CRASS  
Battalion Chief – CAL FIRE  
1968 South Lovers Lane  
Visalia, CA 93292  
Office: (559) 732-5954  
*Can testify to assisting with the overall fire investigation (see attachment #12).*

O-9 Kenneth RUSSELL  
Battalion Chief - CAL FIRE  
5366 Highway 49 North  
Mariposa, CA 95338  
Office: (209) 966-3622  
*Can testify to assisting with the overall fire investigation (see attachment #13).*

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O-10 Frederick LIBBY  
Fire Captain Specialist - CAL FIRE  
5366 Highway 49 North  
Mariposa, CA 95338  
Office: (209) 966-3622  
*Can testify to assisting with the overall fire investigation (see attachment #13).*

O-11 Bennet MILLOY  
Fire Captain Specialist - CAL FIRE  
3800 N. Sierra Way  
San Bernardino, CA 92405  
Office: (909) 881-6922  
*Can testify to assisting with the overall fire investigation (see attachment #10).*

O-12 Robert JOHNSON  
Fire Captain - CAL FIRE  
2249 Jamacha Road  
El Cajon, CA 92019  
Office: (619) 590-3100  
*Can testify to assisting with the overall fire investigation (see attachment #11).*



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## O-13 Jace CHAPIN

Assistant Chief – CAL FIRE

23300 Castle Street

Riverside, CA 92518

Office: (951) 320-6165

*Can testify to assisting with the overall fire investigation.*

## O-14 Jeremy CHRISTOFFERSON

Fire Equipment Manager II – CAL FIRE

23300 Castle Street

Riverside, CA 92518

Office: (951) 320-6165

*Can testify to the evaluation of evidence at the origin (see attachment #14).*

## O-15 Scott PRICE

Heavy Fire Equipment Operator – VCFD

2400 Conejo Spectrum Street

Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

Office: (805) 389-9710

*Can testify to the removal and transporting of evidence associated with the Mountain Fire.*

## O-16 Hayden MINER

Fire Control Worker – VCFD

2400 Conejo Spectrum Street

Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

Office: (805) 389-9710

*Can testify to assisting with the removal and transporting of evidence associated with the Mountain Fire.*

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O-17 Chase HERMAN

Fire Control Worker – VCFD

2400 Conejo Spectrum Street

Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

Office: (805) 389-9710

*Can testify to assisting with the removal and transporting of evidence associated with the Mountain Fire.*

O-18 Nick LABEDZKI

Senior Land Surveyor – CAL FIRE

1300 U Street

Sacramento, CA 92444

Phone: (916) 323-1044

*Can testify to LiDAR (see attachment #28).*

O-19 Jonathan LUCONI

Senior Land Surveyor – CAL FIRE

1300 U Street

Sacramento, CA 92444

Phone: (916) 323-1044

*Can testify to LiDAR (see attachment #28).*

O-20 Element Security Solutions, Inc.

P.O. Box 25755

Fresno, CA 93729

Phone: (559) 754-6614

*Can testify to providing scene security from Wednesday, November 6, 2024, through Tuesday, November 12, 2024 (See attachment #23).*

1

2 O-21 Isidro CRUZ

3 Dynamic Security Operator – Element Security Solutions, Inc.

4 1931 G Street

5 Fresno, CA 93706

6 Phone: (559) 277-1580

7 *Can testify to scene security (see attachment #23).*

8

9 O-22 Nicholas HERNANDEZ

10 Dynamic Security Operator – Element Security Solutions, Inc.

11 1931 G Street

12 Fresno, CA 93706

13 Phone: (559) 277-1580

14 *Can testify to scene security (see attachment #23).*

15

16 O-23 Trevor JOHNSON

17 Fire Captain – VCFD

18 2400 Conejo Spectrum Street

19 Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

20 Phone: (805) 389-9710

21 *Can testify to completing the NFIRS, and being the first arriving Fire Captain at*  
22 *the Mountain Fire (see attachment #1).*

23

24 O-24 Jeffery SEABROOK

25 Fire Captain – VCFD

26 2400 Conejo Spectrum Street

27 Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

28 Phone: (805) 389-9710

29 *Can testify to taking photos and videos of the Overall Fire Area (OFA) while on*  
30 *Copter 4 (see attachment #20).*

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O-25 John BURT  
Senior Deputy – Ventura County Sheriff’s Office (VCSO)  
800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009  
Office: (805) 654-2380  
*Can testify to taking photos and videos of the OFA while on Copter 4  
(see attachment #20).*

O-26 Kristopher TAMBURELLO  
Pilot – Ventura County Sheriff’s Office (VCSO)  
800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009  
Office: (805) 654-2380  
*Can testify to taking photos and videos of the OFA while on Copter 5  
(see attachment #20).*

O-27 Kristopher DOEPKING  
Senior Deputy – Ventura County Sheriff’s Office (VCSO)  
800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009  
Office: (805) 654-2380  
*Can testify to taking photos and videos of the OFA while on Copter 5  
(see attachment #20).*

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O-28 Lance AUSTIN

Battalion Chief – VCFD  
2400 Conejo Spectrum Street  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

Phone: (805) 389-9710

*Can testify to observing the Mountain Fire spot south of Highway 118 and Aggen Road, on the north aspect of the Camarillo Hills (see attachment #11).*

O-29 Robert RAMOS

Director of Risk & Claims Management – Southern California Edison  
2244 Walnut Grove Avenue  
Rosemead, CA 91770

Phone: (626) 632-7095

*Can testify to receiving a formal request from the IT for any possible information regarding data and electrical equipment defaults for the day of the Mountain Fire. Additionally, coordinating the interview with SCE Patrolman Adam LEWIS (see attachment #24).*

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2 **5- EVIDENCE:**

3  
4 Evidence collection at the MOUNTAIN Fire began on Tuesday, November 12, 2024,  
5 with items E-1 through E-4. These items were collected near the origin of the Balcom  
6 Fire and determined to be associated with the ignition of the Mountain Fire.

7  
8 **PHYSICAL EVIDENCE – Collected on Tuesday, November 12, 2024, items #1**  
9 **through #4.**

10  
11 Item #1 – (E-1) 2023 Kubota M5-111HD12 4x4, S/N: [REDACTED]  
12 collected by MILLER on November 12, 2024, at 8:45 AM.

13 Item #2 – (E-2) Gearmore Flail Shredder, Series: GHF90-FS, S/N: [REDACTED]  
14 collected by MILLER on November 12, 2024, at 8:45 AM.

15 Item #3- (E-3) Misc. tools and parts found on and near the 2023 Kubota M5-111HD12,  
16 collected by MILLER on November 12, 2024, at 8:35 AM.

17 Item #4- (E-4) Misc. tools and parts found on and near the 2023 Kubota M5-111HD12,  
18 collected by MILLER on November 12, 2024, at 8:37 AM.

19  
20 Items E-3 and E-4 were collected by MILLER and stored in a locked and secured in a  
21 locked compartment in my department assigned vehicle for transport. These items were  
22 transported to the VCFD Regional Training Center (RTC) and secured in a locked  
23 evidence bunker, to which only four VCFD investigators have access.

24  
25 Items E-1 and E-2 were removed and transported to the RTC by the VCFD Construction  
26 Unit, under escort by members of the IT. These items were temporarily stored in a  
27 caged, locked area for safekeeping. Locks on this area were changed so only members  
28 of the IT had the combination for access (see photographs P-RM-296 to P-RM-333). On  
29 November 19, 2024, items E-1 and E-2 were moved into storage bunkers, which were  
30 locked and secured by a key-operated motorized garage door opener.

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VCFD staff at the RTC provided me with the only keys to the bunkers. These keys were secured in a safe to which only four VCFD investigators have access (see photographs P-RM-334 P-RM-359).

**PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEOS, WITNESS INTERVIEWS, BWC RECORDINGS:**

**PHOTOGRAPHS and/or VIDEOS:**

VCFD Investigator Ryan MILLER:

Photos P-RM-001 through P-RM-380 and videos (see attachment #50).

VCFD Investigator Andrea STANLEY:

Balcom Fire photos and report (see attachment #4).

VCFD Investigator Christine SAQUI:

Photos and videos from the first day of the Mountain Fire (see attachment #17).

CAL FIRE Peace Officer Ken RUSSELL:

Photos collected during the investigation, Ryan WHITEBREAD screenshot of spot fires, Peterson videos, and video from helicopter flight (see attachment #13).

CAL FIRE Peace Officer Fred LIBBY:

Photos for spot fire investigation and helicopter flight (see attachment #13).

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**WITNESS INTERVIEWS:**

CAL FIRE Peace Officer Joe GREEN:

BWC interviews with Donald and Janice SCHIEFERLIE, S. MAGNA, CFI Investigators, P. BARROW, R. KAUCHER, Tom NETZER, and misc. contacts during follow-up (see attachment #15).

CAL FIRE Peace Officer Robert JOHNSON:

BWC interviews with Donald and Janice SCHIEFERLIE, S. MAGNA, CFI Investigators, P. BARROW, R. KAUCHER, Tom NETZER, and misc. contacts during follow-up (see attachment #11).

CAL FIRE Peace Officer Ryan WALLACE:

BWC interviews with BWC interviews with N. EDWARDS, K. VILLANUEVA, J. HERNANDEZ, D. BLUMENTHAL, F. HERNANDEZ, R. ROSARIO, P. GRUMMAN, E. VILLANUEVA, W. EDWARDS, J. ESQUIVEL, J. GONZALES, A. RODRIQUEZ, and various videos, and photos collected during the investigation (see attachment #12).

CAL FIRE Peace Officer Tom CRASS:

BWC interviews with D. BLUMENTHAL, N. EDWARDS, P. GRUBMAN, W. EDWARDS, E. VILLANUEVA, F. HERNANDEZ, J. ESQUIVEL, J. HERNANDEZ, M. KIWITT, J. ESQUIVEL, R. ROSAS (see attachment #12).

CAL FIRE Peace Officer Bennet MILLOY:

M. KIWITT, D. ESPINOSA, J. KIWITT, G. VENEGAS, M. FRANKLIN, P. LYNCH, D. LYNCH, P. WILLIAMS, A. LEWIS, W. LYNCH and various videos, and photos collected during the investigation (see attachments #10 and #16).



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**FIXED CAMERAS:**

OES camera footage from South Mountain Camera from 8:45 AM on Wednesday, November 6, 2024, to 5:30 PM on Wednesday, November 6, 2024 (see attachment #21).

ALERTCalifornia camera footage from the South Mountain 1 camera on Wednesday, November 6, 2024, from 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM (see attachment #21).

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**6 – CONDITIONS:**

The Mountain Fire originated north of Balcom Canyon Road and west of Bixby Road. The fire was on an undeveloped piece of land. The parcel has no official access and is landlocked by other parcels. From the origin, the topography in the area is steep, leading downward or southwest towards the community of Somis. The vegetation at the origin is a mixture of brush and annual grasses.

On November 4, 2024, the National Weather Service issued a Red Flag Warning for the morning of November 6. On November 5, 2024, the NWS upgraded the Red Flag Warning to a Particularly Dangerous Situation (PDS) Red Flag Warning. A PDS declaration highlights exceptional fire weather conditions considered rare and/or especially impactful to the firefighting community. A PDS would be considered an “extreme” Red Flag Warning. The last issued PDS for Southern California occurred in 2020. Criteria for declaring a PDS include sustained winds of 35 miles per hour and/or gusts exceeding 60 miles per hour, single-digit humidity levels, and live fuel moisture less than 60 percent, with dead fuel moisture below seven percent. These conditions must coincide for at least three hours during the event.

Weather information for Wednesday, November 6, 2024, was obtained from a Remote Automated Weather Station (RAWS) located near the community of Somis in the County of Ventura, California. The SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057) RAWS is approximately .4 miles southeast of the Mountain Fire origin. The SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057) RAWS is owned and operated by Southern California Edison (SCE) in conjunction with the NWS. The SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057) RAWS records weather every ten minutes. Weather was recorded at 8:40 AM and 8:50 AM.  
(see attachment #22).

1  
2 The SCE B CANYON ROAD (758SE) RAWS is approximately .7 miles southwest  
3 of the Mountain Fire origin. The SCE B CANYON ROAD (758SE) RAWS is owned and  
4 operated by Southern California Edison (SCE). The SCE B CANYON ROAD (758SE)  
5 RAWS records weather every ten minutes. Weather was recorded at 8:40 AM and 8:50  
6 AM. The start time of the Mountain Fire was approximately 8:48 AM.  
7

8 **Wednesday, November 6, 2024**  
9

10 SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057)

11 Time: 8:50  
12 Temperature: 61 Degrees Fahrenheit  
13 Dew Point: 20 Degrees Fahrenheit  
14 Relative Humidity: 20 Percent  
15 Wind Speed: 20 MPH, Gusts 40 MPH  
16 Wind Direction: north/northeast  
17

18 SCE B CANYON RD (785SE)

19 Time: 8:50  
20 Temperature: 62 Degrees Fahrenheit  
21 Dew Point: 18 Degrees Fahrenheit  
22 Relative Humidity: 18 Percent  
23 Wind Speed: 14 MPH, Gusts 30 MPH  
24 Wind Direction: north/northeast  
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SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 54 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 68 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 12 Percent, High: 64 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 26 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 48 MPH

SCE B CANYON RD (785SE)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 58 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 68 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 11 Percent, High: 57 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 20 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 53 MPH

**Tuesday, November 5, 2024**

SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 54 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 70 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 27 Percent, High: 64 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 5 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 11 MPH

SCE B CANYON RD (785SE)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 56 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 70 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 23 Percent, High: 44 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 9 MPH, Gusts: Low 2 MPH/High 13 MPH

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**Monday, November 4, 2024**

SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 54 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 75 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 18 Percent, High: 69 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 9 MPH, Gusts: Low 2 MPH/High 19 MPH

SCE B CANYON RD (785SE)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 57 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 75 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 15 Percent, High: 64 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 11 MPH, Gusts: Low 2 MPH/High 20 MPH

**Sunday, November 3, 2024**

SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 46 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 69 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 37 Percent, High: 100 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 6 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 11 MPH

SCE B CANYON RD (785SE)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 49 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 70 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 33 Percent, High: 99 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 6 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 13 MPH

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**Saturday, November 2, 2024**

SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 47 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 62 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 57 Percent, High: 99 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 6 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 11 MPH

SCE B CANYON RD (785SE)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 50 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 62 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 52 Percent, High: 96 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 7 MPH, Gusts: Low 14 MPH/High 18 MPH

**Friday, November 1, 2024**

SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 50 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 66 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 44 Percent, High: 98 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 6 MPH, Gusts: Low 0 MPH/High 13 MPH

SCE B CANYON RD (785SE)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 51 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 66 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 40 Percent, High: 93 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 8 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 13 MPH

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**Thursday, October 31, 2024**

SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 49 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 67 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 37 Percent, High: 85 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 6 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 14 MPH

SCE B CANYON RD (785SE)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 51 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 67 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 34 Percent, High: 87 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 7 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 13 MPH

**Wednesday, October 30, 2024**

SCE BIXBY ROAD (SE057)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 48 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 70 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 29 Percent, High: 87 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 6 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 12 MPH

SCE B CANYON RD (785SE)

Time: 24 Hour  
Temperature: Low: 51 Degrees Fahrenheit, High: 70 Degrees Fahrenheit  
Relative Humidity: Low: 26 Percent, High: 80 Percent  
Wind Speed: Low: 0 MPH/High 8 MPH, Gusts: Low 1 MPH/High 15 MPH

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A lightning detection map was obtained and evaluated. This map confirmed there was no lightning in the area within 30 days of the Balcom Fire and Mountain Fire (see attachment #22).

Upon my arrival at the Mountain Fire, I used a handheld Kestrel weather device to obtain weather conditions. The Kestrel recorded the following (see attachment #22):

- Temperature: 62 degrees Fahrenheit
- Humidity: 17.4 percent
- Windspeed: 17 MPH, with gusts to 28 MPH
- PIG: 50 percent



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**7 - EQUIPMENT:**

2023 Kubota M5-111HD12 4x4

S/N: [REDACTED]

R/O: Venegas Farming, LLC  
3379 Somis Road, Suite I  
Somis, CA 93066

*Purchased from Eberhard Equipment 2506 S. Harbor Blvd. Santa Ana, CA 92704  
(see attachment #25).*

Gearmore Flail Shredder

Series: GHF90-FS

S/N: [REDACTED]

Owner: Venegas Farming, LLC  
3379 Somis Road, Suite I  
Somis, CA 93066

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**8 - PROPERTY:**

The Fire Occurred on an open parcel of land in the unincorporated area of Somis, within the county of Ventura. The property's Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) is APN# 108011004. The property is approximately 480 acres (*see attachment #27*).

**Property Owner(s):**

Donald and Janice SCHIEFERLE

Property – APN# 108011004

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

1

2 **9 - NARRATIVE:**

3

4 On Wednesday, November 6, 2024, at approximately 8:51 AM, a fire was  
5 reported from ██████████ Balcom Canyon Road in the community of Somis. Preslie  
6 WILLIAMS called 911 and reported smoke visible from the hilltop northeast of her  
7 location. WILLIAMS indicated smoke was emanating from "the same area as the fire  
8 from last week." Two other callers phoned 911 and reported similar information (See  
9 attachment #2). The Ventura Fire Communications Center (FCC) dispatched multiple  
10 units as part of an augmented first-alarm brush fire assignment at approximately 8:53  
11 AM (See attachment #2). The first fire suppression units arrived on scene at  
12 approximately 9:04 AM. These units reported a large, fast-moving, wind-driven fire with  
13 an immediate impact to residences on Balcom Canyon Road and requested additional  
14 units. The fire was named the "Mountain" Fire, and a large contingent of resources was  
15 ordered for fire suppression and containment. Within thirty minutes of the first report, the  
16 fire was estimated at 250 acres, moving to the southwest in alignment with the  
17 prevailing Santa Ana winds. The fire ignited under extreme weather conditions, with the  
18 fire area under a Red Flag Warning issued by the National Weather Service on  
19 November 4, 2024. The National Weather Service also issued a "Particularly Dangerous  
20 Situation" (PDS) for the fire area on November 5, 2024 (see attachment #22). Within  
21 five and a half hours of the first report, the Mountain Fire exceeded 10,000 acres  
22 burned, primarily due to the extreme weather conditions. Ultimately, the Mountain Fire  
23 burned 19,904 acres and destroyed 243 structures. An additional 126 structures were  
24 damaged. The fire was fully contained on Wednesday, November 27, 2024.

25 I was on duty as Investigator 12, a fire investigator with jurisdiction over the  
26 Ventura County Fire Department (VCFD) service area. I was on duty as an additional  
27 investigator due to an augmented staffing pattern implemented by VCFD. I was  
28 dispatched to the fire as part of the initial alarm at 8:53 AM. Upon notification of the fire,  
29 I logged into the ALERTCalifornia camera network to view the fire. I utilized the South  
30 Mountain 1 camera, which was facing the fire area and located approximately three

1  
2 miles northwest of the fire. I observed a large volume of smoke lying over to the  
3 southwest, being pushed by the wind. Having viewed the Balcom Fire from the same  
4 camera on October 30, I noticed the smoke from this fire appeared to be coming from  
5 the same location.

6 I arrived at the fire area near Balcom Canyon Road and Bixby Road at  
7 approximately 9:25 AM. Looking west on Balcom Canyon Road, I could see a large  
8 volume of smoke and fire north and south of Balcom Canyon Road. I observed strong,  
9 sustained winds from the north/northeast. I was contacted by CAL FIRE Battalion Chief  
10 Ryan WALLACE, who offered to send additional investigators to assist. WALLACE told  
11 me it would be several hours before they arrived. I also requested WALLACE contact  
12 Element Security to assist in securing the fire's origin area.

13 To locate the fire's origin area, I drove to the address of the first reporting party  
14 (RP), which was given as [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road. This location was near the  
15 intersection of Balcom Canyon Road and Bradley Road, approximately two-thirds of a  
16 mile west of my location. As I drove west on Balcom Canyon, I observed a large volume  
17 of smoke and fire crossing the road from the north to the south.

18 While I attempted to locate [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon, I accessed [REDACTED] Balcom  
19 Canyon Road instead. While accessing this location, I observed pockets of vegetation  
20 still burning along the driveway and in the orchards surrounding the property. I also  
21 observed the fire front had already passed through this location, and most of the  
22 vegetation on the hillside north and east of this property had already burned and was  
23 charred and smoking. Looking southwest from this location, I observed fire and thick,  
24 black smoke moving in alignment with the winds in the area. Based on these  
25 observations, I considered it possible the fire started in the hills northeast of my location.

26 I called the first RP listed on the dispatch record, who resides at [REDACTED] Balcom  
27 Canyon Road. The RP, who identified herself as Preslie (later identified as Preslie  
28 WILLIAMS) sounded hurried and out of breath. WILLIAMS told me she was actively  
29 evacuating because the fire was impacting her residence. I told WILLIAMS to get to a  
30 safe place but asked her to quickly describe what she saw. WILLIAMS told me she

1  
2 smelled smoke and went outside to see smoke coming from the hills northeast of her  
3 home. WILLIAMS also told me the fire "came from the same place as the fire last week."  
4 I told WILLIAMS someone would contact her later when she was in a safe location and  
5 ended the call so she could evacuate.

6 I was aware a fire occurred in the general area a week prior, but I did not know  
7 the exact location. I contacted VCFD Investigator Christine SAQUI, who was en route to  
8 the fire to assist me. SAQUI was at the "first fire" on October 30, 2024, and knew how to  
9 access the area. I met SAQUI at the intersection of Balcom Canyon and Bixby Road. I  
10 followed SAQUI north on Bixby Road for approximately one mile, where we turned left  
11 onto a dirt road that led up a hill to the origin area of the fire on October 30, 2024.

12 We arrived at the site of the "first fire", at approximately 10:30 AM. This fire was  
13 named the Balcom Fire when it started on October 30. SAQUI was at the scene of this  
14 fire with VCFD Investigator STANLEY on October 30 and 31. SAQUI provided me with  
15 a briefing on the Balcom Fire and told me what areas were burned and what areas were  
16 not. SAQUI pointed out the Balcom Fire had been surrounded by a dozer line, and a  
17 retardant drop from an air tanker secured the heel.

18 While viewing the Overall Fire Area (OFA) from the Balcom Fire, I observed the  
19 charred remains of a tractor inside the burned area. SAQUI told me the tractor caught  
20 fire while conducting a brush-clearing operation, igniting the fire on October 30. SAQUI  
21 told me the tractor was in the same location when she came out for the Balcom Fire.  
22 See attachment #4 for the origin and cause report pertaining to the fire on October 30.

23 While evaluating the OFA of the Balcom Fire, I observed several areas smoking  
24 and smoldering within the burned area from the Balcom Fire. I also observed low-  
25 intensity backing fire moving downhill against the wind west of the burned area outside  
26 the dozer line. I observed smoke that appeared to be coming from underneath the  
27 tractor. I photographed the scene as it appeared on my arrival, as did SAQUI (See  
28 photographs P-RM-001 through P-RM-022 and attachment #17). For information, the  
29 timestamp on photographs P-RM-001 through P-RM-029 is incorrect, ahead by one  
30 hour due to the daylight savings adjustment three days prior. SAQUI and I decided to

1  
2 evaluate the source of smoke from the tractor. SAQUI and I approached from the north  
3 and observed glowing, smoldering material and flaming combustion underneath the  
4 tractor near the rear wheels and axle. Upon closer inspection, SAQUI and I determined  
5 the burning material was rubber from the burned rear tractor tires from the Balcom Fire.  
6 As we evaluated the burning material, we saw embers circulating in the wind  
7 underneath the rear of the tractor (See photographs P-RM-011 through P-RM-019, as  
8 well as attachment #17).

9 After viewing the area near the tractor, I walked the Balcom Fire perimeter to  
10 orient myself to the area. I walked the ridgetop road along the east perimeter of the  
11 Balcom Fire all the way around to the southwest perimeter. As I walked the ridgetop, I  
12 continued to observe extreme weather conditions. Wind gusts along the ridgetop were  
13 so intense I was constantly fighting to stand still. As I walked the south perimeter of the  
14 Balcom Fire, I observed a downslope area south of the fire that was smoking and  
15 charred. At the base of the slope, I observed a single-wide trailer fully involved in fire,  
16 which was later determined to be at [REDACTED] Bixby Road. As I approached the southwest  
17 perimeter, I looked downslope to the southwest and observed [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon  
18 Road, where I had initially gone to locate the origin area of the fire. I noticed I was  
19 standing near the area I had identified as a possible general origin area one hour prior.  
20 After making these observations, I noted no smoke, fire, or burned areas looking  
21 northwest clockwise to the southeast. From this area, all fire travel was to the south and  
22 southwest. These observations told me the fire likely originated near this area. I  
23 established that the burned area from the Balcom Fire and the downslope areas to the  
24 south and southwest would be my preliminary General Origin Area (GOA) and would  
25 require further evaluation by the Investigation Team (IT).

26 After making this evaluation, I returned to the east perimeter. STANLEY joined  
27 SAQUI and me. Fire activity in the area west and north of the GOA began to increase. I  
28 noticed a bulldozer working to contain the fire west of the GOA. STANLEY told me the  
29 dozer operator was Parker LYNCH, the son of Donny LYNCH. P. LYNCH put in multiple  
30 dozer lines but was unsuccessful in stopping the fire's northern progression. SAQUI,

1  
2 STANLEY, and I remained at the scene to document the fire's spread while awaiting  
3 assistance from CAL FIRE.

4 At 10:44 AM, the fire was actively burning toward the southwest. VCFD Battalion  
5 Chief Lance AUSTIN was operating as Branch 2 in the area of Los Angeles Avenue and  
6 Aggen Road, near the community of Somis. AUSTIN was facing south on Aggen Road  
7 when he witnessed a spot fire start mid-slope on the north aspect of the Camarillo Hills.  
8 AUSTIN reported the spot and drove to the area to manage suppression actions. This  
9 spot immediately impacted multiple residences in the Camarillo Heights, Las Posas  
10 Estates, and Sterling Hills neighborhoods. VCFD Battalion Chief Gene FONG also  
11 witnessed the start of the spot fire and provided a statement (see attachment #18).  
12 Initial mapping estimates placed the spot fire approximately two miles in front of the  
13 main body of fire. In the interest of diligence, the IT sent members to evaluate the origin  
14 area of the Camarillo start. The IT later confirmed this start was a result of ember cast  
15 from the Mountain Fire (see attachments #11 and #13).

16 WALLACE and CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Joe GREEN arrived at the scene at  
17 approximately 6:00 PM. WALLACE and GREEN were briefed on the circumstances  
18 thus far. WALLACE and GREEN requested additional resources to assist with  
19 the Mountain Fire investigation. At approximately 6:15 PM, I received a text message  
20 from Andy VANSCIVER, the VCFD's Public Information Officer (PIO). VANSCIVER  
21 forwarded a text message and photographs indicating the Mountain Fire may have  
22 started near a power pole on Balcom Canyon Road. It was later determined this  
23 information came from Trey ROBERTSON, a volunteer photographer with VCFD (see  
24 attachment #22). Having driven Balcom Canyon early in the incident, I was aware the  
25 lines on this pole were up and intact when the fire started. I captured a video of the pole  
26 in question at 10:10 AM as I drove through the area (see attachment #22, video  
27 IMG\_1052.mov). SAQUI, STANLEY, and I departed the scene around 7:45 PM. The  
28 Mountain Fire scene was held by WALLACE and GREEN until they were relieved by  
29 armed security personnel from Element Security Services. The scene was held between  
30 November 6, 2024, at approximately 9:15 PM and November 12, 2024, at

1  
2 approximately 2:00 PM (see attachment #23).

3  
4 NOVEMBER 7, 2024

5 On November 7, 2024, I arrived at Ventura County Fire Department  
6 Headquarters to secure a working area for the inbound Investigation Team (IT). Once  
7 members of the IT arrived, they were briefed on the status of the investigation. It was  
8 determined Fire Captain Specialist (FCS) Robert JOHNSON, GREEN and I would  
9 conduct the origin and cause portion of the investigation. We departed Headquarters  
10 and arrived at the previously identified GOA. We accessed the area from the southwest  
11 to evaluate fire damage. We drove to [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road and accessed the fire  
12 area through the north fence line of the property, arriving at approximately 2:00 PM. We  
13 observed macro-indicators, such as foliage freeze and angle of char, which indicated  
14 advancing fire on the row of eucalyptus trees along the fence line. As we progressed  
15 west along the row of eucalyptus trees, fire pattern indicators indicated lower-intensity  
16 lateral fire movement. We walked east along the fence line until we were north of [REDACTED]  
17 Bixby Road and directly south of the fire area from the Balcom Fire. We observed fire  
18 pattern indicators on the slope looking north from the fence line. These patterns  
19 indicated areas of high-intensity and low-intensity burning. After evaluating fire pattern  
20 indicators, GREEN, JOHNSON, and I confirmed the location of the GOA. We departed  
21 the scene at approximately 5:00 PM.

22 While we evaluated the scene, CAL FIRE FCS Bennet MILLOY and Investigator  
23 STANLEY contacted Mike and Barbara KIWITT, who reside at [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon  
24 Road. Mike and Barbara told MILLOY they were not home at the time of the fire but  
25 were notified of the fire by their housekeeper, who was working on their property. During  
26 the interview, Mike told MILLOY he was home when the Balcom Fire started and went  
27 to the scene with a shovel to extinguish the fire (see attachment #10).

28 MILLOY and STANLEY also interviewed Guillermo VENEGAS. VENEGAS is the  
29 owner of the tractor that caused the Balcom Fire. VENEGAS told MILLOY he went to  
30 the site of the Balcom Fire on October 31, 2024, at approximately 4:30 PM. He returned



1

2 to the scene with his insurance broker, David ESPINOSA, to file a claim on the burned  
3 tractor. ESPINOSA took photographs of the tractor (see attachment #10). VENEGAS  
4 and ESPINOSA told MILLOY there was no smoke or fire when they went to the site.  
5 VENEGAS returned to the site with his father on November 1, 2024, at approximately  
6 2:00-3:00 PM. VENEGAS told MILLOY there was no smoke or fire at the site while they  
7 were there (see attachment #10).

8 WALLACE and CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Tom CRASS conducted interviews with  
9 multiple individuals at [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road, known as City Farm. This  
10 address is due south of the GOA of the fire. WALLACE and CRASS contacted William  
11 EDWARDS and Nigel EDWARDS, both of whom were at the property when the fire  
12 started. William and Nigel told WALLACE and CRASS they were observing the wind on  
13 the north side of the property when they observed smoke coming from the top of the  
14 ridge near the identified GOA. Nigel said the fire was near the same location as the  
15 Balcom Fire. Nigel told them he watched fire come from the ridgetop and spread  
16 southwest with the wind. WALLACE and CRASS contacted other witnesses from the  
17 City Farm who were present at the time of the fire. These witnesses were Patti  
18 GRUBMAN, Manuel HERNANDEZ, Hugo VILLASEÑOR, and Jesus VIRRUETA  
19 (see attachment #12).

20

#### 21 NOVEMBER 8, 2024

22 On November 8, 2024, GREEN, JOHNSON, and I returned to continue the origin  
23 and cause investigation. We arrived at [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road at approximately  
24 8:15 AM. Before entering the GOA, I took overall photographs of the area (see  
25 photographs P-RM-033 through P-RM-075).

26 We followed the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) FI-210  
27 methodology during the course of our investigation. We utilized red-colored flags to  
28 mark advancing fire indicators, yellow-colored flags to mark lateral/flanking indicators,  
29 blue-colored flags to mark backing indicators, and green-colored flags to mark  
30 items/areas of interest.

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We identified advancing indicators by evaluating the angle of char and foliage freeze on the eucalyptus trees. We entered the GOA near 34.321547 degrees latitude and -118.967017 degrees longitude. We entered the advancing side of the fire and worked our way in an "S" type pattern, locating a transition zone or flank, traversing across the advancing run, or head of the fire, to the opposing flank, and then back. We marked fire pattern indicators as we observed them. Using this method, we were able to identify an advancing run of fire which originated at the top of the ridge, south of the area of the Balcom Fire. This run of fire progressed to the southwest in alignment with the wind and impacted [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road.

After identifying the advancing run to the southwest, we crossed over the ridgetop to evaluate fire patterns in the area north of [REDACTED] Bixby Rd, which is due south from the area of the Balcom Fire. We identified an advancing run of fire coming from the bottom of a bowl near the fence line. This run was identified by a "V-pattern" (See photograph P-RM-177). We worked from south to north, evaluating fire pattern indicators as we progressed. Based on our evaluation of fire pattern indicators, we arrived at areas of low-intensity burning at the top of the ridge, south of the ridge top dozer line. We established this area as a Specific Origin Area (SOA). Within the SOA, we identified multiple advancing runs consistent with multiple ignition areas. We visually inspected the SOA but did not locate any items of interest or evidence. We formed a working hypothesis that this fire was ignited by wind-born embers from within the burned area of the Balcom Fire.

While we processed the fire scene, MILLOY and STANLEY contacted Marvin FRANKLIN at [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon Road. FRANKLIN told MILLOY he was in his home and smelled smoke. He went to his front door and observed smoke coming from the area the IT identified as the GOA. FRANKLIN called 911 to report the fire at 8:53 AM (see attachment #10).

MILLOY and STANLEY contacted Parker LYNCH and Donny LYNCH on Balcom Canyon Road. Parker and Donny described their actions during both the Balcom and Mountain Fires. Both told MILLOY they were not in the area when either

1  
2 fire started but were notified of the fires after ignition. Parker spoke to operating his  
3 private dozer at the scene of both fires to try and contain them. Donny spoke about his  
4 actions during both fires. Donny also told MILLOY of an event on November 3, 2024,  
5 where he observed John KIWITT shooting on his father's property at ██████ Balcom  
6 Canyon Road. Donny described being in the area of the Balcom Fire on November 3,  
7 2024, driving the ridge-top road in his four-wheeler side-by-side north of the KIWITT  
8 property and hearing bullets whiz by his head, causing him to duck for cover. Donny told  
9 MILLOY he stopped at the Balcom Fire location and did not see any smoke, fire, or  
10 indications of heat coming from anywhere in the Balcom Fire area  
11 (see attachment #10).

12 MILLOY and STANLEY contacted Preslie WILLIAMS at ██████ Balcom Canyon  
13 Road. WILLIAMS was the original RP who I contacted shortly after the fire started.  
14 WILLIAMS told MILLOY she observed the fire from her residence southwest of the GOA  
15 of the fire. WILLIAMS called 911 to report the fire. WILLIAMS also observed the Balcom  
16 Fire from her residence on October 30 and stated the smoke she observed on  
17 November 6 was coming from the same area (see attachment #10).

18 WALLACE and CRASS contacted individuals at ██████ Balcom Canyon Road.  
19 Julie RHOADS was home at the time of the fire and saw fire coming from the ridge  
20 north of her property. Talesia DOBIN, Doug BLUMENTHAL, and Alexis RODRIGUEZ,  
21 and Arnoldo RODRIGUEZ-GONZALEZ were all on the property when the fire started  
22 and saw smoke and/or fire coming from the ridgetop north of the property  
23 (see attachment #12).

24 WALLACE and CRASS contacted Thomas GOGSWELL at ██████ Balcom Canyon  
25 Road. GOGSWELL told them he was home at the time of the fire and saw fire near the  
26 row of eucalyptus trees and water tank north of ██████ Bixby Road (see attachment #12).

27 WALLACE and CRASS contacted Eusebio VILLANUEVA-ROJAS at ██████ Bixby  
28 Road. VILLANUEVA-ROJAS told them he was not home at the time of the fire, but his  
29 daughter and her husband were. VILLANUEVA-ROJAS gave contact information for his  
30 daughter to WALLACE and CRASS (see attachment #12).

1

2 NOVEMBER 9, 2024

3 On November 9, 2024, we returned to the scene to complete the origin and  
4 cause investigation. We arrived at the scene at approximately 10:00 AM. We completed  
5 our evaluation of the scene and took photographs of the overall scene with flags in  
6 place showing the fire's progression (See photographs P-RM-076 to P-RM-178). I took  
7 additional photographs of the tractor in the area of the Balcom Fire  
8 (see photographs P-RM-179 to P-RM-250).

9

10 NOVEMBER 10, 2024

11 On November 10, 2024, we returned to the scene to assist the CAL FIRE Survey  
12 Team as they captured the scene utilizing LiDAR survey equipment. The survey team  
13 also captured aerial images of the scene utilizing an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)  
14 (see attachment #28). We departed the scene at approximately 2:30 PM.

15 WALLACE and CRASS contacted Rosario ROSAS at [REDACTED] Balcom Canyon  
16 Road. ROSAS is the housekeeper who was working at the KIWITT'S property on the  
17 day of the fire. ROSAS contacted the KIWITT'S and told them there was a fire on the  
18 hills behind the house. ROSAS told WALLACE and CRASS she was cleaning the  
19 bedroom and saw smoke. ROSAS continued cleaning and observed the smoke get  
20 much worse. ROSAS went to the front door and observed smoke all around the home.  
21 ROSAS called the KIWITT'S and told them of the fire. She also took photographs and  
22 videos with her phone, which she provided to WALLACE (see attachment #12).

23 WALLACE and CRASS traveled to interview Jose MORALES-ESQUIVEL.  
24 MORALES-ESQUIVEL was operating the tractor when the Balcom Fire started on  
25 October 30. MORALES-ESQUIVEL said he was clearing vegetation when he observed  
26 fire coming from the tractor between the steering wheel and the engine. MORALES-  
27 ESQUIVEL moved the tractor to an area of cleared vegetation and stopped it.  
28 MORALES-ESQUIVEL called VENEGAS to tell him of the fire and did not call 911.  
29 MORALES-ESQUIVEL had no tools, water or fire extinguisher with him and had no  
30 means to suppress the fire. MORALES-ESQUIVEL ran back to his truck to grab a fire

1  
2 extinguisher, but his truck was at the bottom of the hill and far from the fire area.  
3 MORALES-ESQUIVEL told them he did not notice any warning lights or mechanical  
4 problems before the fire. MORALES-ESQUIVEL told them he services the tractor every  
5 three to four hours when he is operating it. He also completes daily checks before using  
6 the tractor. MORALES-ESQUIVEL told them Venegas Farming keeps the service  
7 records for the tractor at their office. MORALES-ESQUIVEL told them he is the  
8 manager for Venegas Farming and has worked for Venegas Farming for approximately  
9 twenty-four years (see attachment #12).

10 WALLACE and CRASS returned to [REDACTED] Bixby Road to interview Juan Pablo  
11 HERNANDEZ and Karla VILLANUEVA. Both were at the residence when the fire  
12 started. HERNANDEZ told them he went outside to investigate after VILLANUEVA  
13 mentioned smelling smoke. HERNANDEZ went outside and saw smoke and fire coming  
14 down the hill north of the residence. VILLANUEVA took photographs and videos with  
15 her phone and provided them to WALLACE and CRASS (see attachment #12).

16  
17 NOVEMBER 11, 2024

18 On November 11, 2024, members of the IT met with Jeremy  
19 CHRISTOFFERSON, a Fire Equipment Manager II employed by CAL FIRE.  
20 CHRISTOFFERSON was brought to the scene as a subject matter expert to evaluate  
21 the overall condition of the tractor in the burn area of the Balcom Fire (see attachment  
22 #14). Prior to the IT's arrival, we received a call from the Element Security Officer  
23 securing the scene. He told us he contacted an unauthorized individual attempting to  
24 access the origin area. The individual stated he was "hired by the County of Ventura to  
25 conduct an investigation into the cause of the fire." The individual was identified as Clint  
26 CARMAN, a private fire investigator with Carman and Associates Fire Investigation.  
27 The IT confirmed the County of Ventura hired no external investigators. CARMAN was  
28 immediately asked to exit the area and complied. It was later determined that CARMAN  
29 was hired by a private law firm to evaluate the cause of the fire.

1  
2 The IT also received information from Southern California Edison (SCE) that  
3 claims were made alleging their equipment was the cause of the Mountain Fire.  
4 Specifically, private investigators alleged the fire started at or near the pole identified by  
5 Trey ROBERTSON on November 6. The IT investigated these claims and ultimately  
6 found them invalid (see attachments #10, #17 and #24). The closest SCE equipment  
7 was located approximately 1,000 feet northeast of the GOA. This equipment consisted  
8 of the 220kV Moorpark-Santa Clara transmission circuits. A visual inspection of this  
9 equipment revealed no indicators of broken or failed equipment. Additionally, the  
10 vegetation surrounding this equipment was unburned when I arrived at the scene. I  
11 watched this area burn on November 6, 2024, at approximately 2:10 PM  
12 (see photographs P-RM-251 through P-RM-287 and videos).

13  
14 NOVEMBER 12, 2024

15 On November 12, 2024, members of the IT returned to the scene to collect the  
16 tractor as evidence, arriving at approximately 8:15 AM. The IT utilized the VCFD  
17 Construction Unit and its equipment to remove the tractor. VCFD Fire Equipment  
18 Operator Scott PRICE arrived at the site with two VCFD Fire Control Workers, Hayden  
19 MINER, and Chasen HERMAN, to assist. PRICE determined the best course of action  
20 would be to utilize an excavator to lift the tractor and carry it out. PRICE, HERMAN, and  
21 MINER used chains to secure the flail shredder to the tractor, then additional chains to  
22 lift the tractor suspended from the excavator bucket. The tractor was carried from the  
23 site to Bixby Road, where it was secured to a trailer. After the tractor was removed,  
24 members of the IT searched the area underneath the tractor for any items of  
25 evidence/interest. The tractor was driven to the VCFD's Regional Training Center  
26 (RTC) under escort from members of the IT. It was placed in a caged, locked area for  
27 safekeeping. Locks on this area were changed so only members of the IT had the  
28 combination for access (see photographs P-RM-296 to P-RM-333). Venegas Farms  
29 was provided a property receipt indicating the tractor was taken as evidence. They were  
30 also provided a preservation hold to retain and protect any documents pertaining to the

1  
2 purchase, use, or maintenance of the Kubota tractor or flail shredder that started the  
3 Balcom Fire (see attachment #4).

4 During this, MILLOY contacted William (Bill) LYNCH. William told MILLOY he  
5 was visiting Donny LYNCH and was with him on November 3 when they took the four-  
6 wheeler side-by-side up to the Balcom Fire site. William corroborated Donny's version  
7 of events on November 3, referencing the shooting on the KIWITT property. William  
8 also confirmed he did not see any smoke or fire coming from the Balcom Fire area.  
9 William told MILLOY he was a retired Deputy Chief from the Glendale Fire Department  
10 and did not see anything concerning at the site (see attachment #10).

11 SAQUI was contacted by Robert RAMOS, Director of Risk and Claims  
12 Management for SCE. RAMOS told SAQUI SCE would be filing a notice with the  
13 California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), as a claim was made that their  
14 equipment may have been involved in the fire. SAQUI requested RAMOS provide  
15 electrical data and smart meter information for the 220kV & 16kV circuits (Moorpark –  
16 Santa Clara Nos. 1 and 2 supported by the structure identified as M19T2, and a section  
17 of the Rainbow 16kV circuit west of Bixby Road near ██████ Bixby Road). SAQUI also  
18 requested smart meter data for ██████ Bixby Road (see attachments #17 and #24).

19  
20 NOVEMBER 13, 2024

21 On Wednesday, November 13, 2024, Adam LEWIS was contacted by MILLOY.  
22 LEWIS is a patrolman for SCE. LEWIS was at a site on Bixby Road, monitoring the SCE  
23 transmission lines due to the red flag warning. LEWIS had a direct visual of the OFA of  
24 the Balcom Fire and observed the start of smoke and flames at the top of the ridge  
25 where the IT identified the SOA (see attachment #10).

1

2 NOVEMBER 14, 2024

3 On Thursday, November 14, 2024, Joshua GONZALES was contacted by  
4 WALLACE. Gonzales works for Ventura County Roads, and was in the area of Balcom  
5 Canyon Road and Stockton Road doing wind patrol when he heard radio traffic of the  
6 fire. GONZALES responded to the area of Balcom Canyon Road and Bradley Road to  
7 remove road signs to improve fire department access to the area (see attachment #12).

8

9 NOVEMBER 15, 2024

10 On November 15, 2024, JOHNSON and GREEN contacted Donald and Janice  
11 SCHIEFERLE. The SCHIEFERLE'S own the land on which the Balcom and Mountain  
12 fires ignited. Donald told them he raises cattle and has roughly 1,400 acres in Balcom  
13 Canyon. Donald told them he uses the west side of the property but leases the east side  
14 to Rod PECK. PECK has full access to the leased area of the property. The lease does  
15 not permit PECK to "sub-lease" any portion of the property, which is written in the  
16 contract. Donald was aware of the Balcom Fire on October 30 but did not believe the  
17 fire occurred on his property.

18 JOHNSON and GREEN took Donald to the property where the fire occurred.  
19 Upon arriving at the site, Donald confirmed he owned the land. Donald told them  
20 PECK'S lease covered property north of the location of the fire, but not the area of the  
21 fire itself. Donald told JOHNSON and GREEN that he had not given anyone permission  
22 to be on the land where the fire occurred. Donald also told them no one was granted  
23 permission to do any land or vegetation modifications on the property  
24 (see attachments #11 and #15).

25 WALLACE contacted PECK via telephone. PECK confirmed he leases the  
26 property from SCHIEFERLE on APN 108011004. PECK verified his lease is for the  
27 northern portion of the property, north of the "bluff cliffs". PECK runs cattle on the  
28 property and has several people who tend to them. The area where the Balcom Fire  
29 started is south of the "bluff cliffs." PECK confirmed he is not allowed to sub-lease the  
30 property. PECK also confirmed no one is doing any land modifications or vegetation



1  
2 clearing on the property he leases (see attachment #9 and #11).

3 WALLACE contacted Michael MCALLISTER. WALLACE asked MCALLISTER if  
4 he had a lease or sub-lease agreement for the portion of the property where the Balcom  
5 Fire started. MCALLISTER told WALLACE he did not have any agreements for the  
6 area. MCALLISTER told WALLACE he only runs cattle on the property. MCALLISTER  
7 does not have any formal agreement with PECK to run cattle on the property, but  
8 MCALLISTER and "a few other guys" run cattle on PECK'S lease because PECK does  
9 not currently have any cattle. MCALLISTER told WALLACE that Dean THRASHER and  
10 Tim MARTINEZ also have cattle on PECK'S property. MCALLISTER told WALLACE  
11 there are no contracts or exchange of money to use the land. The only agreement in  
12 place is to repair any fences if they are damaged by the cattle (see attachment #12).

13  
14 NOVEMBER 19, 2024

15 On November 19, 2024, members of the IT returned to the VCFD RTC to secure  
16 the tractor for evidence storage. The tractor was secured in the caged area upon our  
17 arrival. The IT chose to move the tractor into a locked and secure bunker at the RTC.  
18 To fit the tractor in the bunker, it was necessary to remove the flail shredder attachment  
19 from the rear of the tractor. Three Fire Control Workers at the RTC brought tools and  
20 detached the flail shredder under the supervision of the IT. The tractor was moved to  
21 the bunker via forklift. Wheeled dollies were attached to the wheels of the tractor and  
22 secured with straps to facilitate movement. The tractor was moved into the bunker,  
23 which was locked and secured by a motorized garage door opener that is key-operated.  
24 VCFD staff at the RTC provided me with the only keys to the bunker. These keys were  
25 secured in a safe to which only four VCFD investigators have access. The flail shredder  
26 was secured on a pallet and moved into an additional bunker for storage via forklift. This  
27 bunker is secured by a motorized garage door opener that is key-operated. Only four  
28 VCFD investigators have keys to access the bunker  
29 (see photographs P-RM-334 to P-RM-359).

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**POSSIBLE CAUSES:**

ARSON – The origin area of the Mountain Fire occurred on private property that is accessible via unimproved ridgetop dozer line. A search of the SOA did not reveal any remains of matches or improvised incendiary devices. There were no reports of individuals seen in the area of the fire or leaving the area of the fire. Donny LYNCH has not reported any previous fires except for the Balcom Fire a week prior. There were no reports of suspicious activity in the area prior to the fire. Adam LEWIS had a view of the SOA from his location and did not observe any persons or vehicles in the area of the fire when he observed the fire in its early stages. I considered and eliminated arson as a cause of the fire.

GLASS REFRACTION – Broken, clear glass was located in the GOA of the Balcom Fire. This area was located south of the established SOA of the Mountain Fire. This glass appeared to be from a vehicle headlight or marker light. The light lens was broken into multiple small, flat pieces. This glass was dirty and dull. Documents I have reviewed indicate curved or convex glass is the most likely to start a fire. Such an event is an extremely rare occurrence. Flat, broken glass lacking magnification or reflective properties will not start a fire. This glass was located in an area that had burned previously and was not in a receptive fuel bed. Additionally, this glass was located outside the established SOA. I considered and eliminated glass refraction as a cause of this fire.

ELECTRICAL POWER – The closest electrical power equipment was approximately 1,000 feet northeast of the SOA. A visual inspection revealed no evidence of failed or broken equipment. Additionally, witnesses in the area observed the first smoke and fire away from the power equipment. Vegetation surrounding the equipment did not burn until several hours into the fire. There was no other power equipment near the identified SOA. I considered and eliminated electrical power equipment as a cause of the fire.

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2 FIREARMS/SHOOTING – Metal targets were observed on the property at ██████ Balcom  
3 Canyon Road. These targets were approximately 900 feet west of the SOA and well into  
4 the identified advancing run. Fire pattern indicators near the targets were indicative of  
5 advancing fire. Multiple witnesses were questioned and denied hearing gunfire before  
6 the fire. Preslie WILLIAMS told the IT it was common to hear shooting in the community  
7 and was confident she heard no gunfire before the fire. Additionally, none of the  
8 KIWITT'S, who own the property, were home when the fire started. No bullets,  
9 fragments, shell casings or targets were observed near the SOA. I considered and  
10 eliminated shooting as a cause of the fire.

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12 EQUIPMENT – LEWIS was able to view the area where the Balcom Fire started and  
13 told the IT he saw no vehicles or equipment operating in the area when he observed the  
14 Mountain Fire in its early stages. The burned remains of a modified Kubota tractor were  
15 observed in the area. This vehicle was in operation on October 30, 2024, when the  
16 operator, MORALES-ESQUIVEL, observed fire coming from the right side of the engine  
17 compartment near the steering wheel. The tractor burned and spread to the nearby  
18 vegetation, igniting the Balcom Fire. It was determined the use and negligent operation  
19 of the Kubota tractor and flail shredder, combined with the lack of available suppression  
20 tools was the start of the Balcom Fire (see attachment #4). Ultimately, embedded  
21 embers from the Balcom Fire ignited the Mountain Fire.

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**OPINIONS and CONCLUSION:**

The following opinions and conclusions are based on my training, experience, education, observations, supporting documentation, supplemental reports, audio/video recordings, and evidence collected.

The Balcom Fire occurred on October 30, 2024, and burned 1.8 acres of vegetation under mild weather conditions, including higher relative humidity and single-digit windspeeds. VCFD suppression crews extinguished and contained the fire using standard, established tactics and strategies. This containment included a dozer line around the perimeter of the fire, as well as a 4,000-gallon retardant drop from an aerial tanker requested on the initial dispatch. This drop secured the heel of the Balcom Fire. Individuals visited the fire scene multiple times between October 30 and November 6. These individuals confirmed they saw no smoke, fire, or indicators of heat near the tractor or in the burned area of the Balcom Fire. Weather conditions in the week following the Balcom Fire were notable for moderate temperatures, higher humidity, and lower wind speeds. These conditions inhibited any smoldering in the origin area.

On November 4, 2024, the National Weather Service issued a Red Flag Warning for the morning of November 6. On November 5, 2024, the NWS upgraded the Red Flag Warning to a PDS Red Flag Warning. A PDS declaration highlights exceptional fire weather conditions considered rare and/or especially impactful to the firefighting community. The last issued PDS for Southern California occurred in 2020. At approximately 3:00 AM on November 6, winds at the site increased, and relative humidity decreased as the Red Flag Event materialized. Sustained wind speeds in excess of twenty miles per hour, with gusts exceeding forty miles per hour, were recorded in the fire area starting at approximately 5:30 AM. These conditions exposed and stoked smoldering material located under the rear of the tractor. The smoldering material generated embers, which were carried through the burned area of the Balcom Fire due to the extreme wind conditions. These embers traveled through the burned area, over the dozer containment line, and became established in vegetation on the

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south side of the ridgetop.

 4/1/25  
Signature Date

**Ryan MILLER**  
**Fire/Arson Investigator**  
**Ventura County Fire Department**

1

2 **10 - ATTACHMENTS:**

3

- 4 1 - NFIRS  
5 2 - Incident Detail Report and 911 Calls  
6 3 - Perimeter map with APN's  
7 4 - Investigation Report - Balcom Fire, 24-0092680  
8 5 - DINS  
9 6 - Venegas Farming, LLC Business Report  
10 7 - Lynch Land & Cattle, LLC Business Report  
11 8 - AG Land Clearing, LLC Business Report  
12 9 - SCHIEFERILE lease agreement with PECK  
13 10 - Supplemental Investigation Reports and Data – MILLOY  
14 11 - Supplemental Investigation Reports and Data – JOHNSON  
15 12 - Supplemental Investigation Reports and Data – WALLACE and CRASS  
16 13 - Supplemental Investigation Reports and Data – RUSSELL and LIBBY  
17 14 - Supplemental Investigation Reports and Data – CHRISTOFFERSON  
18 15 - Supplemental Investigation Reports and Data – GREEN  
19 16 - Supplemental Investigation Reports and Data – STANLEY  
20 17 - Supplemental Investigation Reports and Data – SAQUI  
21 18 - Supplemental Investigation Reports and Data – ALTON  
22 19 - Evidence Log  
23 20 - Ventura County Air Unit Photos and Videos  
24 21 - ALERTCalifornia and OES Camera Footage  
25 22 - Weather and Lightning Data  
26 23 - Element Security Log  
27 24 - SCE Data  
28 25 - Kubota Tractor Purchase Order and Manual  
29 26 - IAP's  
30 27 - Assessor's Parcel Number 1080110045 Map

- 1
- 2 28 - LiDAR
- 3 29 - CAL FIRE Complete Axon Report
- 4 30 - Hard Drive
- 5 50 - MILLER Photos P-RM-001 to P-RM-380, Plus Videos