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Mountain Resorts Under Siege

Fireman Killed Near Julian; 300 Homes Burn in Arrowhead

COLUMN ONE

It Came From the Pig Lagoon

■ The overpowering stench of hog farms smells like money to inventive odor-fighters.

By STEPHANIE SIMON
Times Staff Writer

AMES, Iowa — Six plastic bags, swollen with trapped air, bounce around the back seat of the Buick. It's a good thing they're not leaking, Dwaine Bundy says as he drives, because the bags are filled with stink.

Bundy has just spent his lunch hour collecting the foul gases that hover over a lagoon brimming with 400,000 gallons of runny hog manure. He'll deliver the air to his lab at Iowa State University, where a team of trained sniffers will determine just how badly it reeks.

In the spare, bare-walled lab — equipped with such instruments as the Nasal Ranger — Bundy evaluates products designed to take the smell out of pig farms.

Today, he's testing whether a lagoon cover made of shredded tires traps manure odor before it can waft into the air. From orange-scented barn deodorizers to ultrasonic manure sterilizers, Bundy has no shortage of products to study.

As the pork industry has consolidated over the past two decades, with scattered barnyard farms giving way to city-sized compounds of 100,000 hogs, odor has become a critical social issue for rural communities from North Carolina to Utah.

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LAKE ARROWHEAD: A charred car and debris remain as flames consume a neighborhood in the Cedar Glen area of Lake Arrowhead. Fires in the state have burned more than 634,000 acres.

RICHARD HARTOG Los Angeles Times

By CHRISTINE HANLEY, RONE TEMPEST AND HECTOR BECERRA
Times Staff Writers

Firefighters battled desperately Wednesday to stop wildfires from destroying two beloved Southern California tourist spots, Lake Arrowhead and Julian, an historic mountain town east of San Diego. One firefighter was killed, bringing the overall death toll to 20 after five days of the largest fires in modern California history.

While there was progress in taming some of the 10 fires that have engulfed a broad arc of the region from Ventura County into Mexico, the blazes at Arrowhead and in the mountains east of San Diego bedeviled an exhausted army of firefighters.

By evening, firefighters had managed to keep the infernos from overtaking Julian, an old gold mining town some 40 miles from San Diego, and much of Lake Arrowhead, the century-old resort on a man-made lake in the San Bernardino Mountains.

Still, about 300 houses were destroyed on the east side of Arrowhead, and strong winds created dangerous conditions Wednesday night that forced the evacuation of many firefighters.

Erratic wind gusts, some as high as 70 mph, sent flames in unexpected directions, not only frustrating efforts to douse them but sometimes engulfing and endangering fire crews. The National Weather Service predicted continued gusty winds for today but said the region was also likely to see higher humidity and might have some rain by the end of the week.

The fight to save Julian took its human toll when four firefighters were overrun by flames in their firetruck. One died and the other three were burned, one critically, authorities said.

The dead man was identified as Steve Rucker, a firefighter and paramedic from the Marin County town of Novato. The most severely injured firefighter was identified as Novato Fire Capt. Doug MacDonald. He was expected to recover.

"This fire has been nothing short of apocalyptic," said Janet Marshall, spokeswoman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

It was not clear how many more homes were lost Wednesday. The toll stood at more than 2,400, with estimated losses expected to rise.

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Los Angeles Times

Trapped Crew Sits Out a Fireball

By GEOFFREY MOHAN
Times Staff Writer

LAKE ARROWHEAD — The fire broke the mountain crest in sheets just before dawn Wednesday and whipped across the Rim of the World Highway like a cross-cut saw, foiling the best-laid plans of Fire Capt. David Shew. He ordered his 20-man strike team to back up the trucks, roll up the windows and wait.

"A real honest-to-God firestorm," Shew said hours later, punctuating his story every few minutes with a sharp exhalation and a shake of his head. "The engines were rocking back and forth."

In 17 years of fighting fire for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Shew had seen nothing like this: staring into what looked like the deepest reaches of an erupting volcano.

"With gloves on your hand, the window was still too hot to touch," he said. Outside the trucks, he said, "you would have died." It took 30 minutes for the fire to pass.

The crew got to this spot about 3 a.m. and since then ton-

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Villagers Tell of Torture

Afghans say a militia working for the U.S. military went on a rampage of abuse as it searched for Taliban and Al Qaeda rebels last week.

By PAUL WATSON
Times Staff Writer

DAI CHOPAN, Afghanistan — Villagers with broken limbs, deep cuts and severe bruises say Afghan militia fighters working as guides for U.S. troops went on a spree of looting, beatings and torture here during a military sweep last week.

The militiamen frequently guide the Americans on missions to search for Taliban and Al Qaeda guerrillas, wear U.S. military camouflage fatigues and carry assault rifles.

None of about 50 villagers who described the abuses in interviews, or who were questioned at an elders meeting, said U.S. forces

witnessed the assaults or thefts during the search for Taliban guerrillas. A U.S. military spokesman said he had no reports of unprofessional conduct by militias operating under U.S. control.

But villagers here tell another story. Militiamen broke a woman's shoulder with a rifle butt and tortured her two adult sons until they blacked out, one son said in an interview Saturday. The other son had not regained consciousness.

Others described assaults and systematic looting by the militia fighters during a week-long operation in Dai Chopan. The militiamen, loyal to warlords in Kandahar, about 70 miles southwest

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HURT: Nasrullah, 21, lies next to his brother in Dai Chopan. "He is not able to speak or move," their father says. "He has been beaten on the back of his head with a [rifle] butt."

PAUL WATSON Los Angeles Times

Grant for Iraq Is a Victory for President

Panel OKs \$18 billion in U.S. aid with no strings attached. Compromise would expand troops' access to health care.

By JANET HOOK
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — In a crucial victory for President Bush, House and Senate negotiators agreed Wednesday to provide more than \$18 billion in aid to Iraq as a direct grant, beating back bipartisan demands that some of the money to rebuild the country eventually be repaid.

Bush has been adamant that the reconstruction aid be provided with no strings attached, and he labored for weeks to bring wayward Republicans in line.

His victory came as a House-Senate conference committee approved the final version of a bill providing most of the \$87 billion Bush requested for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, including the more than \$18 billion in reconstruction money. Negotiators voted to drop a Senate proposal that could have required Iraq to repay up to half the reconstruction aid.

But Bush's win came at a price: He had to give ground in other areas that reflected lawmakers' sensitivity to growing anxiety on the home front about the war's toll.

Over the administration's opposition, the compromise requires the Pentagon to expand access to health-care coverage for National Guard and Reserve troops when they return home.

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UPHILL BATTLE: John Lucas tries to defend the Lake Arrowhead home built by his father-in-law, artist Charles Wysocki.

CAROLYN COLE Los Angeles Times

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FIRES

Wary return: Fire-ravaged San Diego slowly resumes something near normal life. **A13**

Glory be: Old Glory, the tree at the center of a land dispute, survives Stevenson Ranch fire. **A14**

Being tested: Schools near and far from the fires are feeling various levels of disruption. **A15**

Updates: For the latest information on fire closures, evacuations and aid, go to www.latimes.com.

Schwarzenegger Visits D.C. but Puts Spotlight on Fires

By FAYE FIORE
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — The cinder block corridor where press conferences are regularly held on Capitol Hill serves the purpose just fine when your garden variety lawmaker is at the mike. But when the featured speaker is a celebrity superstar who has just knocked off the sitting governor of California, staging a Washington debut in a hallway is like throwing a birthday party in a broom closet.

"Push back! Push back! He's gonna come through here!" a harried Capitol police officer im-

plored as a media clot clogged the only artery out of the conference room where Gov.-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger had just met with virtually every Republican in the House.

In his first visit to Washington since being elected in the Oct. 7 recall, Schwarzenegger continued the transition from celebrity to politician, while being careful not to overreach his authority before he officially takes office. He carried an appeal for disaster assistance from Gov. Gray Davis, met with key lawmakers from both parties and seemed to distance himself from the Termini-

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INSIDE

More Shoppers Cross Market Picket Lines

Sale items and products that can't be found elsewhere bring customers back to the stores. **C1**

Russian Miners Recall Ordeal Underground

The 11 men who survived for nearly a week say they were continually on the move. **A3**

Senate Vote on Pickering Is Timed Right for GOP

The decision on the Mississippi judge falls just before a gubernatorial race in his state. **A8**

Lakers Relax a Little During a Respite

With three days off between games, Gary Payton keeps things very loose at practice. **B6**

L.A. Weather

Mostly cloudy and cooler today after morning fog and local drizzle. L.A. Downtown: 66/52. **A2**

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Neighbors Suing Over Pig Stench

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Hogs emit at least 160 odorous compounds — trace amounts of gases that rise off their skin and their waste. A few, like hydrogen sulfide and ammonia, can damage human health. Others simply smell bad.

"It stinks about enough to make you sick," said Kurt Kelsey, whose family has farmed near Iowa Falls since 1860.

The smell of swine was not overwhelming when most farms had a few hundred animals. But when thousands are packed into narrow confinement sheds, their meaty, musty, musky smell can saturate homes miles away.

Each pig produces as much waste in a week as three or four people — eight liquid gallons of manure. It's too expensive to treat it in waste water plants that handle human sewage. So most pork producers store the manure in giant outdoor lagoons, some big enough to go boating on. They let it sit for up to a year until they can spread it on cropland before the spring planting.

Unless it is injected deep into the soil, manure fertilizer can smell awful.

The lagoons are a potent source of stink too; bacteria feed on the waste, breaking it down to nutrients and releasing foul gases as they digest.

Even in a farm state like Iowa, which boasts five pigs for every

person, many residents have had enough.

Making a Stink

By the score, they are suing confinement facilities as agricultural nuisances that drag down property values and make life downwind unbearable.

In some regions, suburban transplants expecting a clean, quiet country life have proved the toughest foes of big hog farms. In Iowa, many of the litigants are farmers themselves. They may have worked around livestock for decades but say they are physically sickened by the scale of modern agriculture. Blaming "factory farms" for their headaches, nausea and asthma, more than a dozen plaintiffs in Iowa have won damages ranging from \$5,000 to \$320,000.

That scares pork producers. "It's always in the back of your mind," said Gary Ledger, who raises 3,000 hogs near Williamsburg, a small town in east-central Iowa. "Someone could file a nuisance complaint that would destroy our business."

In such fear, entrepreneurs sense a gold mine.

They have developed lagoon covers made of clay pellets, straw and felt. They're tinkering with swine feed — even adding extracts of yucca and sagebrush — in hopes of making manure more fragrant.



STEVE POPE For The Times

STINK-O-METER: Dwaine Bundy, a professor of agricultural engineering, uses a Nasal Ranger to check the strength of odors at a hog facility. Bundy evaluates products designed to reduce smells.

At costs that range from a dime to several dollars per hog, they peddle devices to zap manure with electricity, blast-dry it at super heat, or bombard it with ultrasonic waves.

A Florida firm recently snagged \$650,000 in state and federal grants to build an experimental chamber that will subject manure to temperatures as hot as the sun and atmospheric pressure equal to that on the ocean floor. A spokesman for Global Resource Recovery Organization said the "very violent environment" breaks down the waste so thoroughly that it emerges from the chamber 97% odor free.

Then there are the decidedly low-tech bugs-in-a-bucket products — microbial mixtures designed to be dumped into manure pits. The microbes speed the breakdown of waste; in the process, they set the manure bubbling and burbling like witch's brew.

"We've got people out here in Kansas who talk about having to store their good clothes [in town] so they don't smell in church on Sunday. This is a phenomenal problem," said Stan Irvin, who promises less stink in 10 days with his Biozyme microbe mix, sold by Heartland Enterprises, an agricultural products company based in Hays, Kan.

So hot is the field of swine deodorizing that Premium Standard Farms, the nation's second-largest pork producer, fields hundreds of pitches a year from inventors hoping to test their products on the company's enormous farms in Missouri, North Carolina and Texas.

"I get a call about every day," said Dave Townsend, vice president of environmental affairs.

Farmers Fearful

Bundy, too, spends hours each week on the phone — with hog farmers panicked that their neighbors may sue. A professor of agricultural engineering, Bundy contracts with pork producers to evaluate the latest technology in odor management.

Picking up the phone the other day, he heard from a farmer who had called before, feeling threatened.

"I hear you got a problem," Bundy said.

The farmer, who raises 2,500 hogs, explained that a neighbor a mile west griped about unbearable barn odors. "How serious is she?" Bundy asked, frowning. "Now's a good time to catch her with the idea we're doing something to control this."

He recommended a pump that can be programmed to spritz a cherry-scented odor neutralizer into the wind whenever the wind blows toward the angry neighbor. He also suggested planting a row of trees to catch the smelly dust that sloughs off hogs' skin and floats on the breeze.

"You'll spend a few thousand dollars," Bundy said, sighing as the farmer thanked him.

To Bundy, the answer to odor angst is regulation: States should set limits for small emissions.

Farmers would have less to fear from sensitive neighbors because they wouldn't be expected to get livestock odors down to zero. And neighbors would be able to call the state for help if the smells got more intense.

Regulating Smells

So far, Colorado is alone in enforcing smell standards for pig farms. The state also requires that manure lagoons be covered. The measures appear to be working. Apart from one family that reports unbearable odor several times a week, Colorado logs just a few complaints a year.

Missouri and Minnesota are working on similar regulations. After a contentious debate, Iowa has shelved its proposed rules for at least two years while 34 state-certified "odor inspectors" conduct a study of farm smells.

In the meantime, residents like Jim Kleemeier, 62, are taking to the courts.

He won \$15,000 last year after suing a 4,000-hog confinement farm a quarter mile east of his home near Rockwell City, Iowa. The award was for reduced property value. Kleemeier, a retired truck driver and cattle rancher, thinks he should have been compensated as well for his suffering.

"It stinks to high heaven," he said. "There's no more good, clean air. You can't hardly stand to be outside any more."

Hoping to fend off such clashes, one rural Michigan county recently published a brochure to warn prospective residents what to expect if they buy in agricultural areas.

The pamphlet, produced by fast-growing Ottawa County, describes the clatter of farm machinery before dawn. It also includes a scratch 'n' sniff manure odor so nauseatingly authentic, the print shop had to evacuate during production.

In a similar spirit, a Canadian pork company looking to expand in North Dakota has taken more than 100 prospective neighbors on smell tours of its facilities in Manitoba.

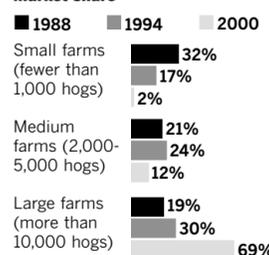
Craig Jarolimek, an Elite Swine marketing manager, takes the groups to a lagoon filled with 8 million gallons of manure and covered with barley straw. He also leads them into the confinement sheds, where hogs are fed a special diet that reduces the smell from the waste. He encourages his visitors to breathe deeply.

"Their perceptions of what it

Pork production

Pork production is now dominated by a handful of corporations that raise up to 100,000 hogs on each farm. Here's a look at the pork industry and how it's changed over the years.

Market share



Top pork-producing states:

Total inventory of pigs at any given moment:

| Number of hogs (in millions) | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Iowa | 15.1 |
| North Carolina | 9.6 |
| Minnesota | 5.7 |
| Illinois | 4.3 |
| Missouri | 3.0 |

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture; National Pork Board

Los Angeles Times

will smell like are based on management practices from 10 years ago. When they see what proper odor management can accomplish, they're amazed," Jarolimek said.

Though public protest over the summer forced Elite Swine to cancel plans for one North Dakota facility, it began building two others in the state this month, with little opposition.

"It's still animal agriculture, and animals do emit odors," Jarolimek said. But with the new technology, "it's manageable," he said. "It's livable."

The key is to figure out which products work.

Enter Dwaine Bundy and his plastic bags.

He has been hired to do off-farm research such as evaluating kitty litter odor. But most of the 2,500 air samples he tests annually come from hogs.

For on-the-spot measurement, Bundy uses the portable Nasal Ranger. Shaped like an oversized hair drier, the device sucks precise quantities of smelly air into a chamber, where it's blended with charcoal-filtered clean air. He inhales the mixture through cushioned nostril holes. If he cannot smell anything, he increases the ratio of stinky air to clean air, then inhales again.

The goal is to determine how strong the offensive odor is by measuring how much clean air it takes to dilute it until it's imperceptible. An odor is generally considered noxious if it can be detected even when diluted by seven times as much clean air.

Bundy acknowledges that the technology isn't all that sophisticated; results require a judgment call. But because the bad-smelling gases are present in such trace amounts — measurable in parts per trillion — few instruments are sensitive enough to measure them.

In the end, he said, the human nose is the best odor gauge around.

Still, he hates to rely on a single nose, so Bundy usually brings air samples back to his lab for testing by a panel of eight students in this college town in central Iowa.

One by one, each student leans into the nose mask on the Ac'scent International Olfactometer, a metal box about the size of a washing machine. The \$30,000 olfactometer mixes hog-lot air and clean air much as the Nasal Ranger does.

When the student turns a knob, the machine blasts the mixture into the nose mask for three seconds. The student inhales deeply, pushing a green button whenever he detects an odor.

At high concentrations, the smell is so sharp, it burns. But most of the time, the panelists are working with far more subtle odors, barely identifiable as pig. For \$8.50 an hour, they're more than willing to inhale.

"Long as I'm earning money," said Gaurav Sangtani, an engineering student.

Bundy's lab has identified several promising technologies. Covering a lagoon with shredded tires can reduce odors by 90%. Some microbial mixes don't work at all, but others can cut smells by 60%.

Premium Standard has invested \$3.6 million in permeable felt covers for 90 of its Missouri lagoons; Bundy says they absorb 40% to 50% of the smell.

Chris Dickel, who raises organic soy a half-mile from Premium Standard's barns in northern Missouri, says the covers work so well, he often forgets there are tens of millions of gallons of manure just on the other side of the hayfield.

Every now and then, though, Dickel catches an overwhelming whiff of "straight pig" from the confinement shed. He figures that's life in rural America these days.

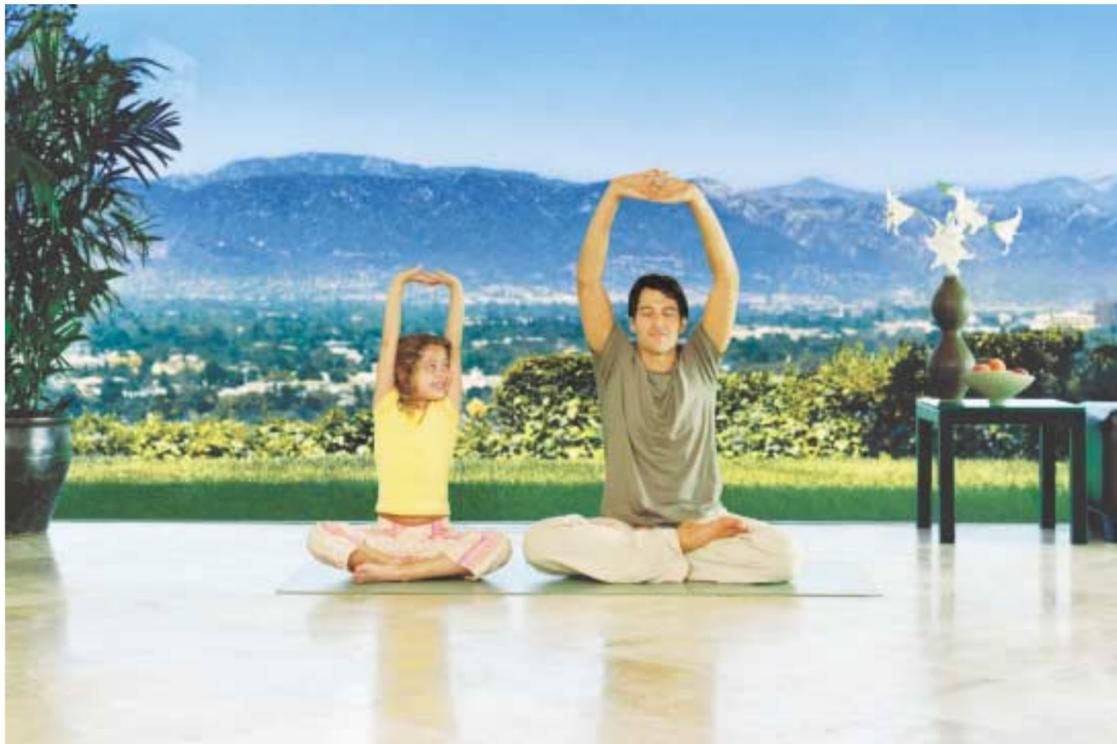
With 132,000 hogs next door, "you wouldn't get the smell down to zero," he said, "even if you had a diaper on every one of them."

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