

FIRE DEVOURS RUBBER FACTORY, CHURCH



PAUL E. RODRIGUEZ/The Orange County Register

A column of smoke rises Tuesday from the Esco Rubber Products Inc. plant in Brea as firefighters douse the building in an attempt to control a blaze that began as workers tried to repair a piece of equipment, plant General Manager Bob Gorham said. The blaze destroyed the building and a small church and daycare facility, and it forced nearly 150 people to evacuate. **Story in Metro, Page 1**

Rubber factory burns

FIRE: Day-care center is destroyed, and 150 residents evacuated.

By **JIM BENNING**

The Orange County Register

BREA — Fire destroyed a decades-old rubber-products manufacturing plant and a small church and day-care facility Tuesday and forced nearly 150 people from their homes.

Eight firefighters were treated for skin irritation from building runoff, but no other injuries were reported from the fire, which began just before 5 p.m. inside Esco Rubber Products Inc. at 130 N. Brea Blvd. But the blaze prompted the evacuation of three apartment complexes east of the facility.

Late Tuesday, almost a dozen residents had gathered at an emergency shelter organized by the American Red Cross at the Brea Senior Center.

The fire began as workers tried to repair a piece of equipment in the plant, general manager Bob Gorham said. Flying sparks set fire to wooden walls nearby, he said.

The facility was not equipped with a sprinkler system, he said.

Nearly 60 firefighters battled the blaze for hours, but rubber inside the facility made it tough to extinguish.

"It almost refuses to go out," said Brea Fire Capt. Dave Mahlstede. "It makes me feel almost helpless."

Workers in the factory tried at first to fight the blaze with fire extinguishers, Gorham said, but they were forced to run for safety when the flames spread. All 16 to 20 workers inside the facility escaped unharmed.

Next door, the fire engulfed the Brea Foursquare Church and its child-care center, a portable building. About 16 children were forced out of the day-care facility when the fire started, the Rev. Loren Wood said.

Company officials had planned to move the their operation to another building a block away in several weeks. City officials are considering building a fire station at the site.

► **FUTURE:** What will become of decades-old, family-run firm? **Page 4**

Fire at Brea factory forces many residents to evacuate

4-24-96 The Orange County Register

FIRE: Workers watch flames, wonder about the future.

By **JIM BENNING**

The Orange County Register

BREA — Bob Gorham stood on a Brea Boulevard sidewalk and stared at the flames in disbelief.

"I don't know what to think," he said. "I've been working there for 30 years."

By sunset, a fire had engulfed Esco Rubber Products Inc. and transformed nearly everything inside the family-run business to ashes.

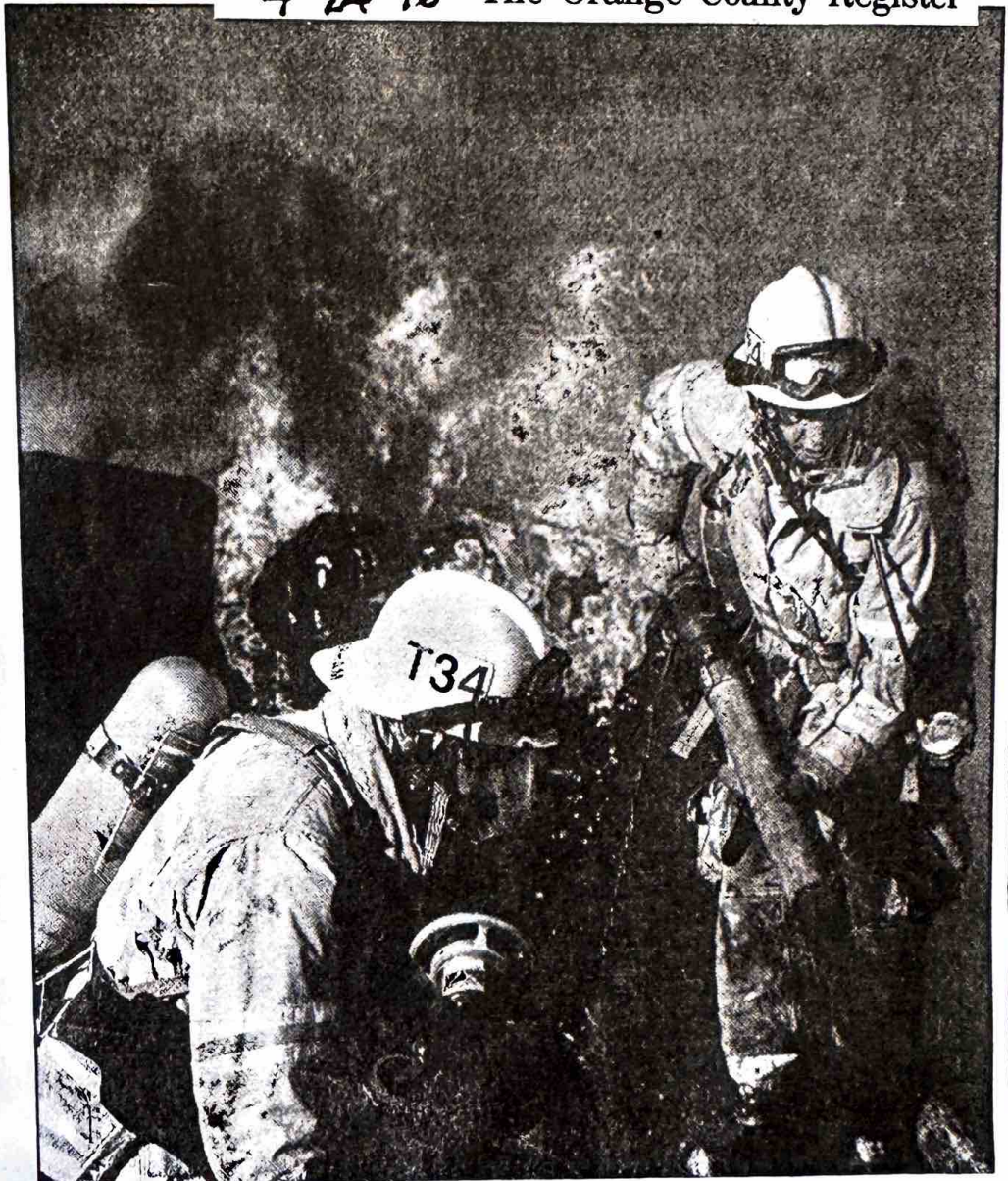
Gorham, the general manager, spoke with owners and friends on a cellular phone as smoke billowed from the building across the street. He wondered what would become of the business that has thrived in the city for more than 50 years.

Many employees gathered nearby and stared blankly at the fire.

"I'm sick about it," said Karen Tinnes, an Esco secretary. "I've been there 17 years."

A block down the street, the Rev. Loren Wood wondered what would become of his church.

Wood sat on a chair and



Esco Rubber Fire Puts City to the Test

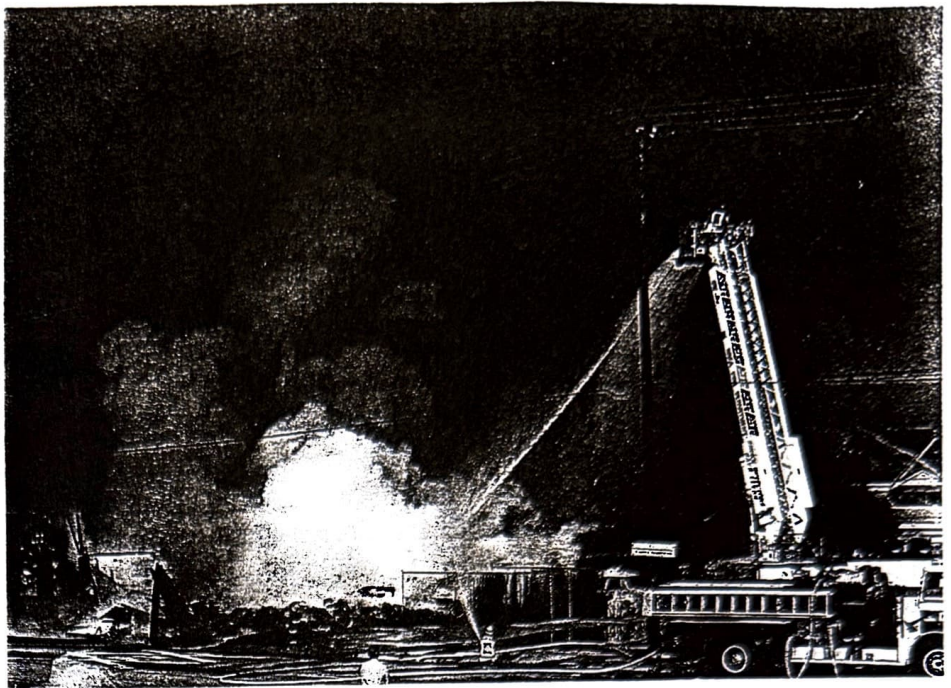
One of the largest fires in Brea history broke out in the late afternoon of Tuesday, April 23. The 50-year old Esco Rubber factory located on North Brea Blvd. was completely destroyed in a cloud of billowing black smoke, while the Brea Foursquare Church lost part of its temporary facilities just to the north of the Esco plant. A senior citizens apartment complex directly to the east was spared, thanks to hard work by firefighters.

There were lots of heroes before the fire was contained nearly 24 hours later. Employees of BIG-O Tires helped evacuate the child care center at the church and led children to safety at their business. Staff from the Brea Boys and Girls Club helped evacuate seniors from the apartments, and used club buses to transport them to emergency shelter at the Brea Senior Citizens Center. After the fire, Neils Brea Mortuary provided space for the church to hold services, while East Hills Baptist Church hosted the pre-school.

Brea police and fire personnel did an outstanding job, with assistance from departments in other cities, including Fullerton, La Habra, Orange County Fire Authority, Garden Grove, and Orange. Firemen were able to rescue Esco's main computer, preserving vital business data. Assistant City Engineer John Hogan and Orange County Environmental Management Agency officials had the foresight to contain water used in fighting the blaze so that it did not contaminate the county's storm drains and run into the ocean.

Chamber President George Delaney commended Fire Chief Bill Simpkins and Police Chief Bill Lentini for the outstanding performance of their departments during this emergency. Letters of appreciation were also sent to the other agencies that assisted. Support for police and fire services is high on the Chamber's agenda for community involvement, and the Chamber strongly encouraged the city to invest in an aerial ladder truck a few years ago, a piece of equipment that was vital in containing the Esco fire.


Chamber President George Delaney presented plaques of appreciation to Police Chief Bill Lentini, left, and Fire Chief Bill Simpkins, for their outstanding efforts during the Esco Rubber Fire.



Brea was joined by several other fire departments in fighting the blaze. Pictured are a Brea Fire Department pumper, with the ladder truck immediately behind it.

Soroptimist International of Brea

5th Annual Charity North/South Softball Game



Wednesday, June 5, 1996

5:30 p.m.

at

Brea Olinda High School

For more information
call: Kim Beckley 714-990-1086