



MEMBERS of the public assisted firefighters battle the blaze that started at Rhodes Memorial on Sunday and spread to the Vredehoek area. The fire jumped over Philip Kgosana Drive and headed towards houses in Walmer Estate. | ARMAND HOUGH African News Agency (ANA)

Strong winds fan flames

Alleged arsonist held while four firefighters injured battling devastating Table Mountain blaze

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STRONG south-easterly winds fanned the flames of the devastating fire on Table Mountain, making it impossible for helicopters from both the province and the SA National Defence Force to assist in dousing the flames, which were making their way down the mountain towards Walmer Estate.

Some Walmer Estate residents helped to fight the flames making their way towards homes in Upper Melbourne Road. They were later assisted by firefighters.

Resident Nazeem Ebrahim said, “When we saw the small fire on Sunday, we were already preparing. We know the wind, and we know the effects of the wind, and we won’t leave the community in the cold just like that, so the City’s Disaster Man-

agement should have trucks stationed here.”

At about 10am, City Disaster Risk Management spokesperson Charlotte Powell said Ministerial Estate, Disa Park and Mountain View complex in Vredehoek were evacuated, including all schools.

Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille said a minister’s Newlands residence owned by the department, was gutted on Sunday

“Thankfully, no one was hurt, and no one was in the property at the time.”

She said yesterday family members of three members of the executive had been evacuated from Walmer Estate properties, as there was an immediate threat as the fire crossed Philip Kgosana Drive.

Western Cape Education Department spokesperson Bronagh Hammond said 17 schools were granted

permission to send learners home, due to health and safety concerns.

“The effects of smoke inhalation and respiratory problems were raised. Many of the schools situated in the areas affected by the fire are commuter schools, so concerns were also raised regarding transport for affected learners if an evacuation was called,” said Hammond.

City spokesperson Janine Willems said yesterday morning that firefighting efforts were concentrated in Vredehoek and Philip Kgosana Drive and at UCT.

The City said about eight structures had been damaged, including four UCT buildings.

More than 250 firefighters from the City, Table Mountain National Park (TMNP), Working on Fire and Volunteer Wildfire Services battled the fires.

The City’s Fire and Rescue Services spokesperson, Jermaine Carelse, said

four firefighters were injured while fighting the blaze: two City firefighters and two external firefighters.

Police arrested a man in connection with the blaze on Sunday.

Police spokesperson André Traut said a 35-year-old man was arrested at 8.10pm along Philip Kgosana Drive by City law enforcement and charged with arson.

“It is alleged that a member of the local neighbourhood watch witnessed three suspects making a fire on the mountain, and alerted authorities. Two of the suspects managed to evade arrest. The circumstances surrounding the case are being investigated and an appearance in court is yet to be scheduled,” Traut said.

People have been urged to stay away from the mountain and not use it for recreational purposes.

South African National Parks (SANParks) spokesperson Rey Thakhuli said

rangers had to stop people from going about their day-to day activities within TMNP yesterday morning.

The public has been requested to refrain from entering the Newlands Forest, Groote Schuur Estate, Rhodes Memorial, Devil’s Peak, Tafelberg Road, Vredehoek and Deer Park sections of the park.

Thakhuli said more than 400 hectares had been damaged so far.

Table Mountain Aerial Cableway managing director Wahida Parker said all operations at the cableway would remain suspended until the area had been declared safe.

UCT vice-chancellor Mamokgethi Phakeng thanked everyone for their support, as well as the university’s staff.

“We’ve had to evacuate about 4 000 students from residences to hotels around Cape Town. That wasn’t an easy task,” she said.