

3 November 2017

Fire and Emergency New Zealand releases findings of the Cause and Origin of Port Hills fires

Fire and Emergency New Zealand fire investigators have completed their investigations into the Cause and Origin of the February 2017 Port Hills fires. The Port Hills fires started as two fires, merging into one large fire. Therefore, two investigations looked into how each of them started.

In July 2017 the cause of the Marley's Hill fire was confirmed as 'suspicious'. The findings were passed on to Police to assist with their investigation.

There is insufficient evidence to definitively conclude the cause of the Early Valley Road fire, so the cause and origin investigation report has returned the official finding of 'undetermined'. However, based on the information available to us, we are of the view that the cause of the fire is suspicious.

Marley's Hill Fire

When a fire is suspicious, it becomes a criminal investigation managed by Police. Fire and Emergency provides its findings, report and any other information to Police for investigation. As such, our report and its findings cannot be released or discussed.

Police want to hear from anyone who may have information about this fire. This is particularly important as we approach a high risk fire season.

Early Valley Road Fire

A range of information has been analysed during the investigation of the Early Valley Road fire.

Investigators looked at a range of evidence including photos from the start of the fires and interviews with witnesses, stakeholders, independent investigators and industry experts. They combed through the 1,600-hectare fire ground for evidence to trace the trail of the fire.

In this case, investigators identified and tested a range of different hypotheses for how the fire could have started. This research methodology practise ensures investigators are testing any biases and considering all possibilities. The aim is to reach a conclusion for a probable cause of the fire through a process of elimination.

Based on the evidence available, a definitive conclusion has not been reached. Therefore, the classification of the cause and origin of the Early Valley Road fire is officially 'undetermined' until new evidence is found.

The three main causes the specialist fire investigators looked into were a) the fire was deliberately lit b) it was caused accidentally, or c) an electrical event. With information available to us, we are of the view that this fire was deliberately lit. The independent electrical engineering report we have had provided to us found that an electrical event happened after the fire started.

"We understand that the community is looking for answers," said Fire and Emergency's Regional Manager Rural, Richard McNamara. "The investigation remains open to any new information. I urge people to come forward, even if you think what you know may not be significant. The only way we are going to solve this is through more information coming to light."

Anyone with further information, should contact Christchurch Police on 03 363 7400. Information can also be shared anonymously via CrimeStoppers on 0800 555 111.