

Fresno investigators searching for cause of giant utility pole fire

By Jim Guy



Firefighters battle a blaze at a storage yard for power poles in northwest Fresno on Thursday, April 30.

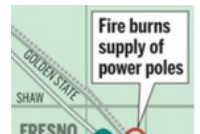
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- How to help

Firefighters want help finding the cause of the pole-yard blaze, and anyone with information is asked to call (559) 621-4440.

Fresno fire investigators continue to search for the cause of a multimillion-dollar fire that erupted early Thursday in a yard where power poles are stored near Ashlan Avenue and Golden State Boulevard.

Investigator Don MacAlpine said his team is also trying to determine why fire hydrants on the lot where McFarland Cascade keeps the poles were not working when the blaze started about 3:45 a.m. The lack of nearby hydrants forced firefighters to run hoses about 2,000 feet before they could begin to pour water on the raging blaze. At the height of the inferno, firefighters were using as much as 3,000 gallons a minute to contain it.



McFarland Cascade rents the 2- to 3-acre yard to provide poles used by Pacific Gas & Electric Co. and other utility firms, but MacAlpine said investigators are still trying to ascertain exactly who owns the parcel. He added it was too soon to determine whether the owner would bear any financial responsibility for the cost of fighting the fire. Fresno Fire Department spokesman Pete Martinez estimated that could be as high as \$3 million.

As the fire burned Thursday, McFarland Cascade workers used heavy equipment to remove unburned poles. Firefighters took a defensive strategy, leaving poles that were already ablaze to burn to save water and prevent injuries to firefighters. Friday morning, smoldering piles of poles continued to burn, but plumes of black smoke which could be seen for miles the day before were mostly gone.

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