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Sean Campbell, Battalion Chief
Arcata Fire District
Office | (707) 825-2000
scampbell@arcatafire.org
www.arcatafire.org

Barn Fire Erupts in the Arcata Bottoms

(Arcata, CA) – August 23, 2020– Arcata Fire District was dispatched to hay on fire inside of a barn at the 800 block of Mad River Road, Arcata Bottoms. As Arcata Firefighters were responding, dispatch reported the fire had spread to the structure and the barn was now on fire. Arcata Firefighters arrived to find a 14,400 square foot barn with light smoke showing from the eaves. As firefighters deployed hose lines and set up a water supply, fire conditions rapidly changed.

Firefighters were preparing to go inside to fight the fire when the hay pile collapsed, causing a massive fireball to erupt. Battalion Chief Campbell reports, “Thankfully our firefighters had not gone inside yet. When the hay pile collapsed, it cause a dust explosion. All of the hay dust and particles ignited simultaneously. This fire went from light smoke to a flashover in about thirty seconds”.

The barn contained approximately 187 tons of hay, which is equivalent to 500 bales weighing 750 pounds apiece. The entire barn and all of its contents were lost. Firefighters used approximately 30,000 gallons of water trying to extinguish the fire but were unsuccessful. Once firefighters realized they didn’t have the water or staffing to extinguish the fire, they discontinued efforts and let the hay burn. Firefighters believe the fire will continue to burn for approximately one week. Those impacted by the smoke should keep their doors and windows closed. Arcata Fire is requesting the public not call 911 to report the smoldering fire. Firefighters will be checking the scene regularly.

“It became clear to me that we were not going to extinguish this fire so I made the decision to let it burn. I was tying up resources from seven fire departments and we were not making any progress. I released all resources and placed a fire watch on the scene to make sure the fire didn’t spread to other buildings”, reported Chief Campbell.

There were no injuries and no livestock were inside the barn. Fire investigators believe spontaneous combustion of the hay is what caused the fire.

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