

Ventura County Fire Protection District

Informational Summary Report of Illnesses and Exposures



Infectious Disease Exposure Confirmed Valley Fever Exposure / Diagnosis

October 13 - 19, 2008

Sesnon Incident

CA-LAC-08246455

Los Angeles County

A Board of Review has not approved this Summary Report. It is intended as a safety and training tool, an aid to preventing future occurrences, and to inform interested parties. Because it is published on a short time frame, the information contained herein is subject to revision as further investigation is conducted and additional information is developed.

SUMMARY

During fire suppression and mop up phases, crews assigned were exposed to adverse weather conditions including high temperatures, low humidities, blowing dirt and dust, and heavy smoke conditions.

CONDITIONS

The temperatures ranged into the nineties, moderate winds from the east, Rh consistently below 20. Road surfaces in Las Lajas are described as 16" of fine dust. Handcrews and engine strike teams were assigned to the area for days. Most personnel activity was confined to the bottom of the canyon.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Crews had been assigned structure protection responsibilities prior to being assigned into Las Lajas Canyon. During the assignment in the canyon, a medical emergency occurred requiring immediate transport to a medical facility. The incident medevac procedures were followed and the victim was transported by helicopter. Due to the existing conditions in the area, high amounts of dust and dirt were disturbed and spread out over a wide area which included many personnel.

INJURIES/DAMAGES

At this point in time, VNC has confirmed cases of Valley Fever, some pending completion of examinations and testing, and several exposures with potential.

SAFETY ISSUES FOR REVIEW

Valley Fever is a type of fungus infection and usually affects the lungs. It is caused by the fungus called *Coccidioides Immitis* and lives in soil, spreading via inhalation of airborne spores. When soil containing this fungus is disturbed by construction or heavy equipment, natural causes/disasters or wind, the fungus spores get into the air. Breathing the spores can lead to contracting Valley Fever.

In most cases, symptoms are not present. When they are, the most common symptoms are: fever, fatigue, cough, rash, loss of appetite, night sweating, chest pain, muscle aches and pains. Anyone can develop Valley Fever; however, workers who engage in activities that disturb the soil or have compromised immune systems are at higher risk.

There is no vaccine for Valley Fever. All personnel should maintain a high awareness for the potential exposure and exercise protective measures to safeguard against it. Landing zones for helicopters and areas where dozers operate are good examples where dust abatement is necessary. During adverse weather conditions or other uncontrolled work environments, use dust masks or

other particulate filtering devices, stay inside whenever possible, and keep doors and windows tightly closed.

If exposure is suspected, seek medical attention immediately. Please review the attached links for further information regarding this matter.

http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/dfbmd/disease_listing/coccidioidomycosis_gi.html

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/valley-fever/DS00695>

<http://www.projectinform.org/info/vfever/index.shtml>