

Massive wildfires scorch California, but humidity helps keep feared lightning at bay for now

By Ryan W. Miller

USA Today, Monday, August 24, 2020

Massive wildfires [ignited by lightning](#) continued to rage Monday on all sides of the San Francisco Bay area, and much of Northern California was under a red flag warning as high winds with [lightning](#) threatened to spark even more flames.

Three vast blazes are scorching Northern California, and more than 650 wildfires, most sparked by lightning, have burned across the state in the last week.

However, firefighters received some help Monday from the weather as humidity rose and the lightning was kept at bay overnight. "Mother Nature's helped us quite a bit," said Billy See, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) incident commander for a complex of fires burning south of San Francisco.

At least seven people have died from the fires, including the first victim of the CZU Lightning Complex fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains, south of San Francisco, who was found dead Sunday.

Nearly a quarter-million people are under evacuation orders and warnings as weather forecasts signaled the looming threat of more lightning with hot temperatures and unpredictable winds.

Here's what we know on Monday:

LNU Lightning Complex, SCU Lightning Complex, CZU Lightning Complex burning area around San Francisco

On all sides of the San Francisco Bay Area, three of the largest fires in California are burning: the LNU Lightning Complex to the north has burned 350,030 acres and was 22% contained; the SCU Lightning Complex to the southeast has burned 347,196 acres and was 10% contained; and the CZU Lightning Complex to the south has burned 78,000 and was 13% contained.

A lightning complex is a group of fires started by lightning strikes.

California fires: [This is how a lightning storm can start a wildfire](#)

According to [Cal Fire](#), the LNU Lightning Complex in California's wine country is expected to grow. "Fires continue to make runs in multiple directions, impacting multiple communities," Cal Fire said. With more than 1,000 structures destroyed or damaged, and at least four fatalities confirmed since the fire started burning last Monday, the LNU Lightning Complex has been the most deadly and destructive in Northern California.

The [Santa Rosa Press Democrat](#) reported that the fire gained less than 3,000 acres over night and the expected lightning storms did not materialize.

"That's a pretty substantial victory last night, considering all things," Cal Fire spokesman Jay Tracy told the newspaper.

The SCU Lightning Complex in the Santa Clara area "merged into two major fires and are broken into three zones," Cal Fire says.

With both the LNU and SCU complexes burning more than 500 square miles, the fires have become two of the three largest fires in state history.

In the CZU Lightning Complex, the body of a 70-year-old man was discovered Sunday in a remote area called Last Chance. Approximately 77,000 people have been evacuated from the area of CZU complex, and more than 200 buildings have been destroyed, Cal Fire says.

"This is one of the darkest periods we've been in with this fire," Santa Cruz Sheriff's Department Chief Deputy Chris Clark said.

Across California, more than 12,000 lightning strikes have been recorded since Aug. 15, igniting hundreds of blazes. More than 14,000 firefighters, 2,400 engines and 95 aircraft are combating the fires.

Other large fires included the Butte/Tehama/Glenn Lightning Complex west of Red Bluff and the River Fire south of Salinas, both of which had burned nearly 50,000 acres each.

According to the [Los Angeles Times](#), wildfires have burned more than 1.2 million acres of land in California since last month. In all of 2019, which was a slow year for fires, only 259,000 acres, the Times reported.

In Southern California, several fires are burning around the Los Angeles area, including an 11-day-old blaze that held steady at just under 50 square miles.

Forecast calls for more dry thunderstorms that could ignite even more blazes

Most of Northern California remains under red flag warnings, indicating "critical fire weather conditions," as more dry thunderstorms threaten the state.

The dry storms could bring more lightning strikes as well as gusty winds that could spread any fire started by the strike.

The red flag warnings were in effect through Monday night.

Mark Brunton, a battalion chief for Cal Fire, said firefighters are prepared for more flames, but he's not sure what to expect.

"There's a lot of potential for things to really go crazy out there," he said.

Reports of 'sickening' looting of fire victims, including a firefighter

As tens of thousands have been forced from their homes, [looters have taken advantage of the situation](#), local authorities have warned.

In one case, a looter burglarized a California firefighter's marked vehicle, Santa Cruz County Sheriff Jim Hart said Sunday.

Brunton called the incident "sickening" and said the firefighter's wallet was stolen and his bank account was "drained" while he was at work directing firefighting crews in the area.

Hart said his department has made eight arrests related to looting so far. Some of the looters have been from outside the area, he said. Others are neighbors. Looters have taken personal possessions inside homes and guns, for example. Hart added a story he heard about a group trying to take an outdoor heating system.

"I have no empathy, I have no patience for somebody who is going to come into our community and steal from people who have been who have been evacuated and victimized and traumatized," Hart said.

Air quality worsens in north, central California

With so many fires burning throughout the state, unhealthy air full of smoke continues to blanket the areas around the blazes and south in Central California.

The National Weather Service issued air quality alerts throughout much of the Bay Area and central California "until fires are extinguished."

"Because of the number of fires we have in California, the smoke is just a lot more than normal," said Dan Kottlowski, a senior meteorologist at AccuWeather. "As long as the fires are burning, you're going to keep seeing smoke in these areas."

Kottlowski said much of the smoke gets caught in Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys, and the air flow often remains stagnant during this time of year. Warm weather can also create temperature inversions that trap the particulate matter in the lower atmosphere, worsening air quality over time, Kottlowski added.

The weather service's office for the San Joaquin Valley in Hanford warned residents to "stay indoors if possible" and to avoid prolonged outdoor activity. Smoke was forecast to move north Monday, the office said.

Air quality index maps showed levels of fine particulate matter, or PM 2.5, in the air in parts of northern and central California as among the worst levels in the world.

"Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infection," the weather service says.

How to stay safe from wildfire smoke

[Wildfire smoke](#) can irritate your eyes, nose, throat and lungs, make it hard to breathe and make you cough or wheeze, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

To reduce exposure to smoke, the CDC recommends choosing a room that can be closed off to outside air. Place a portable air cleaner or filter in the room if possible, the CDC says, and wear a [respirator to filter out smoke](#).

While most cloth or surgical masks will help prevent the spread of the new coronavirus, they don't keep people safe from harmful particles in smoke. A mask designed to filter fine particulate matter, like an N-95, is best, though supplies are scarce because of the pandemic.

Kottowski said the more layers, the better, if you don't have access to a respirator. Some face coverings allow you to put an additional filter in to protect you from smoke particles, he said.

An air conditioning unit with high efficiency filters can capture fine particles from smoke, and setting the system to recirculate mode can prevent outside air from coming in. Also, avoid burning candles and frying or broiling meat, the CDC says.

Update 8:25 a.m.: CalTrans closes Highway 120/49; Weather break for SCU crews?

[By Brian Clark](#)

Modesto Bee, Mon., Aug. 24, 2020

Update, 8:25 a.m.: Caltrans closes roads around Moc Fire

Highway 120/49 is closed in the area of the Moc Fire, the state Department of Transportation said in a [post on Twitter](#) Monday morning. The road is closed from Chinese Camp in Tuolumne County east to SR-120/Priest Grade and south to SR-49/Penon Blanco Road in Mariposa County. Drivers are advised to seek alternate routes. There is no estimated time of reopening, Caltrans said.

Update, 7:45 a.m.: Crews at SCU Lightning Complex could get break

Unlike Sunday, More moderate weather conditions this afternoon – more humidity and cooler temperatures – could give those fighting the [SCU Lightning Complex](#), which includes the Canyon Zone Fire in and around Stanislaus County's Del Puerto Canyon, the break they need.

The fire grew overnight a little, to 347,196 acres, and CalFire was able to assess more of the damage as containment remained at 10%.

The agency announced Monday morning that 12 structures had been destroyed and 12 "minor structures" also were destroyed. More than 20,000 structures remained threatened.

Three first responders and two civilians have suffered injuries.

There is still no estimate on when the fire, which encompasses seven counties, including Merced, will be under control.

Diablo Grande Parkway and the Diablo Grande community remain under an evacuation warning.

There was no immediate update Monday morning on the Moc Fire in Tuolumne and Mariposa counties with the exception that containment had gone from 10% to 12%.

Update, 6:50 a.m.: Air quality off to a poor start on Monday

Unlike Sunday, when some Stanislaus County residents were greeted with a somewhat blue sky in the morning, Monday has gotten off to a bad start in terms of [air quality](#).

The air quality index at 6 a.m. was at 164, in the unhealthy range as fires to the east and west of Modesto continued to burn.

On Sunday, through at least late morning, the AQI was in the 80s, in the moderate range.

The National Weather Service on Thursday issued an Air Quality Alert, that remains in place until crews can get hold of the fires burning in Stanislaus County and elsewhere (the SCU Lightning Complex) and in Tuolumne and Mariposa counties (the Moc Fire). There are other fires throughout Northern California and in the hills east of Fresno.

Temperatures in the mid to high 90s are expected through Friday in the Modesto area.

We should have an update on the fires shortly.

Update, 7:40 p.m.: SCU Lightning fire grows; overnight conditions a concern

In updates Sunday night on various fires, here is the latest:

The SCU Lightning Complex grew to 343,965 acres throughout the day. The LNU Lightning Complex in Sonoma and surrounding counties has grown to 347,630 acres.

Crews are especially worried about the hot, dry and windy conditions facing them into Sunday night and Monday morning. The Red Flag warning has now been extended to 5 p.m. Monday.

CalFire also updated its evacuation warnings to include four spots in Merced County:

- North of Hwy 152 to I-5 to the Santa Clara County Line and Stanislaus County Line
- West of the I-5 excluding the community of Santa Nella
- East of Santa Clara County Line and Stanislaus County Line to the Delta-Mendota
- South of the Stanislaus County Line to Hwy 152

Meanwhile, the Turlock Fire Department announced they have firefighters at the LNU Lightning Complex, the North Complex in Plumas and the BTU Lightning Complex just south of Chico.

In a set of numbers released by CalFire on Sunday:

- Since Aug. 15, there have been more than 12,000 lightning strikes.
- There have been 615 new wildfires.
- More than 14,000 firefighters are covering 2,400 fire engines, 284 dozers, 327 fire crews, 321 water tenders and 95 aircraft.
- There have been about 60 out of state engines.
- Two dozen wildfires have consumed more than 1.1 million acres.

Update, 5:15 p.m.: CalFire talks at Sunday afternoon press conference

With more adverse weather expected from Sunday night into Monday, officials with CalFire and partner agencies urged residents within the SCU Lightning Complex fires to take evacuation warnings and orders seriously.

“We are hyper-focused with CalFire Team 6 on that structure defense component and evacuations,” Jake Hess, the chief assigned to the Santa Clara Unit, said at a news conference in Alameda County on Sunday afternoon. “So, please, please, look at those evacuation orders or warnings and listen to those. We put those out there for a reason.”

Officials said 1,323 personnel are fighting the SCU Lightning Complex, which now involves San Benito and Merced counties in addition to Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Alameda, Contra Costa and Santa Clara.

Speaking on areas of particular concern, a CalFire chief spoke about the southern piece of the Canyon Fire in and around Del Puerto Canyon. “The fire continues to push down into the (Henry W. Coe) State Park through wilderness area, and that continues to give us a little challenge,” he said. “We’ve created a number of different contingency lines on both sides of the fire and those contingency lines are usually done with bulldozers that are creating lines the fire can’t burn through.” Those bulldozed lines are augmented with an attack from tankers that lay down retardant lines.

Hess referred to the SCU Lightning Complex battle as a marathon. Getting the fire controlled and extinguished is just the first part. Then will come the “fire suppression repair piece,” he said. The CalFire Santa Clara Unit will be living with this incident for years, he predicted.

Returning to the more immediate future, Hess said the potential lightning to come Sunday night and Monday “has us very white-knuckled right now” and CalFire turning to partner agencies for resources.

Twenty-plus lightning strikes began the fires that merged into the SCU Complex, he said, calling it an “unprecedented event that immediately overwhelmed our resources” and has crews battling 22 fires spread out over the counties.

Update, 6:50 a.m.: Modesto’s air quality already unhealthy as crews battle SCU, Moc fires

By Deke Farrow

Fresno Bee, Monday, August 24, 2020

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Update, 2:30 p.m.: SCU Lightning Complex just 10 percent contained

Crews fighting the SCU Lightning Complex fires faced the threats of wind gusts and dry lightning Sunday and into Monday as they worked to improve containment beyond the 10% it’s been for the past few days.

The complex, which includes the Canyon Fire in and around Del Puerto Canyon west of Patterson, had burned 339,968 acres as of the latest update from CalFire on Sunday.

Overnight Saturday, poor humidity and southwest winds “tested containment lines on the north edge of the Calaveras and Canyon zones,” CalFire reported Sunday morning.

A Red Flag warning, signaling the possibility of warm winds and dry lightning, began Sunday at 5 a.m. and was expected to last through Monday afternoon at 5. The period of greatest concern was Sunday evening through Monday morning, CalFire reported.

The weather service’s Sacramento office posted on its Facebook page a gif of a weather prediction model that shows scattered thunderstorms with little to no rainfall are expected to move across Northern California from Sunday evening into Monday.

“Even if the storms miss the complex, gusty outflow winds from nearby cells will be of concern for fire growth and firefighter safety,” according to a CalFire incident update Sunday.

As the agency reported injuries to two firefighters and two civilians, it said “aerial assets” arrived Sunday to assist in perimeter updates and operational decisions on the complex.

There is no prediction on when the fires will be fully contained, CalFire reported.

Diablo Grande Parkway and the Diablo Grande community remained under an evacuation warning.

While there are five known structures that have been destroyed, 20,265 remain threatened.

The SCU Lightning Complex started Aug. 16 with multiple fires. They merged into two major fires and are broken into three zones: Canyon, Calaveras and Deer. The complex is burning in Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties.

Saturday night, it became the second largest fire by acreage in state history dating back to 1932, but was surpassed overnight by the LNU Lightning Complex in Sonoma and Napa counties, among others. The LNU is now at 341,243 acres. The largest is the Mendocino Complex, which burned 459,123 acres in July of 2018.

Moc Fire containment doubles

Containment of the Moc Fire, burning in parts of Tuolumne and Mariposa counties, has gone from 5% to 10%, CalFire reported Sunday morning. It remains at 2,800 acres.

No structures have been lost or damaged, but 1,500 remain threatened.

CalFire's update said the fire is active in the Jackass Creek drainage, very rugged terrain and a difficult area for fire personnel to access.

Early Sunday afternoon on its Facebook page, the CalFire Tuolumne Calaveras United posted that the fire poses a significant threat to the Priest Coulterville Road area. It also said it is working with local utility providers to restore power where it does not threaten firefighter safety.

The Tuolumne County Sheriff's Department, on its Facebook page, wrote that additional resources had arrived or were to arrive Sunday. Because of hot and dry weather conditions, along with possible lightning over the next two days, evacuated areas remain threatened.

There are evacuation areas set up at the Mother Lode and Mariposa fairgrounds.

Air quality warnings issued

Because of fires burning across Northern California, air quality continues to be unhealthy for much of the interior, the National Weather Service is reporting. It urges residents to limit outdoor activities and check on sensitive groups.

A post on the weather service's Facebook page links to AirNow to check air quality by ZIP code or city. Shortly before noon, AirNow said air quality in Modesto was well within the "moderate" range, but the forecast was for "unhealthy."

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has a valleywide air quality alert in effect because of the wildfires. It warns that particulate matter pollution can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Big California wildfires burn on as death toll reaches 7

By Martha Mendoza and John Antczak, Associated Press
Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Aug. 24, 2020

SCOTTS VALLEY, Calif. (AP) — Firefighters battling three massive wildfires in Northern California got a break from the weather early Monday as humidity rose and there was no return of the onslaught of lightning strikes that ignited the infernos a week earlier.

The region surrounding San Francisco Bay remained under extreme fire danger until late afternoon amid the possibility of lightning and gusty winds, but fire commanders said the weather had aided their efforts so far.

"Mother Nature's helped us quite a bit," said Billy See, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection incident commander for a complex of fires burning south of San Francisco.

The three big fires around the Bay Area and many others burning across the state have put nearly 250,000 people under evacuation orders and warnings and authorities renewed warnings for anxious homeowners to stay away from the evacuation zones.

Six people who returned to a restricted area south of San Francisco to check on their properties were surprised by fire and had to be rescued, the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office said.

The death toll from the fires reached 7 over the weekend after authorities battling a big fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains south of San Francisco announced the discovery of the body of a 70-year-old man in a remote area called Last Chance.

He had been reported missing and police had to use a helicopter to reach the area of about 40 off-the-grid homes at the end of a windy, steep dirt road north of the city of Santa Cruz.

The area was under an evacuation order and Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Chris Clark said the discovery of the man's body was a reminder of how important it was for residents to evacuate from fire danger zones.

"This is one of the darkest periods we've been in with this fire," he said.

California over the last week has been hit by 650 wildfires across the state, many sparked by more than 12,000 lightning strikes recorded since Aug. 15. There are 14,000 firefighters, 2,400 engines and 95 aircraft battling the fires.

The Santa Cruz fire is one of three "complexes," or groups of fires, burning on all sides of the San Francisco Bay Area. All were started by lightning.

Fire crew made slow progress battling the blazes over the weekend, which included a break in the unseasonably warm weather and little wind.

But the National Weather Service issued a "red flag" warning through Monday afternoon for the drought-stricken area, meaning extremely dangerous fire conditions exist, including high temperatures, low humidity, lightning and wind gusts up to 65 mph (105 kph) that officials said "may result in dangerous and unpredictable fire behavior."

A fire in wine country north of San Francisco and another southeast of the city have within a week have grown to be two of the three largest fires in state history, with both burning more than 500 square miles (1,295 square kilometers).

The wine country fire has been the most deadly and destructive blaze, accounting for five deaths and 845 destroyed homes and other buildings. Three of the victims were in a home that was under an evacuation order.

Officials surveying maps at command centers are astonished by the sheer size of the fires, said Cal Fire spokesman Brice Bennett.

"You could overlay half of one of these fires and it covers the entire city of San Francisco," Bennett said Sunday.

In Southern California, an 11-day-old blaze held steady at just under 50 square miles (106 square kilometers) near Lake Hughes in the northern Los Angeles County mountains. Rough terrain, hot weather and the potential for thunderstorms with lightning strikes challenged firefighters on Sunday.

Authorities said their firefighting effort in Santa Cruz was hindered by people who refused to evacuate and those who were [using the chaos to loot](#). Santa Cruz County Sheriff Jim Hart said 100 officers were patrolling and anyone not authorized to be in an evacuation zone would be arrested.

"What we're hearing from the community is that there's a lot of looting going on," Hart said.

He and county District Attorney Jeff Rosell expressed anger at what Rosell called the "absolutely soulless" criminals victimizing people already victimized by the fire. Among them was a fire commander who was robbed when he left his fire vehicle to help direct operations.

Someone entered the vehicle and stole personal items, including a wallet and "drained his bank account," said Chief Mark Brunton, a battalion chief for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

"I can't imagine a bigger lowlife," Hart said.

Holly Hansen, who fled the wine country fire, was among evacuees from the community of Angwin allowed Sunday to return home for one hour to retrieve belongings. She and her three dogs waited five hours in her SUV for their turn. Among the items she took with her were photos of her pets.

"It's horrible when you have to think about what to take," she said. "I think it's a very raw human base emotion to have fear of fire and losing everything. It's frightening."

Northern California firefighters dig in ahead of high winds

By Martha Mendoza and Frank Baker, Associated Press
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Aug. 23, 2020

SCOTTS VALLEY, Calif. (AP) — Three massive wildfires chewed through parched Northern California landscape Sunday as firefighters raced to dig breaks and make other preparations ahead of a frightening weather system. That system was packing high winds and more of the lightning that sparked the huge blazes and scores of other fires around the state, putting nearly a quarter-million people under evacuation orders and warnings.

At the CZU Lightning Complex fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains, south of San Francisco, authorities said their effort was hindered by people who refused to heed evacuation orders and those who were using the chaos to steal. Santa Cruz County Sheriff Jim Hart said 100 officers were patrolling and anyone not authorized to be in an evacuation zone would be arrested.

"What we're hearing from the community is that there's a lot of looting going on," Hart said. He said eight people have been arrested or cited and "there's going to be more."

He and county District Attorney Jeff Rosell expressed anger at what Rosell called the "absolutely soulless" people who seek to victimize those already victimized by the fire. Among the victims was a fire commander who was robbed while helping coordinate efforts on Saturday.

Someone entered the commander's fire vehicle and stole personal items, including a wallet and "drained his bank account," said Chief Mark Brunton, a battalion chief for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire).

"I can't imagine a bigger low-life," Hart said, promising to catch him and vowing "the DA is going to hammer him."

The Santa Cruz fire is one of the "complexes," or groups of fires, burning on all sides of the San Francisco Bay Area. They were started by lightning strikes that were among 12,000 registered in the state in the past week.

The National Weather Service issued a "red flag" warning through Monday afternoon for the drought-stricken area, meaning extreme fire conditions including high temperatures, low humidity and wind gusts up to 65 mph (105 kph) that "may result in dangerous and unpredictable fire behavior."

In nearly a week, firefighters have gotten no more than the 17% containment for the LNU Lightning Complex fire in wine country north of San Francisco. It's been the most destructive blaze, accounting for five deaths and 845 destroyed homes and other buildings. It and a fire burning southeast of the Bay Area are among the five largest fires in state history, with both burning more than 500 square miles (1,295 square kilometers).

In Southern California, an 11-day-old blaze held steady at just under 50 square miles (106 square kilometers) near Lake Hughes in northern Los Angeles County mountains. Rough terrain, hot weather and the potential for thunderstorms with lightning strikes challenged firefighters.

Holly Hansen, an evacuee from the LNU fire, was among evacuees from the community of Angwin being allowed to back their homes for one hour to retrieve belongings. She and her three dogs waited five hours in her SUV for their turn.

"It's horrible, I lived in Sonoma during the (2017) Tubbs Fire, so this is time No. 2 for me. It's horrible when you have to think about what to take," she said. "I think it's a very raw human base emotion to have fear of fire and losing everything. It's frightening."

Meantime, firefighters were frantically preparing for thunderstorms that will bring high winds and “dry” lightning, a term used when such storms have little or no rain. Brunton said while he’s confident firefighters did the most with the time they had to prepare, he’s not sure what to expect.

“There’s a lot of potential for things to really go crazy out there,” he said.

Since Aug. 15, more than 500 fires of varying sizes have burned throughout California, scorching 1.2 million acres, or 1,875 square miles (4,856 square kilometers). Of those, about two dozen major fires were attracting much of the state’s resources.

Most of the damage was caused by the three complex fires. They have burned 1,175 square miles (3,043 square kilometers), destroyed almost 1,000 homes and other structures and killed five people, three of whom were found in a home in an area under an evacuation order.

Other casualties included ancient redwood trees at California’s oldest state park, Big Basin Redwoods, plus the park’s headquarters and campgrounds. Smoke from the fires made the region’s air quality dangerous, forcing millions to stay inside.

Officials surveying maps at command centers are astonished by the sheer size of the fires, Cal Fire spokesman Brice Bennett said.

“You could overlay half of one of these fires and it covers the entire city of San Francisco,” Bennett said Sunday.

Responding to the emergency, President Donald Trump on Saturday issued a major disaster declaration to provide federal assistance. Gov. Gavin Newsom said in a statement that the declaration will also help people in counties affected by the fires with crisis counseling, housing and other social services.

Fire officials, meanwhile, have struggled to get enough resources to fight the biggest fires because so many blazes are burning around the state.

The wine country fire has only 1,700 firefighters on scene. By comparison, the state had 5,000 firefighters assigned to the Mendocino Complex Fire in 2018, the largest fire in state history.

“All of our resources remain stretched to capacity that we have not seen in recent history,” said Shana Jones, the chief for Cal Fire’s Sonoma-Lake-Napa unit.

Relief from smoky skies and bad air may be on its way. Here’s what experts predict

By Robert Rodriguez

Fresno Bee, Sunday, August 23, 2020

A storm front from the Pacific Northwest is expected to arrive next weekend, bringing some relief from the central San Joaquin Valley’s smoky skies, suffocating air quality and triple-digit heat.

National Weather Service meteorologist David Spector said that while the storm isn’t expected to bring rain, it will provide the region with a strong westerly flow of cooler air. Those winds could push out the stagnant, smoky air that has settled into the area from wildfires raging north of the central Valley.

The incoming storm that could arrive Sunday also is expected to knock temperatures down a few degrees to seasonal average highs in the mid-90s and lows in the mid-60s.

High heat and smoky air has made for poor air quality in the region. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued an air quality alert on Saturday and Sunday.

Sunday’s air quality was rated as very unhealthy in Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties. Madera County’s air quality was rated as unhealthy.

Air pollution control officials recommend people stay indoors, saying the particle pollution can cause serious health problems, including aggravating lung disease, and increase the risk of respiratory infections.

For the latest on air quality information visit the air pollution control district’s website at www.valleyair.org.

Firefighters battling Bay Area blazes brace for new lightning round as LNU, SCU fires grow to historic proportions

By [Sam Whiting](#), [Kurtis Alexander](#), [Chase DiFelicianantonio](#) and [Dustin Gardiner](#)
San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, August 23, 2020

A massive cluster of fires burning across several counties including Sonoma, Napa and Solano became the second largest in California history Sunday, as firefighters and residents braced for a potential new round of lightning storms that could bring wind gusts and spark new blazes across Northern California.

The LNU Lightning Complex is one of three groups of wildfires that are spreading through dry fields and forests and threatening communities in and around the Bay Area. Firefighters have had a difficult time containing the unprecedented siege of blazes sparked a week ago during a round of thunderstorms that brought lightning but little rain amid a record-setting heat wave.

A group of fires raging in Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara and several other counties, the SCU Lightning Complex, became the third largest in state history and prompted new evacuations overnight Saturday and warnings for parts of Fremont, Pleasanton and Livermore.

South and west of there, the CZU Lightning Complex slowed somewhat in its push through the Santa Cruz Mountains. But it remained within striking distance of several small towns, including Boulder Creek.

Tens of thousands have been evacuated and hundreds of homes burned, and four have died in the Bay Area. The fires were sending smoke into Bay Area cities, making for some of the worst air quality the region has seen. Many parks were closed Sunday because of the smoke, another disruption for Bay Area residents already cooped up for months during the coronavirus pandemic.

Conditions early Sunday were calm and favorable to making progress, and Cal Fire officials reported slight increases in containment on several fronts. But they warned that it could take weeks to get control of the blazes. There are too few firefighters and not enough equipment to handle this many fires of this magnitude simultaneously.

Cal Fire representatives said that the LNU, which stands for Lake Napa Unit and has burned 347,630 acres in Napa, Sonoma, Lake and Solano counties, and was 21% contained by Sunday evening.

“We’re going to be here for a while: weeks and possibly longer,” Cal Fire Unit Chief Shana Jones said at a Yolo County news conference Sunday afternoon. Right behind the LNU in size is the SCU Lightning Complex — which had burned more than 340,000 acres of Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties.

Either or both could soon surpass the Mendocino Complex fires, which burned swaths of Mendocino, Lake, Colusa and Glenn counties in September 2018, was contained at 459,000 acres, having destroyed 280 structures.

Between these fires that are rimming the Bay Area in a giant pincer move, Cal Fire was spread so thin that local departments in Yolo County had to start the fight before Cal Fire could free up its own crews.

“As Cal Fire’s unit chief, I don’t remember a time that this occurred,” Jones said.

Alameda County had largely been spared from evacuation orders until Sunday morning, when the SCU Lightning Complex got closer to homes in the foothills east of Fremont and south of Livermore.

The evacuations orders spread as 25 mph wind gusts picked up in the evening. Firefighter Ryan Cramer, who has been working the SCU fire since Tuesday, said his crew can’t help but feel spread thin because of a lack of air support and too few engines as California battles a host of fires simultaneously.

“It’s just a large expansive area, and not the normal amount of resources,” Cramer, 44, said. “These fires are growing, and growing and growing.”

Late Sunday afternoon, Cal Fire was trying to bolster its forces by hiring as many volunteer, military or out-of-region firefighters and equipment as possible ahead of Sunday night’s expected thunderstorm.

"This is absolutely instrumental: If there are any cooperators out there that we have not reached out to or have slipped through the cracks, get to the Alameda County Fairgrounds to our 10 o'clock cooperators meeting," Cal Fire unit chief Jake Hess said. "This is going to be a very long-term incident ... and our troops are exhausted."

Also burning out of control but slowing slightly Sunday was the CZU Lightning Complex in coastal San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties, which had burned 71,000 acres and was 8% contained. A number of communities remained under threat.

"I'm definitely nervous about my shop," said Justin Acton, 36, the owner of Boulder Creek Pizza & Pub, who had evacuated from his home in Ben Lomond to Santa Cruz. "I keep looking at the fire on the map and see it getting closer and closer."

Already, though, with at least 129 homes destroyed by the CZU fires as of Sunday morning and more burning throughout the day, things won't be the same for area residents. As many as three of Acton's employees don't have houses to go back to.

"There's going to be some change," Acton said. "I'm hoping that the core of the community stays here, but this was a big thing and it could really shake some people out."

Officials on Sunday announced the CZU's first known fatality. The victim was found in a remote area of Last Chance Road just southwest of Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Chief Deputy Chris Clark said it took a helicopter to retrieve the remains.

"I don't want to be standing up here, nor does our office want to be recovering people that are victims of fire," Clark said at a news briefing. "We got into this job to help people. ... I think it's one of the darkest periods we've been in with this fire."

CZU officials later in the day issued a list of evacuation warnings for the western region of Santa Clara County, including ones for Foothills Park and the Monte Bello Open Space Preserve.

Nowhere was the battle line drawn as heavily as in western Sonoma County, where Guerneville on the Russian River had been evacuated while nearby Healdsburg had not.

The normally touristy wine town was mostly quiet Sunday afternoon, the presence of fire indicated only by the smoky haze in the air and the sound of helicopters whirring overhead as they shuttled water to the Walbridge Fire, part of the LNU complex, to the west of town.

That calm stood in stark contrast to fire hot spots just miles outside of town where residents have been evacuated with homes and property burned and ash still falling like fresh snow. On Mill Creek Road, a short drive out of town, small fires still poured from destroyed tree stumps and smoke billowed out of the ground as if coming from the earth itself.

Helicopters swung low over the road to a nearby property to fill huge buckets of water and immediately head back to the fire, making dozens of trips. Some structures have been badly damaged by the fires along Mill Creek Road, with vehicles and other abandoned belongings blackened and charred.

The firefight was also raging further north near Lake Sonoma, where the hilly terrain is blanketed with smoke like thick fog. The area was also closed to public access and a deserted Lake Sonoma Bridge stretched across the water seemingly into smoky nothingness.

On a ridge overlooking the lake, a team of Cal Fire firefighters were resting in a parking lot stained pink and red with fire retardant from aerial tankers after coming off a 24-hour shift. They said good progress had been made protecting some homes nearby, but some areas near the lake would likely still burn. That area is mostly seeing flareups during the afternoons when the sun heats vegetation and some of their recent work has involved hiking the hillsides near the lake to out spot fires before they could spread further, the firefighters said.

The National Weather Service issued a red flag fire warning starting at 5 a.m. Sunday through 5 p.m. Monday, and while weather service forecasters said the [thunderstorms would probably begin early Sunday evening](#) and potentially last until early Monday, the lightning strikes were not expected to be as severe as last weekend.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District extended its Spare the Air alert through Wednesday. Air quality is expected to be unhealthy, with the heaviest impacts in the East Bay and Santa Clara Valley, according to the agency.

By Sunday afternoon, [air quality in Pleasanton and Livermore reached levels considered "hazardous,"](#) the worst rating in the Bay Area so far in this smoke siege year far. Air quality in Concord, Vallejo, Napa, San Rafael and San Pablo reached "very unhealthy" levels, and it was "unhealthy" in several other areas.

Even San Francisco, insulated from the fires, was smoky Sunday morning. At the Fort Mason Center Farmers' Market, everybody was masked up and shoppers could barely make out Marin County to the north. By midday, a golden haze had covered the city, suggesting late autumn, not mid-summer.

But an onshore flow of ocean air had been starting and stopping and shortly after noon, there seemed to be a positive development when the first forlorn foghorn finally blew on the Golden Gate Bridge.

'Good idea to leave,' Castle Fire grows, sheriff recommends evacuation at Camp Nelson

By Joshua Yeager

Visalia Times Delta, Sunday, August 23, 2020

Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux issued a voluntary evacuation notice Sunday afternoon as the Castle Fire grew dramatically in size Sunday, scorching some 4,000 acres in Sequoia National Forest.

Deputies are in the area going cabin to cabin to warn people "that the fire is growing and it would be a good idea to leave," spokesperson Ashley Ritchie said in a news release.

Heavy smoke particles, in particular, pose a health risk to the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions. The sheriff and Valley air pollution officials urge everyone to stay inside as particle pollution skyrockets [above safe levels](#).

Lightning sparked the [Castle Fire in Sequoia National Forest](#) Wednesday morning.

On Sunday, the fire jumped the Little Kern River, increasing tenfold in size from about 400 acres on Saturday. The fire is 0% contained, according to the United States Forest Service.

Six 20-person hand crews were dispatched to the fire on Thursday, but the firefighters were unable to stop the spread of the flames because of the challenging terrain, wind patterns and harsh conditions.

The fire is now spreading further into the remote Golden Trout Wilderness, away from Camp Nelson and Ponderosa to the northeast. No giant sequoia trees are currently threatened by the wildfire, officials said Saturday.

Now that the fire has exploded in size, it's unclear how far the flames are from the world's most famous trees.

"This fire is burning in extremely rough, inaccessible terrain," said Alicia Embrey, Sequoia National Forest spokeswoman.

Lots of fires, limited resources

Firefighters are making the best of limited resources to keep the flames at bay, she said. Officials are concerned by continuing hot and dry conditions, as well as thunderstorms forecast across the mountains this weekend.

The challenging weather sparked Cal Fire to issue a red flag fire warning across much of the state Saturday.

"What this means, is that any lightning that comes through, based on the fact that we have so many resources that are affected throughout California, it's going to likely result in additional fires," said Chief Sana Jones, an incident commander for Cal Fire. "We do have a plan in order to immediate attack those fires, but it's going to take some work."

An Incident Management Team has been ordered for the Castle Fire and is expected to arrive over the next few days. That process may be sped up after Sunday's quick spread.

Emergency closures of Golden Trout Wilderness trails and trailheads are pending. Those with Wilderness permits are asked to view closure information online. Forest personnel are reaching out to known wilderness permit holders to warn them about the fires.

Aircrews battling the Castle Fire spotted a second fire on Friday, where Pistol Creek and Shotgun Creek converge, deep in the Tulare County wilderness.

The second blaze is located within the burn scar of the 2017 Lion Fire and grew to 200 acres. It will remain unstaffed until resources become available to put it out.

"With most fire personnel assigned to other fires throughout California, the forest is prioritizing firefighting resources to protect life first, then property and infrastructure," Embrey said.

Air quality unhealthy this weekend; people encouraged to stay inside

The Porterville Recorder, Friday, August 21, 2020

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District reissued a health caution on Friday, stating it will remain in place until all of the state's wildfires are extinguished.

There have been eight wildfires across the state that have been dumping smoke and accompanying particular matter, including PM2.5 into the Valley. The district stated PM2.5 concentrations continued to increase throughout the week, leading to unhealthy air quality in the Valley.

The District stated it anticipates unhealthy air quality to affect the Valley through the weekend and encouraged residents to stay indoors.

The District stated the following fires are producing smoke that's infiltrating the Valley: The SCU Lightning Complex Fire, located in multiple Northern California counties, including Stanislaus and San Joaquin Counties; the Hills Fire, located in Fresno County west of Avenal near Highway 33; the CZU August Lightning Complex Fire, located in various locations across San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties; and the Lake Fire located in Los Angeles County southeast of Lebec.

The District stated counties impacted are San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern.

Air pollution officials caution Valley residents to reduce exposure to the particulate matter emissions by remaining indoors in these affected areas.

PM pollution can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Individuals with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of PM exposure.

Those with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young children and the elderly, are especially susceptible to the health effects from this form of pollution. Anyone experiencing poor air quality due to wildfire smoke should move indoors to a filtered, air-conditioned environment with windows closed.

The district stated face coverings people wear may not protect them from wildfire smoke.

Residents can use the District's Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) to track air quality at any Valley location by visiting myRAAN.com.

District air monitoring stations are designed to detect microscopic PM2.5 particles that exist in smoke.

However, larger particles, such as ash, may not be detected. Those smell smoke or see falling ash in their immediate vicinity should consider air quality "unhealthy" (RAAN Level 4 or higher) even if RAAN displays a lower level of pollution.

The public can also check the District's wildfire page at www.valleyair.org/wildfires for information about any current and recently past wildfires affecting the Valley.

In addition, anyone can follow air quality conditions by downloading the free “Valley Air” app on their mobile device. For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call a District office in Fresno (559-230-6000), Modesto (209-557-6400) or Bakersfield (661-392-5500).

Smoke from California wildfires impacting San Joaquin Valley air quality

By [Genette Brookshire](#)

Stockton Record, Friday, Aug. 21, 2020

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued a health caution because of the hazy conditions caused by smoke from the wildfires burning throughout California. Officials are asking Valley residents to reduce their exposure to particulate matter by remaining indoors.

Particulate matter can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Those with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young children and the elderly, are especially susceptible.

Common cloth and paper masks being worn because of COVID-19 concerns may not provide protection from wildfire smoke.

- If you see or smell smoke in your immediate area, stay indoors, if possible, with windows and doors closed and use air conditioning to recirculate air to avoid drawing outside air inside. Also, in your vehicle, use the “recirculating” air function.
- Those with heart or lung disease, older adults, pregnant women and children should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outside. Outdoor activities should be moved or rescheduled for when the air quality improves. If that’s not possible, at least take several breaks during the outdoor activity.
- Ensure family members with heart disease or lung problems such as asthma, bronchitis or emphysema are following their doctor’s advice about medicine and their respiratory management plan. Seek help if symptoms worsen.

For people who have not been previously diagnosed with a chronic lung or heart disease, health officials note that smoke can “unmask” or produce symptoms of those conditions such as chest pain or tightness, shortness of breath or fatigue. If they appear, contact a doctor.

It also is advised to keep airways moist by drinking lots of water. You also can breathe through a warm, wet washcloth to help relieve dryness.

Residents can track air quality at myRAAN.com and find out which fires are affecting the air at www.valleyair.org/wildfires.

Lodi grape growers hopeful the year's crop to not be tainted by smoke from wildfires

By Bob Highfill

Stockton Record, Friday, Aug. 21, 2020

Wine grape growers in the Lodi American Viticultural Area, the state’s largest district, are in the early stages of harvest and believe the area’s topography and distance from the wild fires burning in Northern California may help prevent this year’s crop to be marred by smoke, though the area has been especially smoky in recent days mainly from the LNU Lightning Complex and SCU Lightning Complex fires.

The region in the San Joaquin Valley, planted to more than 100,000 acres of wine grapes, located 67 miles southeast of Vacaville and 67 miles east of Napa, is almost completely flat, so smoke isn’t trapped in canyons and flows with the wind.

“We’re getting smoke, but if we were right next to a fire, it would be a different situation,” said Joe Valente, vineyard manager for John Kautz Farms in Lodi and San Joaquin Farm Bureau leader. “We’re a few miles from it. It might have cooled things down.”

Grape sugars have shot up due a heat spike this month, pushing harvest up about 10 to 14 days for some early ripening varieties, such as sauvignon blanc, viognier, pinot noir, pinot grigio and chardonnay.

"It's all ramping up," said Amy Blagg, Valente's daughter and executive director of the Lodi District Grape Growers Association. "As far as around here, the growers I've talked to, the sugars are picking up very quickly and I think the crop is lighter than anticipated. Things are moving along very quickly."

Poor air quality combined with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the need to supply farmworkers and laborers with surgical masks and N95 respirator masks. Currently, grapes, melons, apples and almonds are being harvested in San Joaquin County.

Tim Pelican, San Joaquin County Agricultural commissioner, said nearly 500,000 surgical masks have been distributed and the commission has some N95 masks in stock and expects to receive more next week from the California Office of Emergency Services. Face coverings already are recommended when physical distancing is not feasible to help stop the spread of the coronavirus that causes the disease COVID-19 and are required for farm laborers when the air quality index for PM2.5 particulate matter is 151 or higher.

Pelican said that because of smoke, the commission is surveying livestock and poultry houses, and rendering plants in the south county.

"Here it seems we haven't had a huge problem as of yet," he said. "The smoke, we're curious if that's going to affect the grape quality. The crush is just starting so it remains to be seen."

Pelican said the ag commission is collaborating with the state, the Community Foundation of San Joaquin and Catholic Charities on the Homes for the Harvest program that provides housing for farm laborers and agriculture workers who have tested positive for COVID-19. Testing sites, he said, are being set up throughout the county.

Wildfires Impacting Air Quality Across State

By CR Staff

Clovis Roundup, Friday, August 21, 2020

With numerous wildfires burning, the air quality has been greatly impacted throughout California.

The San Joaquin Valley Air District has issued a health caution for valley residents that will remain in effect till wildfires are contained.

District health officials are expecting the air quality to worsen throughout the weekend and is warning people to stay indoors, avoid being outside for long periods of time especially those who have underlying respiratory or health conditions.

Below are current wildfires:

SCU Lightning Complex Fire, located in multiple northern counties, including Stanislaus and San Joaquin Counties; the Hills Fire, located in Fresno County west of Avenal near Highway 33.

CZU August Lightning Complex Fire, located in various locations across San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties.

Lake Fire located in Los Angeles County southeast of Lebec are producing smoke that is infiltrating into the San Joaquin Valley which includes San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare Counties, and the valley portion of Kern county.

To find more information ongoing wildfires, visit www.valleyair.org/wildfires. For more information about air quality, visit www.valleyair.org or call a District office in Fresno (559-230-6000), Modesto (209-557-6400) or Bakersfield (661-392-5500).

Scotts Valley, SLV communities evacuated as fires burn out of control

Press Banner in the Tracy Press, Friday, Aug. 21, 2020

Cal Fire has ordered evacuations around Santa Cruz County

- Bonny Doon south of Ice Cream Grade, and Pine Flat Road South
- All areas of Ben Lomond

- South of Bear Creek Road to Felton, including Ben Lomond
- Scott Valley west of Highway 17
- Campus of University of California, Santa Cruz
- All areas adjacent to Bonny Doon and the San Lorenzo Valley should be prepared to evacuate

Wildfires burning out of control in southern San Mateo County and northern Santa Cruz County have scorched 50,000 acres, forcing evacuations in the communities of Scotts Valley, Ben Lomond and Felton.

The fires, named the CZU August Lightning Complex by Cal Fire, were sparked by lightning on Sunday morning have destroyed 50 structures and forced the evacuation of 64,000 people in the flames' path.

A Cal Fire spokesman said the fires had "significant behavior through the night," especially on the eastern edge of the fire zone, affecting areas near Boulder Creek and Ben Lomond. They continued to burn with no containment as of Friday morning.

There were 1,026 firefighters on the line fighting the fire with 82 fire engines, 30 water tenders, 10 helicopters and 30 bulldozers assigned to 20 crews.

Officials said multiple fires had merged during the night and continued to burn due to low humidity, inaccessible terrain and limited resources.

Firefighting air tankers from throughout the state are flying suppression missions as conditions allow, but heavy smoke is hampering flight operations.

Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Chief Deputy Chris Clark said Friday morning that the evacuation of the 12,000 residents of Scotts Valley west of Highway 17 was nearly complete. Once everyone has been evacuated, 93 officers and deputies will spread out on roving patrols throughout the valley, including Scotts Valley, to keep homes secure against potential looting or vandalism.

Clark said it might be weeks before people can return to their homes, depending on what the fire does.

Residents who might have left pets or other animals in an evacuation area can call the county animal control, 831-471-1182, to see whether the sheriff's department can arrange for a rescue of their animals.

For the latest evacuation orders, evacuation warnings and road closures, visit the [Cal Fire San Mateo-Santa Cruz Unit Twitter page](#).

Smoke from the wildfires is also impacting the wider area.

The Monterey Bay Air Resources District issued a wildfire air quality advisory stating the air quality had reached "hazardous" — the highest level on the scale — at many monitoring stations throughout Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties.

Everyone should take precautions to limit exposure to smoke and spend as little time outdoors as possible.

Smoke is a mixture of gases and fine particles created when wood and other organic material burn. Microscopic particles in the smoke can trigger asthma, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Young children, older adults, and people of all ages with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, are especially at risk from this type of air pollution.

People are urged to remain indoors in a room with filtered air and to reduce their activity levels until the air clears.

More air quality information, including the status of the wildfire smoke, can be found at [mbard.org](#).

California fires claim 6 lives, threaten thousands of homes

Written by [Janie Har](#) and [Martha Mendoza](#), Associated Press

The Business Journal, Friday, Aug. 21, 2020

(AP) — Sky-darkening wildfires that took at least six lives and forced tens of thousands of people from their homes blazed throughout California on Friday as firefighting resources strained under the vastness of the infernos authorities were trying to control.

Three major complexes encompassing dozens of fires chewed through a combined 780 square miles (2,020 square kilometers) of forests, canyons and rural areas flanking San Francisco on three sides.

Statewide, nearly 12,000 firefighters are battling blazes that have scorched more than 1,200 square miles (3,120 square kilometers) in California, said Daniel Berlant, assistant deputy director for the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, known as Cal Fire.

Crews from Oregon, Idaho and Arizona have arrived to relieve local firefighters, he said, with engines on their way from as far away as Maryland and New Jersey.

Tens of thousands of homes were threatened by flames that drove through dense and bone-dry trees and brush. Many of the fires were sparked by lightning strikes from brief thunderstorms — nearly 12,000 since last weekend — as a high-pressure area over the West brought a dangerous mix of triple-digit weather and monsoonal moisture pulled from the south.

Some fires doubled in size within 24 hours, fire officials said.

And while some evacuations were lifted in the small city of Vacaville, between San Francisco and Sacramento, other areas expanded their evacuation areas. The University of California, Santa Cruz, was evacuated, and a new fire burning near Yosemite National Park also prompted evacuations.

Santa Cruz itself, a coastal city of 65,000, wasn't affected. But Mayor Justin Cummings urged residents Thursday evening to be prepared to evacuate by gassing up their vehicles and packing important documents, medicines and other belongings.

"Prepare early so that you are ready to go at a moment's notice," Cummings said.

More than 64,000 people have been ordered to evacuate in San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties, which make up part of Silicon Valley and hug the coast south of San Francisco.

With firefighting resources tight, homes in remote, hard-to-get-to places burned unattended. Cal Fire Chief Mark Brunton pleaded with evacuees to quit battling fires on their own, saying that just causes more problems for professionals.

"We had last night three separate rescues that pulled our vital, very few resources away," he said.

An anxious Rachel Stratman, 35, and her husband, Quentin Lareau, 40, waited for word Friday about their home in the Forest Springs community of Boulder Creek after evacuating earlier this week. She knows one house has burned but has received conflicting information about the rest of the neighborhood.

"It's so hard to wait and not know," she said. "I'm still torn if I want people to be going back to the area and videotaping. I know they cause the firefighters distraction, but that's the only way we know."

The couple are in a San Jose hotel with medication she needs after undergoing a transplant surgery last month. She collected her mother's ashes and some clothes while her husband closed windows and readied the home before they evacuated Tuesday.

"I kept looking at things and kept thinking I should grab this or that, but I just told myself I needed to leave. I didn't bring any official documents and I didn't bring my house deed or car title. No passport," she said.

The ferocity of the fires was astonishing so early in the fire season, which historically has seen the largest and deadliest blazes when gusty, dry winds blow in the fall.

But the death toll already had reached at least six since the majority of blazes started less than a week ago, with four deaths claimed by fires burning in wine country north of San Francisco.

The bodies of three people were found in a home that burned in Napa, Henry Wofford, spokesman for the Napa County Sheriff's Office, told the San Francisco Chronicle. In Solano County Sheriff Thomas A. Ferrara reported the death of a male resident there.

Separately, a Pacific Gas & Electric utility worker was found dead Wednesday in a vehicle in the Vacaville area Wednesday. In central California, a pilot on a water-dropping mission in western Fresno County died Wednesday morning when his helicopter crashed.

At least two other people were missing and more than 30 civilians and firefighters have been injured, authorities said.

Smoke and ash billowing from the fires also fouled the air throughout California's scenic central coast and in San Francisco. The fires have destroyed at least 175 buildings.

Tim and Anne Roberts had gone to the beach with their two children on Monday to avoid the smoke at their home in Boulder Creek in Santa Cruz County. They packed a change of clothes, their children's school supplies and their passports — just in case.

They learned Wednesday that their house had burned. Birth certificates, legal documents and family heirlooms are gone. But in photos of the ruins, they were surprised by how many redwoods, oaks and fruit trees were still standing.

"It's a strange sort of comfort," Tim Roberts said.

The good news for Brookdale resident Larissa Eisenstein Thursday afternoon was that her five chickens, Kelly and The Nuggets, had been safely relocated into a stranger's yard in a safer, neighboring community.

The chicken evacuation came a day after Eisenstein, a Silicon Valley tech worker, had been forced to leave them behind during an overnight evacuation. She fled with her cats Mochi and Mini, driving from one hotel to the next only to find they were full before landing in a safe place where they could get some rest.

The bad news Thursday was that the fire was burning down her wooded street as she adjusted to the idea that her worldly possessions may now be limited to photos of her parents, some jewelry she had grabbed, and fresh tomatoes from her garden.

"After I got the cats, I realized there was very little important to me, and the priority is to try to remember how lovely things can be," she said. "I've had a wonderful garden this year."

Although temperatures were predicted to ease slightly on Friday, they were also expected to be hot enough so that firefighters will not be able to count on cool evening weather aiding them. Erratic winds also could drive the fires unpredictably in multiple directions, state fire officials said.

Winds gusting to 20 mph (32 kph) over ridge tops could challenge overnight firefighting efforts in Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties, said the incident commander, Cal Fire Assistant Chief Billy See. More firefighters were sent to battle the complex of fires, but "it's still not enough," See said.

"We're still drastically short for a fire of this size," he said.

State reminds farmers to protect outdoor workers from poor air quality

By John Cox

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Aug. 21, 2020

On top of limitations imposed by COVID-19 and the heat wave, local ag companies and their workers are now having to deal with extraordinarily poor air quality that has the potential to shut down outdoor work amid the ongoing grape and almond harvests.

Cal/OSHA, in a news release shared by the state Department of Food and Agriculture, on Friday reminded California employers they must make sure their workers are protected from airborne particulate matter caused by wildfires across the state.

"If employers cannot move operations indoors where air is adequately filtered and they do not have access to respiratory protection, they may need to halt operations until the outdoor air quality improves," Cal/OSHA Chief Doug Parker said in the release.

Wildfire smoke carries dangerous chemicals and gases but the biggest concern is fine particular matter known as PM2.5. These tiny specks can inhibit lung function and worsen conditions such as asthma and heart problems. They can also aggravate COVID-19.

Cal/OSHA noted that when the local air quality says PM2.5 reaches 151 or higher — it was forecast to be 153 Friday, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District — then employers of outdoor workers must share information and instruction about available protective measures.

It said employers must also make workplace modifications "if feasible," such as bringing workers inside where air is filtered. Otherwise, Cal/OSHA stated, they must either reduce employees' exposure to dirty air or provide masks approved by the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health as meeting N95, N99, N100, R95, P95, P99 or P100 filtration standards.

Kern Ag Commissioner Glenn Fankhauser said by email he was unaware of any local operations that have had to close down because of the recently poor air quality.

He noted the state has provided the county with N95 masks specifically for distribution to farmworkers having to work in the smoky air and that growers can give their crews N95 masks if they have them.

On Friday, the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California noted there is some limited crossover between wildfire and COVID-19 face-mask practices but that some ag employers will need to provide N95 masks to workers. It said in a news release that it's making sure its members are aware of the state's regulatory requirements on days of low air quality.

"Workplace safety has remained at the forefront throughout the pandemic, but farmers and farming companies know they must also prioritize exposure mitigation measures in place to help protect employees from wildfire smoke," the association wrote.

It pointed out that 2020 has presented growers with challenges that seem like the most difficult they have ever faced.

"We are a resilient industry with dedicated farmers and farm employees," the GSA stated. "But 2020 is testing everyone's resolve and we must lean on each other and protect each other during these unprecedented times."

Wildfire evacuation order, warnings issued for areas south of Tracy

Tracy Press, Thursday, Aug 20, 2020

A fire evacuation order related to the SCU Lightning Complex was issued at noon Thursday for an area on the other side of Interstate 580 at Tracy's extreme southern edge. Other nearby areas are under evacuation warnings.

Immediate evacuation is required in the red area in the map below, which is south of West Corral Hollow Road to the Stanislaus County line and west of I-580 to the Alameda County line.

The [Cal Fire incidents page](#) shows that the SCU Lightning Complex Fire extends north to Lone Tree Creek, about 5 miles southwest of Tracy Golf and Country Club. Homes in the area around the golf course are not under an evacuation order, but are under an evacuation warning, shown in yellow on the map.

An evacuation warning (yellow) is also in effect in the area north of West Corral Hollow Road and east of the Alameda County line to I-580.

For a visual overview of evacuation orders and warnings related to the SCU Lightning Complex fires, refer to [this map](#). Note that the "Tracy triangle" is just north of the evacuation area.

Note: The following clip in Spanish mentions the Valley's current poor air quality due to wildfires.

Los niveles de la mala calidad del aire en el Valle Central empeoran este domingo

La alerta por mala calidad del aire se mantiene vigente desde el lunes pasado cuando una serie de incendios forestales estallaron de norte a sur del estado. Este domingo, varios condados del Valle Central de California amanecieron por sobre los 200 AQI, es decir, que el aire se halla 'muy insalubre'.

Univision, Sunday, August, 23, 2020

FRESNO, California.- El índice de calidad del aire (AQI, por sus siglas en inglés) superó las 200 unidades en los condados de Fresno, Tulare y Kings, mientras que Madera y Merced mantuvieron una calidad del aire en nivel 'insalubre', debido a la gran cantidad de partículas microscópicas contaminantes halladas en la atmósfera.

Maricela Velázquez, del Distrito de Calidad de Aire del Valle dice que de los 15 años que ella lleva en la agencia, "este es uno de los peores que hemos visto". Y agrega que el Valle suele estar en nivel 2 o 3 que es moderado para personas vulnerables. "ahorita estamos viendo niveles 4 o 5, que es insalubre para todos y muy insalubre".

Cuando el aire supera los 150 AQU (índice de calidad del aire), este se considera no saludable, pero cuando la concentración de las partículas contaminantes y el ozono concentrado en el aire sobrepasa las 200 AQU, el aire se vuelve 'muy insalubre'.

La recomendación de las autoridades medioambientales y de salud es precisamente a evitar toda actividad al aire libre. Y es que durante este domingo 23, los incendios forestales en California suman 28 activos, de los cuales cinco son nuevos.

Durante la jornada de este sábado, los esfuerzos de los bomberos lograron avanzar en la contención de las llamas de algunos focos. De acuerdo al Departamento de Bomberos de California, el incendio más cercano al condado de Fresno que arrasa más de 2000 acres al sur de Coalinga logró ser contenido en un 96%.

Altas concentraciones de PM2.5

Durante esta semana, las concentraciones de PM2.5 han seguido aumentando provocando una calidad del aire muy insalubre en toda la región, aseguran autoridades del Distrito de Calidad del Aire del Valle.

El Distrito anticipa que la mala calidad del aire afectará al Valle durante el fin de semana y advierte a los residentes que se queden dentro de sus casas.

El incendio de SCU Lighting Complex Fire, ubicado en varios condados del norte, incluidos los condados de Stanislaus y San Joaquín; el incendio de Hills Fire, que se progaga al oeste del condado de Fresno; el incendio de CZU August Lightning Complex, cuyas llamas amenazan los condados de San Mateo y Santa Cruz; y el incendio de Lake Fire ubicado en el condado de Los Ángeles al sureste de Lebec están produciendo humo que se está infiltrando en el valle de San Joaquín.

La contaminación de partículas puede causar ataques de asma, agravar la bronquitis crónica y aumentar el riesgo de ataque cardíaco y ataque cerebral. "Aquellos con condiciones respiratorias existentes, incluyendo el COVID-19, los niños pequeños y personas de tercera edad, son especialmente susceptibles a los efectos de salud de esta forma de contaminación" indica un comunicado de las autoridades del Distrito.