

SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

Fire suppression gel may have helped save family's home

By Staci Matlock

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Buddy Laird said three things saved his off-grid, solar home on Cochiti Mesa from the ravages of the Las Conchas Fire last week: thinning trees, the grace of God and Barricade Fire Blocking Gel. The product, designed by a Florida firefighter more than a decade ago, can put out a fire or stop it from burning structures, propane tanks, cars and trees. Laird said he thinks his family's home was one of only five houses and three garages that survived the fire in the area, a dozen miles southwest of Los Alamos. He estimated there originally were about 40 structures belonging to year-round residents. "The community is gone," he said from his Preventech Auto Service and Sales shop in Los Alamos. His wood house survived, but the fire destroyed his solar-power system. "The structure is standing, but there's no way of supporting it. We have no electricity, no water," he said. Laird said he sprayed his house with the gel less than half an hour before the Las Conchas firestorm came blistering through the community. The canola oil-based gel was invented by Florida firefighter John Bartlett. "He saw that a baby diaper didn't burn during a fire," said Dan Gouldner, a company spokesman. "It's evolved from there." Gouldner said Bartlett worked on the gel's formula until it produced no toxins. The gel earned a U.S. EPA award for being environmentally friendly. The U.S. Forest Service approved the gel's use for fire suppression in 2006. The product can be applied from the air and from the ground, Gouldner said. The concentrated gel comes in a spray container that residents can attach to a garden hose. "You have approximately 24 hours of protection," Gouldner said, adding that the gel can be rehydrated by misting it with water, making it last a day or two longer. Barricade is available from authorized dealers. The only one in New Mexico is Mike Ramsay of Firestop in Albuquerque. Bartlett and other Barricade staff will be going out to visit Laird's house once fire officials allow them into the area, so they can analyze the impact of the fast-moving wildfire. Laird, meanwhile, has another concern. He hopes to get an insurance adjuster in as soon as possible so he can begin cleaning up the property and figuring out how to salvage what's there. He and his wife can't move back into the house until all of that is done. "I can't

live there until we and our insurance adjuster can get in and we can figure out what we lost," Laird said. "We need in and we need in before the rains and the erosion. We're all very well-equipped with survival. We go in with proper vehicles, chain saws, straps, all the equipment. We have moved many trees without help from anyone else." Fire officials are cautious about allowing residents back into recent burn areas, due in part to the risks from burned trees falling.