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N E W S R E L E A S E

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Palomar Observatory expected to weather fire storm

PALOMAR MOUNTAIN, Calif. — The tragic fires that continue to affect San Diego County remind us all just how fragile life and property can be. Currently fires are slowly approaching the area of Palomar Mountain, home to the California Institute of Technology's historic Palomar Observatory.

Smoke and ash from the fires have put a temporary end to the Observatory's nightly observations, but the Observatory itself is not threatened. In fact the dome of the 200-inch telescope is a safe place for and has been selected as an evacuation point for the Palomar Mountain Community .

“The builders of Palomar realized the potential fire danger and designed the 200-inch Hale Telescope to survive a fire. It is constructed with two layers of concrete and steel. Also, in recent months our maintenance staff along with foresters have removed dead and dying trees from the Observatory grounds. We are prepared for the worst,” says Palomar Observatory's superintendent, Bob Thicksten. It doesn't hurt that the Observatory has its own million gallon water tank, an array of fire hydrants and staff members who double as volunteer firefighters as well. Thicksten has worked tirelessly to maintain a working relationship with the local fire department, the United States Forest Service and the California Department of Forestry (CDF), which has its own fire station less than half a mile from the Observatory's main gate.

The Palomar Observatory will issue further press statements as necessary.

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