

Toy rocket blamed for fire in York

Officials warn that sparks can cause serious damage

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YORK, Maine — Fire Department and water district officials are warning residents to be aware of the potential danger of children's rocket toys, after what they believe was a spark from such a toy touched off a brush fire on water district land earlier this month.

Fire officials were called to water district land near Chases Pond, the town's water supply, at 11:30 p.m. May 1, when someone called the station reporting smelling smoke in the area. Firefighters spent an hour and a half looking for a fire, said Assistant Chief Dave Apgar, with no luck.

"We thought it could have been a campfire smoldering but not that large," he said. "We didn't see any fire."

Gary Stevens, the water district's resource protection manager, patrolled the trails the following day and spoke with several hikers, but found no sign of a fire.

A week later, a Maine Forest Service entomologist walking in the woods found a burned patch of land one-half to three-quarters of an acre in size.

"We're pretty fortunate it went out," Apgar said. "It was at a time when everything was greening up and it happened at night when the dew sets in and the wind calms down."

When Apgar and Stevens investigated, they found a toy rocket with a parachute attached that was burned and lying on the scorched area.

"We're figuring it probably came from pretty close by," Stevens said. "The fire marshal said he's seen those rockets travel up to a half a mile, but we're thinking it probably didn't travel that far."

Stevens said the area that was burned was very close to Chases Pond, so the potential for serious damage was significant.

"Where it burned is all downhill from there to the pond, and right there is an intake," he said. "If it had got burning bad, it would have been devastating for water quality and with everything burned off, there would have been an erosion problem."

Apgar and Stevens both stressed that they're not looking to get anyone in trouble, but said it's important for people to think about the ramifications of the toys they give their children.