

Los Angeles Wildfire Declared 'Major Emergency'; 100,000 Forced to Evacuate, Two Freeways Closed

At a Glance

- Residents of more than 23,000 homes in Los Angeles were ordered to evacuate.
 - The 210 and 5 Freeways are closed because of the Saddleridge Fire.
 - On Thursday, numerous mobile homes were destroyed in Calimesa, California, by a wildfire.
 - Two deaths have been connected to the fires; one in Calimesa and one in Los Angeles.
 - Fewer than 195,000 customers still had no electricity in Northern California because of PG&E shutoffs.
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A fast-moving wildfire jumped into neighborhoods in Los Angeles overnight forcing evacuations, destroying homes and closing two freeways and an interstate. It was one of two deadly fires burning Friday in Southern California.

At least two deaths were being blamed on the fires, and news reports said a separate death may be connected to the widespread power outages in California this week.

Flames from the Saddleridge Fire, which started about 9 p.m. local time Thursday in Sylmar, crossed over the 210 Freeway and later the 5 Freeway. Both highways were closed because of smoke. Interstate 405 was closed at State Road 118, and the 14 Freeway also closed.

By later Friday afternoon, the fire had spread to about 12 square miles in the northern foothills of the San Fernando Valley and was 13% contained. The Los

Angeles Fire Department deemed the fire a “Major Emergency,” the highest classification there is for a fire emergency.

At a news conference Friday, Fire Chief Ralph Terrazas blamed the fire for the death of a man who died of a heart attack overnight. Terrazas said one firefighter had a slight eye injury.

Officials ordered mandatory evacuations for more than 23,000 homes in the Porter Ranch, Granada Hills, and Oakridge Estates neighborhoods. The order covers about 100,000 people, officials said.

Los Angeles Rams football coach Sean McVay said three of the team’s players are among the people who have been evacuated, according to KCBS.

Terrazas said 25 structures had been destroyed in the fire that was growing about 1 square mile each hour.

Santa Ana winds were fanning the flames. Linda Lam, a weather.com meteorologist, said a moderate to strong Santa Ana wind event would bring wind gusts over 50 mph at times into Friday evening in parts of Southern California. These strong winds combined with dry conditions have prompted red flag warnings.

The warnings were expected to end at 6 p.m Friday, but they were extended to 6 p.m. Saturday because the winds are expected to linger.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District issued a smoke advisory saying the fire was creating unhealthy air in Reseda. The smoke was also affecting air quality in portions of the San Fernando Valley, Topanga and Malibu.

More than 1,000 firefighters were battling the blaze, the chief said. The cause of the fire has not been determined.

The fire forced the closing of more than two dozen schools in Los Angeles and Ventura counties. California State University, Northridge also closed Friday.

Edwin Bernard, 73, told The Associated Press he and his wife had to leave four cats behind as they fled their Sylmar home. He said they were only able to grab their three dogs.

“The fireman said, ‘go, go, go!’” Bernard said. “It was a whole curtain of fire,” he said. “There was fire on all sides. We had to leave.”

California Gov. Gavin Newsom’s office announced the state secured a Fire Management Assistance Grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help ensure the availability of resources to fight the Saddleridge Fire. The grant will assist local, state and tribal agencies responding to the fire to apply for 75% reimbursement of their eligible fire suppression costs, a statement said.

The Saddleridge Fire was one of several wildfires that burned as hundreds of thousands of California residents entered a third day without electricity. Utilities had shut off the power in an effort to prevent falling or sparking wires igniting fires.

On Thursday afternoon, a blaze known as the Sandalwood Fire grew rapidly and destroyed numerous mobile homes in the town of Calimesa, about 65 miles east of Los Angeles.

Todd Hopkins, a division chief with the Riverside County Fire Department, said at a news conference Friday morning that 76 structures were destroyed in the fire and another 14 were damaged. The fire had burned 1.3 square miles and was 10% contained.

Fire crews responded quickly to the flames Thursday as they invaded the Villa Calimesa Mobile Home Park not far from Interstate 10. The surrounding area, which includes a middle school, was ordered to evacuate as the fire grew and moved quickly to the west, away from the freeway.

Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco said Friday that 500 homes remained under a mandatory evacuation order.

Footage from a KTLA-TV helicopter showed dozens of mobile homes on fire.

Division Chief Hopkins confirmed that one person died in the fire. KABC identified the victim as 89-year-old Lois Arvickson whose son had reported her missing late Thursday.

Don Turner told AP his mother’s neighbors saw her going into her garage as flames approached. Soon after the garage caught fire, but neighbors didn’t know if she escaped.

Bianco said two other residents of the mobile home park had not been located, but he added he didn't want to say they were missing.

Because there was a death, Bianco said, arson and homicide investigators are looking into the fire to determine whether there should be any criminal culpability.

The fire was sparked when a garbage truck driver dumped a burning load of trash onto vegetation, Hopkins said. Dry, windy conditions allowed the flames to spread quickly.

Rosie Castalon lost her home in the blaze, but her dog was rescued.

"Fire just engulfed the entire park," she told KCBS.

In Northern California, Pacific Gas & Electric began restoring electricity to customers after shutting off power to as many as 750,000 homes and businesses to prevent power lines from sparking wildfires. At noon Friday, power had been restored to 543,000 customers, PG&E reported. Fewer than 150,000 remained without electricity by Friday evening.

The death of a 67-year-old man in El Dorado County may be connected to the power outages. The man, who was dependent on oxygen, died about 12 minutes after PG&E shut off power to the home where he was staying with family, the Mountain Democrat reported.

Relatives said the man didn't make it in time to an emergency device that would have supplied oxygen without power when the electricity was shut off at 3:30 a.m. Wednesday. El Dorado County Fire Chief Lloyd Ogan told the AP he couldn't say whether the death was directly related to the power outage.

"It's devastating beyond words," Gov. Newsom said, according to the AP. "Losing a family member is horrific and to the extent, this was the reason why I hope that is investigated and I hope those responsible are held to account."

PG&E officials said the company has to repair 23 instances of weather-related damage that had been reported in areas affected by shutoffs, according to the San Francisco Chronicle.

A small wildfire in the affected area forced about 150 families to flee their homes

in Moraga in Contra Costa County, the San Francisco Chronicle reported. The fast-moving fire had burned about 40 acres as of early Thursday and was 80% contained.

Another small fire that broke out under some power lines on San Bruno Mountain about 10:55 a.m. Thursday prompted voluntary evacuations in parts of the city of Brisbane, just south of San Francisco. Officials said it had burned 4 to 5 acres.

A large fire that began Sunday was only 30% contained on Friday. The Briceburg fire has burned more than 7.6 square miles in Mariposa County, according to Cal Fire.

In Southern California, electricity remained cut off for more than 22,600 customers at noon Friday, according to Southern California Edison.

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