

Braving Florida's Raging Infernos

Input provided by members Newton Nicholson, Chris McCarthy and Murray Cook

You've seen it on the news -- the raging fires, the thick black smoke. You can imagine, in your own mind, the heat, the smell, the devastation. What would you do if this happened to you? Would your fields hold up under this kind of pressure? Would you? Here's a first-hand look at what a few of our members in Florida actually DID have to put up with - and how they endured.



Soccer Field at Ormond Beach Recreation Complex

What was once acres and acres of green - trees, grass and other vegetation - now stands black and bleak along the highways, roadways, housing developments and parks. Approximately 435,000 acres of Florida's agricultural land were covered by the fires. That's around 3.2 percent of their total agricultural land but adds up to 11 percent of Brevard and 19 percent of Flagler counties' agricultural land. (These figures were being updated and residential and community property damage totals were still being tabulated at press time.)

The heat and lack of rain combined to create "tinder-box" conditions. Trees that looked green on the outside were actually dry and brittle, and would snap into flames.

Newton Nicholson, Maintenance Supervisor for the City of Daytona Beach, was right in the thick of things. He said that before the fires even started, their football field looked like a desert and he had to replace about 20,000 sq. ft. of sod. Fire came to within 100-200 feet of the stadium and between the ash and embers, he's not sure now how that sod is going to fare.

Murray Cook, Baseball Stadium Manager at

Disney's Wide World of Sports™ complex, in the Orlando area, said they actually had a lightning strike on the sports complex property that started a fire that was visible from the top of the stadium. The call went out immediately and fire crews responded at once, but despite all that, 1 1/2 acres were burned.

Fourth of July fireworks were cancelled in Daytona Beach, Orlando, and surrounding areas. The Disney Theme Parks cancelled their fireworks displays for a full week as an added precaution, even though standard safety measures include the use of a water cannon throughout the day to thoroughly wet down the "landing site."

The Pepsi 400 at the Daytona International Speedway was cancelled because of the fires. Daytona Beach, which is usually



Next to the Parking Lot at Ormond Beach Recreation Complex

packed during the races, was almost deserted. Summer parks concerts and playground activities for children were also cancelled in Daytona Beach.

Ormond Beach, just north of Daytona, suffered severe damage also. At the recreation complex, the

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