

Australian mum says son killed in LA fires as water ran out

AFP – An Australian mother has spoken of how she tried in vain to save her blind son from the Los Angeles wildfires as water supplies ran dry.

Shelley Sykes, a TV production entrepreneur, told Australian media of a desperate battle to save her 32-year-old son Rory, who had cerebral palsy.

Wind-fanned wildfires have killed at least 24 people in Los Angeles, consuming communities and destroying homes.

Sykes said on social media that she and her son lived on a 6.8-hectare (17-acre) estate in Malibu, a beachside city in Los Angeles County.

Rory Sykes, who appeared in British TV show “Kiddy Kapers” in the 1990s, had his own self-contained cottage on the estate, she said.

Her son was blind and had difficulty walking.

“Rory’s feet with the heat had started to swell, and he couldn’t walk very well. And he also had problems with his tummy. So he didn’t want to be far away from the bathroom,” Sykes told Australia’s Channel Nine on Sunday.

“So he said, ‘Mum, you go, I’m staying’.”

Sykes said she could not leave her son alone on the estate.

“I stayed in the main property with my two peacocks in a bathroom because it was hard to breathe. Sitting on the floor with bottled water and trying to keep wet.”

Sykes said she saw embers on the roof of her son’s cottage and

tried to extinguish them with a hose, but “there was no water coming out”.

– ‘Devastated’ –

She then drove to the closest fire station seeking help, but was told they, too, had no access to water.

Water hydrants in some Los Angeles neighbourhoods ran dry during the initial effort to fight the blazes, sparking widespread anger among residents.

Authorities told the Los Angeles Times newspaper that the water shortages occurred because the scale and duration of the firefighting effort were more than the city’s infrastructure was designed for.

When the fire department took Sykes back to her property, she found the cottage had been reduced to “just black ash”.

“There was nothing there,” she told Channel Nine.

Sykes – who shared her birthday with her son – said she was overwhelmed by his death.

“I am just devastated, it is unreal at the moment. I cannot breathe.”

Fire authorities said he died from carbon monoxide poisoning, Sykes said.

The stricken mother said she had been unable to remove her son from the danger.

“I’ve got a broken arm. I couldn’t lift him. I couldn’t move him,” she said in a separate interview with Australia’s Channel 10.

Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said it was aware of reports that an Australian man had died and was engaging closely with local authorities.

The department said it was providing consular assistance to the man's family, but was unable to comment further citing "privacy obligations".

AFP