Firefighters battled a blaze Wednesday, March 23, in a section of phragmites on the 1400 block of Missouri Avenue. No one was injured.

Pheromones fire causes heat damage to homes at Harbor Cove

By JACk Fichter
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — A fire in the Harbor Cove subdivision caused heat damage to five structures and several properties and took about 1 hour 30 minutes to contain. March 23.

Firefighters from Cape May, Walt Cape May and Upper Township Fire Fighting Center Cape May responded to the fire on the 1400 block of Missouri Avenue.

According to Cape May Fire Department Lt. Ed Zebrowski, two homes, six garages and a shed were damaged. Vinyl siding, mailboxes or garages or on several buildings from the initial intense heat of the fire, he said.

Zebrowski said homes at 42 and 44 Harbor Cove sustained the most damage. The fire was started by a section of phragmites roots across from condominiums in the 1400 block of Elgin Avenue.

"The danger that day was wind, you have low humidity and somewhat dry ground with a little bit of wind, that's what gets it going," Zebrowski said. "Winds did not help the situation, he said. From the suspected point of origin, the fire traveled very quickly toward homes, he said.

"If the wind was blowing in the other direction, it could have spread throughout the street and those homes probably wouldn't have been in danger," he said.

The fire is not considered suspicious, according to Zebrowski, and is under investigation by the state Forstry Fire Service because it was a brush fire. He said a carelessly discarded cigarette is the cause of many fires.

Zebrowski said the fire spread rapidly, "the pros and cons of it is it gives you a lot of fuel very quickly," he said.

The fire was declared under control in 15 minutes. Firefighters worked to keep the fire away from the homes.

"We fought for one-way going in because the only way to get to Urgent Care is going to be one way," Zebrowski said. "We want to go two way as it has been for many, many years. They're going to leave it as it was. It's going to be one way going. That's the way we want it," he said.

Mayor Michael Beck asked if the township would tear some responsibility in case of accidents for requiring that change. Councilman Tom Conat asked the question, and the township solicitor said the township was in charge of the property if there was an accident, "the state says we told you." Township Solicitor Dave Stefankie added that if there were any increase in liability it would be minimal. "I don't think it's a goal to make it one way, but you can't make it two way, we have some curve," Councilman Tom Conat said.

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UL: Lower Township Council approved the purchase of 46 body cameras for the Lower Township Police Department.

The cost of the cameras is $89,951, of which $2,000 will be paid by a grant from the state Attorney General's Body Worn Camera Assistance Program.

The cameras, which have an adjustable lens, will be worn by every officer’s uniform to get the best view, he said. The cameras can be turned off by the officer. Motorists have a constitutional privacy rights’ association would be limited, he said.

"You can dictate who wears them, who doesn’t wear them, but it’s very hard to dictate when and when they can’t wear it," he said. Motorists said directives were published by the state Division of Criminal Justice. He said the Police Department would follow the state guidelines on deployment of cameras but discretion was very limited as to when a body camera could be turned off by the officer.

The new cameras have the capability to record continuously for 12 hours but said that was unlikely since the camera would not be reusable.

Motorists said a body camera may be a bad thing, a good thing or losing your hair.

By Mastriana
Cape May Star and Wave

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