



G4 Paradise Lost: The Camp Fire

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will be acquainted with information regarding the Camp Fire in, and around, Paradise, CA, which started on November 8, 2018.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by sharing details of the disaster and the importance of a working relationship between forensic odontologists and the coroner's office, as well as other members of the forensic team.

On November 8, 2018, a wildfire started in rural Butte County, in northern California. The Camp Fire's name came from the place of origin: Camp Creek Road. This fire was the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in California history. Also, it was the deadliest wildfire in the United States since 1918, and ranked as the sixth-deadliest United States wildfire overall. The fire caused more than 80 civilian fatalities. It covered more than 153,000 acres and destroyed 18,804 structures. Most of the damage occurred in the first four hours.

Due to the nature of the wildfire, the victims ranged from being visibly recognizable to near-cremation. This necessitated the need for multiple forensic sciences working together. This presentation will show how several of the forensic science disciplines worked together to attain the goal of victim identification. Anthropology, pathology, odontology, fingerprints, and DNA were some of the forensic sciences represented at the morgue. Reportedly, this was the first time "Rapid DNA" was used in a mass disaster such as this.

While the fire and its victims were located in Butte County, the decision was made to send all victims to the Sacramento County Coroner's Office, which is approximately 90 miles from Paradise. Sacramento was better able to accommodate the anticipated number of potential victims. Thus, the Sacramento County Coroner's Office facilitated the victims and the workers, while Butte County remained the authorizing agency.

As many of the local dental offices were destroyed by the fire, retrieving antemortem records necessitated an alternative method. With the help of the local dental society, emails were sent out to all of the dental office in surrounding towns and cities for requests of records of reported missing persons. The records that were sent in by the surrounding dental offices were then screened by the coroner and the lead odontologist.

Early on, it was discussed that this disaster could potentially become a Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) event. This led to the decision to input all data in to the WinID program. Even though this would prove to be unnecessary, it still proved to be beneficial by allowing part of the team to work remotely on the antemortem data gathering and input.

Wildfire, Odontology, DVI