

Chief: Wine Country fire could happen in Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

The 2007 Angora Fire was devastating. Compared to the Wine Country fires, though, it was nothing.

For starters, there was no loss of life in the Tahoe blaze. The toll today stands at 43 for this October's blazes, but that number could increase.



Jeff Meston

Angora was out in a matter of days. Wine Country is still burning.

And while 254 houses were destroyed, no commercial structures were lost. In the Wine Country, more than 5,700 structures have been reduced to ash.

"The real question is could it happen here in South Lake Tahoe. Yes," South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston said.

He spoke briefly at the Oct. 17 City Council meeting.

With winds reaching 70 mph that first night, there was only so much firefighters could do. Meston called this an "unprecedented" time, noting how firefighters from Australia were flown in to help.

Meston's duties aren't just relegated to the basin. He is the president-elect of the California Fire Chief's Association. He is a board member on statewide mutual aid.

If a statewide commission is formed to study this fire, Meston would be on it.

On Tuesday he stressed that the best thing local residents can do is to make sure they have their defensible space.