

## Canberra fire damages two units



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**TWO units were destroyed and another two gutted when a suspicious grass fire swept through the plush Canberra suburb of Yarralumla today.**

Other nearby units in the duplex complex also had to be evacuated as the fire threatened property in Schomburgk Street, about a kilometre from the Governor-General's official residence.

All but two of the ACT's fire pumpers were called to help extinguish the blaze which started about 2pm (AEDT).

ACT police have declared the street a crime scene after residents reported seeing children smoking at an old brickworks behind where the fire started. The brickworks is surrounded by grassland and adjoins the Royal Canberra Golf Course.

"It's (the fire's) being treated as suspicious," a police spokeswoman confirmed.

About 20 firefighting units, including two water dumping helicopters, were used to douse the blaze.

ACT acting fire chief Chris Maguire said firefighters had to use all resources they could because of the closeness of homes.

"Because of the proximity to the residential units, it was really important to get a heavy weight of attack," he said.

"So we responded with a lot of vehicles very quickly and were able to make sure that we minimised the damage that we had.

"There was potential there to lose at least two more units, so we're very happy with the actions of the firefighters."

Mr Maguire said firefighters feared there could be worse to come with high temperatures and a drop in humidity forecast over the coming days.

"(We have) got probably more critical fire conditions facing us over the next two to three days," he said.

Nearby resident and former ACT Legislative Assembly speaker, Greg Cornwell, was inside his house with his wife when they heard the sirens.

"(We) walked out onto the balcony and (my wife) shrieked as the pine trees were going up 100 metres from our house," Mr Cornwell said.

"(The fire) roared up through the pine trees, over the mound and rushed down the other side and was spreading towards the fences."

Temperatures in the ACT are expected to reach 35 degrees Celsius tomorrow after hitting a high of 34 degrees at 3.30pm (AEDT) today.

Weather bureau spokesman Nick Bright said he expected high fire danger although "we're not expecting the same wind speeds tomorrow".

In January 2003, more than 400 homes were destroyed and four people killed in a bushfire which

reached Canberra suburbs.

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