

# Florida Man Arrested for Palisades Fire

A 29-year-old Florida man has been arrested for starting the Palisades Fire.

Uber driver Jonathan Rinderknecht has been charged with destruction of property with fire.

According to the Department of Justice, “witness statements, video surveillance, cellphone data, and analysis of fire dynamics and patterns at the scene, among other things,” determined that Rinderknecht “maliciously set the Lachman Fire just after midnight on January 1 on land owned by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA), an organization that received federal funding.”

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The same fire, then called the Palisades Fire, burned federal property.

Rinderknecht dropped off a passenger in the area, drove toward Skull Rock Trailhead, parked his car, and walked up the trail after attempting to contact a friend.

“During an interview with law enforcement on January 24, 2025, Rinderknecht lied about where he was when he first saw the Lachman Fire,” the DOJ explained. “He claimed he was near the bottom of a hiking trail when he first saw the fire and called 911, but geolocation data from his iPhone carrier showed that he was standing in a clearing 30 feet from the fire as it

rapidly grew.”

Acting US Attorney Bill Essayli announced on X that among the evidence collected from the suspect’s devices was “an image he generated on ChatGPT depicting a burning city.”

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“While we cannot undo the damage and destruction that was done, we hope his arrest and the charges against him bring some measure of justice to the victims of this horrific tragedy,” Essayli wrote.

Governor Gavin Newsom (D-CA) previously announced a \$101 million fund to rebuild fire-devastated areas of Los Angeles. The fund is specifically intended for the “development of affordable multifamily rental housing.”

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“Los Angeles has taken significant steps to rebuild after January’s fires, but the devastation is significant and there remains a long road ahead,” Newsom said in a statement in July. “Thousands of families – from Pacific Palisades to Altadena to Malibu – are still displaced and we owe it to them to help. The funding we’re announcing today will accelerate the development of affordable multifamily rental housing so that those rebuilding their lives after this tragedy have access to a safe, affordable place to come home to.”

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