

CDF NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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Airtanker Collision Update

Sacramento-The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) confirms the mid-air collision of two firefighting airtankers at 6:55 p.m., Monday evening, August 27, 2001. The airtankers collided while fighting the Bus Fire, located at Bus McGall Road in the McNab Ranch Subdivision, which lies just west of Highway 101, north of Hopland, in Mendocino County. The Grumman S-2 aircraft were making fire retardant drops on the fire when they collided. Both pilots were killed. The two pilots assigned to the airtankers were Larry Groff of Santa Rosa and Lars Stratte of Chico.

In expressing her condolences, CDF Director Andrea Tuttle stated, "All of CDF is in mourning. On behalf of the Department, I extend our heartfelt sorrow to the families of the pilots, their friends, fellow pilots, and the entire CDF family." The fire, which began Monday afternoon, has been determined to be an escaped campfire. As of 4:00 a.m. today, the fire had burned 250 acres, destroyed 12 structures, and was 60% contained. Firefighters are battling the blaze at this moment and expect to contain it by 6:00 p.m. today. Mendocino County Sheriff's Officers and CDF Fire Investigators have arrested Frank Brady, age 50, of Redwood Valley for unlawfully causing a fire. A second suspect has been arrested; no further details are available at this time.

The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection will be conducting a major accident investigation. CDF has notified the National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Administration, and will cooperate fully with their investigation. This is the first mid-air collision in the history of the Department.

There will be a press briefing at the Ukiah Air Attack Base, 1475 South State Street, Ukiah, at 2:00 p.m. today.

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