

Progress Made in I-90 Wildfire Investigations

Missoula, MT – Investigators are making progress in determining the cause of the 22 fires started along I-90 on August 4. The series of fires began between 5 and 6 pm in the Tarkio and Alberton areas.

“We quickly determined the fires were not caused by lightning and an interagency team formed to jointly investigate the cause,” said Paula Nelson, spokesperson for the team. “Officers are completing the on-the-ground, intensive investigation today where they will determine the point of origin for each of the fires and will gather substantive evidence. This is painstaking, detailed work.”

While the specific fire cause hasn’t been determined, investigators strongly believe a vehicle with a major malfunction, such as a damaged catalytic converter or a valve problem, is responsible for the series of ignitions.

The combined Forest Service, Missoula County Sheriff’s Office, and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation established a joint fire tip line for the public to call with any information. The number, (406)396-4168, is answered by an officer between 8am and 8pm daily and is answered by a recorder otherwise. All leads will be investigated.

“We’re still hoping more people will call with more leads, helping us find each piece of the puzzle on both the I-90 investigation as well as on the Gold Creek arson fire,” said Nelson. “The tips we have received have been instrumental in moving the cases forward but we still need more information.”

One caller to the tip line identified a motorist who had a car broken-down on I-90 at the time the fire started. Investigators interviewed the individual Tuesday and are not considering him a suspect. Investigators are working with both men to gain as much information as possible about activities in the area during the time the fires started.

Officers are actively searching for leads in finding the person responsible for starting a fire near the Gold Creek exit off of I-90 on Tuesday Aug. 9 around 9am. The suspect was driving a blue or black GMC pickup, possibly with a silver stripe. The truck had Idaho license plates. This fire is being considered an arson fire.

Gold Creek exit is between Drummond and Garrison Junction.

**Fire Investigation Phone Line
(406) 396-4168
8am – 8pm daily**

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NOTE: The tip line phone number was erroneously reported as a 369 number early this week. We as your help in ensuring the correct number is provided to the public. Thank you for all the help with this on-going investigation.

CONTACT: Paula Nelson, US Forest Service; (406) 329-3472.

LINKS and OTHER RELATED MATERIAL: The Northern Region incident information website is: <http://gacc.nifc.gov/nrcc/information/information.htm>.