Are arsonists responsible for the Los Angeles wildfires?



Some of the most skilled fire investigators in the country are working to determine what caused the blazes.

The key to identifying the cause of the still-raging Palisades Fire lies on a brush-covered hilltop where the blaze broke out just after 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday.

Fire investigators are still working to determine what sparked the inferno, but experts say it's easy to rule out one common cause of wildfires: lightning. The region was free of stormy weather this week. The area near the Temescal Ridge Trail also appears to be free of power lines or transformers, which rules out another potential cause.

That leaves the source of most wildfires: people. But was it a result of arson? Four experts interviewed by NBC News said it was a possibility, but they thought the fires were more likely not set on purpose.

firefighter battles the Palisades Fire as it burns a structure in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles on Tuesday's news Alerts.

Are arsonists responsible for the Los Angeles wildfires?

By Adiel Kaplan, Andrew Blankstein and Rich Schapiro

The key to identifying the cause of the still-raging Palisades Fire lies on a brush-covered hilltop where the blaze broke out just after 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday.

Fire investigators are still working to determine what sparked the inferno, but experts say it's easy to rule out one common cause of wildfires: lightning. The region was free of stormy weather this week. The area near the Temescal Ridge Trail also appears to be free of power lines or transformers, which rules out another potential cause

Follow along for live updates

That leaves the source of most wildfires: people. But was it a result of arson? Four experts interviewed by NBC News said it was a possibility, but they thought the fires were more likely not set on purpose.

palisades fire california wildfire

A firefighter battles the Palisades Fire as it burns a structure in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles on Tuesday.Ethan Swope / AP

"This is what we call inaccessible, rugged terrain," said Rick Crawford, former battalion chief for the Los Angeles Fire Department. "Arsonists usually aren't going to go 500 feet off a trailhead through trees and brush, set a fire and then run away."

Fires break out in the wooded areas on the edges of Los Angeles all the time — many of them caused unintentionally by homeless people. The fires almost never grow into a destructive blaze due to the lack of high winds. The combination of ferocious winds and a parched landscape created ideal conditions for the fast-moving fires that have consumed large swaths of Los Angeles this week.