



Governor Bill Richardson Monitors Dangerous New Mexico Wildfires

Governor will repeat request for administration to reverse its decision grounding all heavy air tankers

For Immediate Release
May 23, 2004

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SANTA FE- Governor Bill Richardson is closely monitoring two dangerous wildfires burning in New Mexico, and is keeping in close contact with state officials to make sure sufficient resources and manpower are available to fight the fires.

“The extreme conditions brought upon by the severe drought we are experiencing make any wildfire potentially disastrous,” said Governor Richardson. “I want New Mexicans to know I will make every possible resource available to contain these fires. In the meantime I’ll be working with the federal government to see how we can get at least some of the heavy air tankers back in the air immediately. It’s the wrong time to not have access to the most effective and timely firefighting weapons.”

The “Lookout Fire”, located near the town of Corona in the Cibola National Forest, has destroyed at least one residence and several small sheds and has grown to more than 4,000 acres. By today, 500 firefighting personnel were expected to be on site, directed by a Type Two fire management team. Several single engine air tankers, also called SEAT aircraft, and two water-drop helicopters are being used as weather conditions permit. They were grounded yesterday and part of today because of high winds. The fire has damaged several communications facilities, and is threatening a state system that provides communication for state police. There is a backup plan in place should the facility be knocked out, and police communication is not expected to be interrupted. This fire appears to have been started by a smoldering campfire.

“I cannot stress enough the need for people to be fire-safe, and fire-smart,” said Governor Richardson. “Enjoy our beautiful forests, but follow the rules and use common sense. Offenders who cause wildfires either carelessly, or deliberately will be vigorously prosecuted.”

The “Peppin Fire”, located about 9 miles from the town of Capitan in the Lincoln National Forest, grew dramatically today, fanned by high winds and low humidity, and now covers approximately 1,000 acres. If the fire continues in its current direction, several homes spread throughout the sparsely populated area would be threatened. A Type Three fire management team is being brought in to oversee firefighting efforts there.

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