

# New cameras keep electronic eye on Western wildfires

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As the summer wildfire season heats up in the West, a growing network of online cameras installed on forested mountaintops is changing the way crews fight fires by allowing early detection that triggers quicker, cheaper and more tactical suppression.

The network of roughly 20 high-definition cameras being installed around the Lake Tahoe region can pan, tilt and zoom into fires. They can rotate 360 degrees. And the cameras even have night vision to supplement human lookouts that only work during daylight hours.

"At night, it becomes real easy to see a fire. Just a few days ago, we could see a fire from northern Nevada into Oregon, about 100 miles away, and it wasn't hard to see at all," said Graham Kent, director of the Nevada Seismological Laboratory and a professor at the University of Nevada, Reno.

"We know from last year with lightning strikes, it can be just one or two trees on fire and it looks like a Roman candle," he said.

Scientists with the University of Nevada, Reno, who built the system, are trying to teach the cameras to recognize fire and smoke and send an alert.

At the command tower, dispatchers monitor and operate the cameras remotely. The feeds should help dispatchers make more efficient decisions when it comes to deploying resources.

The cameras will augment—not replace—human fire spotters who climb high towers armed with only a radio and binoculars, scanning the forest for faraway smoke, [fire](#) officials say.

They hope to install the internet-ready cameras throughout California and other Western states.

At a seismological meeting earlier this year, the cameras were credited with the discovery of six fires and provided early intelligence on more than two dozen fires last summer, Kent said.

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