

# 19 firefighters die in Arizona wildland blaze

**Publisher's note:** *The Angora Peak crew from Lake Valley Fire Protection District is in Arizona on standby and the Lake Tahoe U.S. Forest Service crew is en route.*

**By Jackee Coe and Laurie Merrill, Arizona Republic**

Arizona State forestry officials confirmed Sunday night that 19 firefighters have died in the Yarnell Hill Fire that has ripped through half of the town, sent residents to Prescott for safety and given the state its biggest ever wildfire firefighter tragedy.

"It's a dark day," said Mike Reichling, Arizona State Forestry Division spokesman.

Reichling said the 19 firefighters were found in area that also had 19 fire shelters deployed. Some of those found were inside a shelter, which is typically used as a last resort to withstand the fire as it blows over. Some of the crew members were found outside the shelters.



Homes burn near Yarnell, Ariz., on June 30.

Photo/David

Kadlubowski/Arizona Republic

Officials said 18 of the deceased were members of the Prescott Hotshots team. It's unknown what fire crew the 19th firefighter was a member of. The firefighters are part of a team that is typically sent in first to help cutoff the fire, Reichling said.

"They were up there doing what they normally do," he said.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, this is the worst loss of life of firefighters since 1933 when 25 died in a blaze in L.A.'s Griffith Park.

Reichling expects about half of the town's 500 homes to be decimated by the fire that is currently burning with zero containment and has grown well past 2,000 acres.

Mike Reichling, Arizona State Forestry Division spokesman, said the fire is quickly reaching "Type 1" status and that federal authorities will be brought in to help Monday morning. Reichling expects the manpower dedicated to the fire to reach about 400 people as federal help arrives.

Fire officials Sunday afternoon ordered the evacuation of Yarnell and parts of Peoples Valley as a fast moving, lightning-caused fire that charred up to 2,000 acres reached Yarnell, Reichling said, Arizona State Forestry Division spokesman.

The wind-whipped blaze also prompted officials to shut 25 miles of State Route 89 between Congress and Kirkland, but residents of the hundreds of evacuated homes could still travel the estimated 30 miles to a shelter in Prescott, Reichling said.

The Yarnell Hill Fire, ignited at about 5:30pm Friday, was moving north and east at the rate of about half a mile per hour, fire officials said.

As about 250 firefighters fought to keep the blaze at bay

Sunday, officials evacuated three subdivisions outside Yarnell, officials said.

Speaker of the House Andy Tobin, R-Paulden, was shaken Sunday evening during a brief interview with the *Arizona Republic*. He could not confirm details of the number of people injured, and said the Department of Safety was on its way to take him to the scene.

"I'm going to the scene, I'm going there," he said, adding he just spoke with his friend, Yavapai County Sheriff's Officer Scott Mascher. "The fire took an incredibly swift turn is all he (Mascher) said and he said it is very, very bad. Tonight, we need all of Arizona's prayers."

About 14 Yarnell-area residents Sunday afternoon had arrived at the shelter at Yavapai College near Prescott, located about 30 miles from Yarnell, according to Brian Gomez, spokesman for the Red Cross Grand Canyon Chapter.

He said the power went out at the shelter due to monsoons but was restored.

More people were expected to need shelter as officials ordered still further evacuations, Gomez said. The Red Cross was poised to open a shelter at Wickenburg High School, he said.

Yavapai College was also used to house evacuees during the Doce Fire, which has been 96 percent contained, officials said.

The Yarnell Hill Fire was zero-percent contained Sunday, officials said.

Officials opened a shelter for livestock and large animals at Hidden Spring Ranch on Highways 89 in a part of Peoples Valley that as of Sunday was safe from the fire, officials said.

The Yarnell Hill Fire had burned 300 acres Sunday morning, had scorched about 1,000 acres Sunday afternoon, and had probably

grown to 2,000 acres Sunday evening, Reichling said.

Fueled by chaparral and grass, the blaze was burning uphill on state land about 25 miles north of Wickenburg with 15-to 20-foot flames, he said.

The Yavapai County Sheriff's Office evacuated the Double Bar A Ranch and Model Creek areas, officials said. A reverse 911 call was sent and sheriff's deputies went door-to-door to alert residents.

The temperature warmed to 101 degrees Sunday afternoon and southwest winds were blowing up to 22 miles per hour, Reichling said.

The low humidity, type of fuel, topography and northwest direction of the wind was feeding the and pushing it up the hill toward the communities, Reichling said.

About 250 firefighters, including two Type 2 crews, three Type 1 crews, and four engines, were on the scene, Reichling said. Three Type 1 crews, seven helicopters, two air tankers, four single engine air tankers, and multiple engines and air tankers were ordered.

There were expected to be about 400 firefighters arriving Sunday night and on Monday, Reichling said.

Firefighters were establishing structure protection in the Yarnell area and directly attacking the fire along its eastern flank.

A large animal shelter was set up at the Hidden Springs Ranch on Arizona 89 southwest of Hayes Ranch Road, he said. A shelter for people and small animals is being opened at Yavapai College at 1100 E. Sheldon in Prescott.

Fire crews across the state also were battling three other blazes, including firefighters in Prescott who continue to work to get the Doce Fire fully contained, authorities said.

Firefighters near the Mexican border were battling the 530-acre W-2 Fire that is burning in oak grassland and brush about seven miles west of Lochiel, east of Nogales and south of Sierra Vista, Coronado National Forest spokesman Gerry Perry said. A local rancher reported the fire about 3pm Saturday.

The fire likely is human caused as there has been no lightning in the area recently, but the exact cause still has not been determined, Perry said. No structures currently are threatened.

A total of 160 firefighters, including six hand crews, two helicopters dropping water, two engines, two single air tankers and a heavy air tanker, were battling the blaze, he said.

Fire crews had conducted burnouts along the western flank overnight Saturday to insure the fire would not grow from that side, Perry said. They will continue to build additional fire lines and supplemental burnouts in advance of the fire to try to prevent further growth.

Firefighters were battling the 25-acre Dean Peak Fire near about 10 miles southeast of Kingman, officials said. Two heavy air tankers and one Type 1 crew had been ordered.

The 6,767-acre Doce Fire burning seven miles northwest of Prescott in the Granite Mountain Wilderness was 96 percent contained Sunday morning, officials said. Road and trail closures in the area are still in effect.

The estimated cost to date for the Doce firefighting efforts is \$6,787,293, authorities said.