

## Devastating wildfires advancing through Northern California

By Terence Chea, Ethan Swope and John Antczak Associated Press  
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Aug 18, 2021

GRIZZLY FLATS, Calif. (AP) — Wind-driven wildfires raged Wednesday through drought-stricken forests in the mountains of Northern California after incinerating hundreds of homes and forcing thousands of people to flee to safety.

A reversal of wind direction was expected to test some previously quiet fire containment lines, but also push flames back in other areas, authorities said.

The newest inferno, the Caldor Fire, continued to grow explosively in the Sierra Nevada southwest of Lake Tahoe, covering 84 square miles (217.5 square kilometers) after suddenly ravaging Grizzly Flats, a community of about 1,200.

At least 50 homes burned there but tallies were incomplete because officials had not been able to make thorough assessments of the damage in Grizzly Flats. Two people were hospitalized with serious injuries on Tuesday and about 5,900 homes and other structures were threatened by the fire.

In the Sierra-Cascades region about 100 miles (161 kilometers) to the north, the month-old Dixie Fire expanded by thousands of acres to 993 square miles (2,572 square kilometers) — two weeks after the blaze gutted the Gold Rush-era town of Greenville. About 16,000 homes and buildings were threatened by the Dixie Fire, named for the road where it started.

“It’s a pretty good size monster,” Mark Brunton, a firefighting operations section chief, said in a briefing.

“We’re not going to get this thing overnight,” he said. “It’s going to be a work in progress — eating the elephant one bite at a time kind of thing — and it’s going to be a long-haul mindset. It’s a marathon and not a sprint.”

The Caldor and Dixie fires are among a dozen large wildfires in the northern half of California. In contrast, Southern California has had few wildfires recently. Very moist ocean air even ushered in occasional drizzle or light rain on Wednesday.

But Northern California’s wildfires have left scenes of utter devastation.

Few homes were left standing in Grizzly Flats, where streets were littered with downed power lines and poles. Houses were reduced to smoldering ash and twisted metal with only chimneys rising above the ruins. A post office and elementary school were destroyed.

Hulks of gutted vehicles littered the ruins and the skeletons of chairs stood in rows among the ashes of a church.

Derek Shaves, who fled Grizzly Flats late Monday, said he visited the next day, finding that his home and most of the houses in his neighborhood were gone.

“It’s a pile of ash,” he said. “Everybody on my block is a pile of ash and every block that I visited — but for five separate homes that were safe — was totally devastated.”

All 7,000 residents of the town of Pollock Pines on Tuesday were ordered to evacuate because of the fire.

To the north at the Dixie Fire, numerous firefighting resources were deployed into the area of Susanville, a city of about 18,000 a few miles from the northeastern edge of the blaze, where residents have been warned to be ready to evacuate.

Fire officials said early Wednesday that the fire did not push toward Susanville overnight, and that was one location where the switch in wind direction to the northeast could push flames back on themselves.

Late Tuesday, Pacific Gas & Electric began shutting off power to as many as 51,000 customers in 18 Northern California counties to prevent wildfires for the first time since last year’s historically bad fire season.

The utility said the shutoffs were focused in the Sierra Nevada foothills, the North Coast, the northern Central Valley and the North San Francisco Bay mountains and could last into Wednesday afternoon.

The nation's largest utility announced the blackouts as a precaution to prevent gusts from damaging power lines and sparking blazes.

PG&E has notified utility regulators that the Dixie fire may have been caused by trees falling into its power lines. The Dixie Fire began near the town of Paradise, which was devastated by a 2018 wildfire ignited by PG&E equipment during strong winds. Eighty-five people died.

The Dixie Fire is the largest of nearly 100 major wildfires burning across a dozen Western states, including Alaska. The wildfires, in large part, have been fueled by high temperatures, strong winds and dry weather.

Climate change has made the U.S. West warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more destructive, according to scientists.

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This story corrects that the Dixie and Caldor fires are more than 100 miles (161 kilometers) apart, not a few miles.

## **Caldor Fire is forcing swift evacuations in Gold Country amid 'unprecedented' conditions**

By Jill Tucker

San Francisco Chronicle, Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2021

The Caldor Fire near Lake Tahoe continued its explosive growth overnight Tuesday, jumping from 6,000 to 54,000 acres in less than 24 hours and forcing evacuations across a huge swath of El Dorado County.

The blaze, which had reached Highway 50 near the 7,000-person community of Pollack Pines, was exhibiting "unprecedented fire behavior" and remained out of control with no containment, officials said.

The blaze started on Saturday around 7 p.m. 4 miles south of Grizzly Flats and 2 miles east of Omo Ranch. By Tuesday it was at more than 6,000 acres, burning through the small community of Grizzly Flats, destroying the small school and other town buildings. By evening, 30,000 acres had burned, with more than 20,000 more scorched by morning.

Extreme fire conditions, including heavy winds and extremely dry timber, fueled the wildfire. A red flag warning is still in effect through 8:00 p.m. Wednesday.

Mapping the fire proved challenging, given the pace of the fire, officials said.

Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency for El Dorado County to assist in pushing resources to the firefighting effort.

Huge swaths of the county were under mandatory evacuations, including the area northeast of Highway 88 to Loon Lake above South Lake Tahoe, including the towns of Pollack Pines and Kyburz. Nearly 6,000 structures were threatened, officials said.

Thick, black smoke from the blaze was pushed northeast, nearly covering the sun in South Lake Tahoe and east into Nevada, where day turned into a deep red twilight Tuesday. Given severe and unpredictable fire behavior, officials said the current focus was on evacuation efforts.

Two people were injured in the Gizzly Flats area Tuesday and airlifted to local hospitals.

It was unclear how the fire started. Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais on Tuesday issued an emergency forest closure of all lands, roads and trails within the Eldorado National Forest through Sept. 30.

## **Caldor Fire near Tahoe grows from 6,500 to 53,000 acres in 24 hours**

By Amy Graff

SFGATE, Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2021

Tearing across the bone-dry landscape of the El Dorado National Forest at unfathomable speeds, California's Caldor Fire near Lake Tahoe exploded in size from 6,500 acres Tuesday morning to 53,772 acres Wednesday morning with no containment, triggering a flurry of evacuations, torching parts of a small town and injuring at least two people, officials said.

Fire officials said an unknown number of structures were destroyed, but Sacramento Bee reporters on the ground in Grizzly Flats (population 1,200) found an elementary school, a church, a post office and other buildings in ruins. Two civilians were seriously injured in the blaze, Cal Fire said in a statement Tuesday evening. Both were taken from the Grizzly Flats area by air ambulance to a hospital.

Officials ordered residents in Pollock Pines to evacuate late Tuesday, and crews fought flames overnight to protect the town of about 7,000 people near Highway 50. The community of Kyburz was also given evacuation orders.

The California Highway Patrol warned Highway 50, a main artery between South Lake Tahoe and Sacramento, may close overnight, but it appeared to be open Wednesday morning.

Roadways in the region were clogged with traffic Tuesday as residents fled. CapRadio journalist Scott Rodd shared a video Tuesday of traffic backed up along Sly Park Road.

The El Dorado National Forest issued an emergency order Tuesday night closing the national forest because of extreme fire behavior. The forest wide closure will be in effect through Sept. 30, 2021

The Caldor Fire broke out Saturday about 40 miles southwest of Lake Tahoe, as the crow flies. The blaze exploded from 2,261 acres Monday night to 6,500 acres Tuesday morning, burning through heavy timber in a steep river canyon, Cal Fire said.

The first flames were spotted at 7 p.m. Saturday just south of Pollock Pines in El Dorado County, 4 miles south of the small town of Grizzly Flats and 2 miles east of the unincorporated community of Omo Ranch.

The fire has been extremely active amid hot, gusty weather and with vegetation parched and dry from drought conditions. The U.S. West has been warmer and drier in the past 30 years because of climate change, which is resulting in more destructive wildfires, according to scientists.

"Firefighters say the Caldor Fire has grown so quickly they've had a hard time even keeping their maps updated with the perimeter," KTVU reported.

The Caldor Fire emitted massive smoke plumes that rose more than 20,000 feet into the air.

The wildfire camera positioned on Leek Spring Hill, about 40 miles southwest of South Lake Tahoe, showed the blaze looking more like an erupting volcano than the type of wildfires that Californians have become accustomed to.

"It's very scary," said Neil Lareau, a professor of atmospheric sciences in the department of physics at the University of Nevada at Reno who studies wildfire-generated weather. "We have the worst mix of things you could put together for fires, which is a combination of dry vegetation, strong, shifting winds and an atmosphere conducive to these deep smoke plumes."

Nearly 250 personnel are assigned to the blaze. The cause of the fire is unknown.

## **Mineral evacuates as Dixie Fire hits 635,728 acres**

By Katie Dowd

SFGATE, Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2021

The small Northern California town of Mineral was evacuated late Tuesday as the still-raging Dixie Fire began to threaten the area.

Shortly after 10 p.m., the Tehama County Sheriff's Office issued a mandatory evacuation order for the community of just over 100 people, located one mile from the Lassen Volcanic National Park headquarters. The Dixie Fire has already burned 635,728 acres across Plumas, Butte, Lassen and Tehama counties. It is 33% contained, up slightly from 31% on Tuesday.

Communities along the I-5 corridor are sandwiched between two huge wildfires, the Dixie Fire to the east and the McFarland Fire to the west. The McFarland Fire has burned through 97,407 acres but is now 51% contained.

Because the Dixie Fire is so massive, Cal Fire splits its incident report into the east and west portions of the blaze. On the west zone, Cal Fire said "spotting, single and group tree torching all contributed to fire

growth. Challenges to the control lines occurred in many divisions, as fuel conditions allowed for steady growth."

On the east zone, crews saw "high fire activity" in the Peter's Creek area and "very active fire conditions" near Thompson Peak, the highest peak in the Trinity Alps Wilderness. As of Wednesday morning, Cal Fire said the fire hasn't crossed Fruit Growers Boulevard.

At a Wednesday morning fire briefing, officials said the fire has held steady outside of Susanville, and they're expecting winds today to push the fire back onto itself away from the town. Crews are anticipating winds will move the fire down the Highway 395 corridor, however, and are preparing to defend that area today.

A red flag warning for gusty winds remains in effect, although conditions have been more favorable over the last day. For the first time in weeks, crews on the ground awoke to clear skies Wednesday as a cold front moved in. Air teams will be performing drops today.

The second-largest wildfire in California history, the Dixie Fire has scorched 890 square miles in the northern Sierra Nevada and southern Cascades since it ignited on July 13. Ongoing damage surveys have counted more than 1,100 buildings destroyed, including 625 homes, and more than 14,000 structures remained threatened.

Investigations are continuing, but PG&E has notified utility regulators that the Dixie and Fly fires may have been caused by trees falling into its power lines. The Dixie Fire began near the town of Paradise, which was devastated by a 2018 wildfire ignited by PG&E equipment during strong winds. Eighty-five people died.

Climate change has made the U.S. West warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more destructive, according to scientists.

## **Wildfire smoke covers Sacramento. Here's how bad it will get and when it will get better**

By Mila Jasper

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2021

Winds coming from the north are pushing wildfire smoke into the Sacramento region Wednesday. You'll likely be able to smell smoke outside by this afternoon, according to the National Weather Service.

"The winds today will mostly remain from the north through the evening hours," Hannah Chandler-Cooley, a meteorologist with NWS, said.

Some Delta breeze from the west will likely move in overnight, Chandler-Cooley said, but it's hard to tell how much that shift will affect the smoke. Jamie Arno, spokesperson for the Sacramento Air Quality Management District, told The Sacramento Bee on Tuesday air quality will likely be poor until the weekend. Arno emphasized that if you can smell smoke, you should get inside.

According to Sacramento Air Quality Management District forecasting, Sacramento, Placer, El Dorado, and Yolo counties are all expected to reach Air Quality Index numbers that indicate the air is unhealthy for sensitive groups to breathe.

While air quality in many parts of Sacramento County has avoided jumping into unhealthy ranges, that's expected to change. The Sacramento Air Quality Management District forecasts Sacramento County air quality will reach 107 Wednesday before rising to 139 Thursday. But at one monitoring station, in downtown Sacramento, a level of 119 was recorded Wednesday morning.

El Dorado and Placer counties are expected to reach slightly higher levels Wednesday, at 124 and 112 respectively, before falling Thursday to 102 each. Current conditions in Placer still reflect moderate levels of particulate matter, but in Yolo-Solano counties and parts of El Dorado county, air is unhealthy to breathe.

At 7 a.m. this morning, the monitoring station at UC Davis showed a reading of 170. Swaths of El Dorado County currently fall in the unhealthy to hazardous air quality index ranges, according to El Dorado County Air Quality Management District monitoring.

## **Caldor Fire burning over 53,000 acres with no containment; two evacuation**

### **centers are full**

Kristin Oh - Reno Gazette Journal

In the Stockton Record, Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2021

The Caldor Fire in Eldorado National Forest exploded to 53,772 acres burned since Tuesday morning, when it was at 6,500 acres. It is 0% contained as of Wednesday.

Extremely dry fuels and southwest winds created unprecedented fire behavior and growth, fire officials said. A red flag warning is in effect through 8 p.m. Wednesday.

The communities in proximity to the Caldor Fire experienced multiple evacuations on Tuesday. Some structures were damaged or destroyed. Structure assessment teams will be evaluating these areas when conditions become safe.

Containment is not expected until the end of the month.

### **Evacuation orders, warnings**

As of Wednesday morning, communities across the U.S. 50 corridor were under either evacuation orders or warnings.

Officials pleaded with residents to get out of the area before a warning becomes an order. That will reduce traffic on the roads and help fire crews reach the area quicker.

"Please, heed the warning and when you're asked to get out, get out," said Cal Fire Chief Thom Porter on Wednesday. "We need you out of the way so we can protect your homes from these fires."

### **There are evacuation orders for the following areas:**

- Grizzly Flat: The areas on Grizzly Flats Road east of Kendra Way into Grizzly Flats Proper. The areas of Diamond Railroad Grade, Old School House, Sweeney Road, Caldor Road, and Steely Ridge.
- Grizzly Flats Road east of four corners in Somerset into Grizzly Flats Proper. The areas of Myers Lane, Varmet Ridge Road, Rodwell Canyon Road, Snowbird Lane, and Mehwald Lane.
- East of Sly Park Road between Highway 50 and Mormon Emigrant Trail to Ice House Road. This includes the communities of Pacific House and Fresh Pond.
- North of Highway 50, east of Forebay Road to Ice House Road.
- Intersection of Perry Creek and Hawk Haven, the East side of Fairplay Road from Perry Creek South to Cedarville Road. This includes Slug Gulch, Omo Ranch, and all roads off of Slug Gulch and Omo Ranch.
- All roads off of Omo Ranch from Cedarville Road to Hwy 88.

- The area between Highway 88 and Mormon Emigrant Trail
- South of Highway 50 from Snows Road to Ice House Road.
- Between Highway 50 and Slab Creek from Snows Road to Ice House Road.
- South of Highway 50 from Ice House Road to Silver Fork Road. This includes the community of Kyburz.
- North of Highway 50 from Ice House Road to Silver Fork Road to include Ice House Reservoir, Union Valley Reservoir, and Loon Lake.

**Evacuation warnings have been issued for the following areas:**

- North of Slab Creek to Wentworth Springs Road between Sand Mountain and Loon Lake.
- Mosquito Road from the bridge North to include the Community of Swansboro.
- North of Highway 50 to Slab Creek between Smith Flat and Snows Road.
- South of Highway 50 to Pleasant Valley between Smith Flat and Snows Road,
- and North of Pleasant Valley between Holm and Newtown.
- South of Pleasant Valley between Bucks Bar Road and Newtown Road, East of
- Bucks Bar Road to Mt Aukum Road.
- Southwest of Bucks Bar Road to Ladies Valley Road including the community of
- Outingdale, Ant Hill Road, Perry Creek Road and Sand Ridge between Ladies
- Valley Road and Bucks Bar Road.
- East of Mt Aukum Road (E16) from Bucks Bar Road to Omo Ranch Road. North
- of Omo Ranch Road to the intersection of Omo Ranch Road and Fairplay Road.
- South of Omo Ranch to the El Dorado County Line between Mt Aukum Road (E16) and Fairplay Road to include Coyoteville Road, Cedar Creek and all tributary roads.
- North of Slab Creek to Wentworth Springs Road between Sand Mountain and Loon Lake.
- Mosquito Road from the bridge North to include the Community of Swansboro.
- North of Highway 50 to Slab Creek between Smith Flat and Snows Road.
- South of Highway 50 to Pleasant Valley between Smith Flat and Snows Road, and North of Pleasant Valley between Holm and Newtown.
- South of Pleasant Valley between Bucks Bar Road and Newtown Road, East of Bucks Bar Road to Mt Aukum Road.

The Diamond Springs and Cameron Park evacuations are at full capacity, officials said.

Residents who need shelter should go to Green Valley Church. Their address is 3500 Missouri Flat Road, Placerville, CA 95667. This emergency shelter has space for RV and travel trailers.

Large animals can be taken to Amador County Fairgrounds.

## **Live updates: Dixie Fire crews rerouted to Caldor as 'siege' stretches California thin**

By Sam Stanton, Michael McGough and Dale Kasler  
Modesto Bee, Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2021

Conditions have gotten so bad on the Caldor Fire burning in El Dorado County that Cal Fire transferred 30 engines early Wednesday from the Dixie Fire — the largest fire in the state this year and second-biggest in state history.

The engines and their crews had been stationed in Reno.

"They were released from the Dixie Fire and sent straight over the hill because they were the closest resources available," Cal Fire director Thom Porter said.

Speaking to reporters at the state Office of Emergency Services headquarters east of Sacramento, Porter said the shift reflects the balancing act fire agencies are performing as the state juggles 13 major fires burning in California.

He acknowledged that the Dixie Fire is "exceedingly resistant to control and "not going to end anytime soon."

But officials believed the Caldor Fire was becoming the more urgent situation.

"We are moving resources around as needed .... It's a surge, kind of, to where the greatest need is."

The fire as of Wednesday morning had grown to 53,772 acres, more than eight times bigger than the 6,500 acres reported 24 hours earlier, according to Cal Fire's Amador-El Dorado Unit. The blaze grew more than 30,000 acres overnight, continuing extreme fire behavior for a second straight night as winds rocketed the fire dangerously close to well-populated communities along Highway 50 and surrounding areas.

Sheriff's officials Tuesday evening issued a number of new evacuation orders across a sprawling range of territory, including the entirety of Pollock Pines, Cedar Grove and Kyburz; most of Camino; eastern portions of Pleasant Valley and Somerset; a large stretch between Mormon Emigrant Trail and Highway 88; and areas near the Union Valley, Ice House and Loon Lake reservoirs.

The fire earlier Tuesday devastated the community of Grizzly Flats, population of about 1,200, within hours of the town being urgently evacuated.

At least two civilians were airlifted to hospitals with injuries described as "severe" and "serious," both of them picked up in Grizzly Flats, Cal Fire and Forest Service officials said in a joint statement.

Precise destruction tallies are not yet available due to dangerous conditions, Cal Fire says, but Sacramento Bee journalists observed many homes, a post office, an elementary school and a church all burned to the ground in Grizzly Flats.

### **CALIFORNIA FIRE RESOURCES STRETCHED THIN**

While the agency's official early-morning update reported just 242 personnel on the Caldor Fire, Porter said more firefighters were being deployed to the incident throughout the day. He didn't have details beyond the redeployment of the engine crews from the Dixie Fire.

The Legislature beefed up Cal Fire's budget this year, but the state agency remains stretched for resources across the state. Behind Porter, the electronic board in the Cal OES control room showed 1,074,622 acres currently burning.

"We have every Cal Fire employee engaged in this siege," Porter said.

Porter and Anthony Scardina, deputy forester with the U.S. Forest Service's California office, said the presence of 100 major fires across the West is hampering California's ability to pull more firefighters and

equipment into the state. As it is, 65% of the Forest Service's 10,000 firefighters are currently working in California, Scardina said.

Getting help from international partners is limited, too, in large part because of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Canada is burning as well," Porter said.

The Caldor Fire, which began over the weekend on the Eldorado National Forest, remained relatively small at first, before raging out of control Monday night, raising new questions about the Forest Service's firefighting practices.

Scardina said the Forest Service made an aggressive initial attack but was hampered by the terrain and the presence of heavy smoke, which limited the ability to fight the fire with retardant from the air.

#### OVER HALF OF STATE'S EVACUEES FROM EL DORADO

More than 16,300 El Dorado residents — about 9% of the county's total population — have been evacuated, the state Office of Emergency Services said in an update around 10 a.m.

That's over half of California's current total for wildfire evacuations. Close to 15,000 are evacuated across Plumas, Siskiyou, Lassen, Trinity, Tehama and Shasta counties in response to <https://www.sacbee.com/news/california/fires/article253573144.html>.

"Please, please heed the warnings, and then when you're asked to get out, get out," Cal Fire Chief Thom Porter said during a Wednesday morning briefing with Cal OES. "We need you out of the way so we can protect your homes from these fires."

#### CALDOR FIRE EVACUATIONS

Source: El Dorado County Sheriff's Office

#### MAJOR DESTRUCTION NEAR GRIZZLY FLATS, BUT SOME HOMES STANDING

The fire appeared to have flared up overnight in the Grizzly Flats area, which had been largely obliterated Monday night.

Early Wednesday, hot spots were still burning throughout what had once been neighborhoods, but a handful of houses had survived, some because they had defensible space and no trees nearby.

A retirement home belonging to Rege and Janet Brannagan on Meadow Glen Drive appeared to be one of only two that survived the fire.

Their son, Mike Brannagan, said in a phone interview from San Luis Obispo Wednesday that his parents had evacuated around 9 a.m. Monday night, hours before the mandatory order to get out.

"They were smart," Brannagan said. "They didn't want to be scrambling at 3 in the morning."

The family had managed to pack photos, paintings and other items to take to safety as they evacuated to Cameron Park, Brannagan said, adding that he wonders what his parents will be returning to with much of the community destroyed.

"The crazy part was my dad just talked to me about it Saturday because of the Dixie Fire," he said.

#### TWO EVACUATION SHELTERS AT CAPACITY

The American Red Cross in Northern California said shortly after 8:30 a.m. that the Cameron Park Community Center was full.

A shelter at the Diamond Springs Fire Hall was also reportedly full.

The El Dorado County Sheriff's Office was directing residents in need of shelter to go to Green Valley Church, located at 3500 Missouri Flat Road in Placerville.

#### 'CAN THEY MAKE US?' SOME STAY DESPITE EVACUATIONS

Authorities went door to door in areas of Pollock Pines early Wednesday ordering residents to leave the area.



Although a mandatory evacuation had been ordered Tuesday night, law enforcement officials at first took no immediate efforts to evacuate residents or to set up roadblocks to keep visitors from coming in.

That changed shortly after midnight, when law enforcement sirens began blaring throughout town and authorities set up roadblocks and began ordering people in the community of 7,000 to leave immediately, including residents of the Sly Park area who had taken refuge in Pollock Pines earlier in the day.

Several groups had set up camp in a CVS drug store parking lot Tuesday after being evacuated from the Sly Park area. The fire had chewed through forest land above the Sly Park Recreation Area through most of Tuesday.

But some chose to ignore the Wednesday morning evacuation order.

Candie Calderon, who was sitting in a pickup truck filled with belongings and had parked a trailer in the CVS lot as a temporary home, said law enforcement officers came through the lot early Wednesday ordering people to leave.

"They told us they were going to clear the parking lots," Calderon said. "They said they were going to clear all of Pollock Pines, to go down the hill."

Calderon said she was evacuated Tuesday afternoon from the Sly Park area.

"We've only been here a little bit," she said. "We're debating. Can they make us?"

She said she did not know whether her house had survived the flames.

#### HIGHWAY 50 STILL OPEN

Authorities were concerned early Wednesday with the prospect of the fire jumping Highway 50 near Fresh Pond and forcing the closure of the roadway.

Although ash was falling in the area, there were no obvious signs of flames near the highway between Pollock Pines and the south fork of the American River early Wednesday, and firefighting crews were positioning themselves along frontage roads near the highway.

As of 7 a.m. Wednesday, the highway has not closed.

#### 'UNPRECEDENTED' FIRE ACTIVITY IN EL DORADO

Cal Fire and U.S. Forest Service officials in a late Tuesday night update reported the fire at 22,919 acres, down from an estimate of 30,000 acres earlier in the evening due to better mapping but still an intense increase from 6,500 acres that morning. The fire remains 0% contained.

"The Caldor Fire experienced unprecedented fire behavior and growth due to extremely dry fuels pushed by the south winds," officials wrote in an 11 p.m. incident report.

Evacuation orders now extend to within about 5 miles of the eastern outskirts of Placerville, the seat of El Dorado County with a population of about 12,000. The Placerville Police Department said authorities are monitoring the situation, but no formal evacuations or warnings were in effect for the immediate Placerville area as of early Wednesday.

The state Office of Emergency Services reported around 7 p.m. that close to 7,000 residents had evacuated from El Dorado County, but that total likely grew by thousands as more people left the Pollock Pines area later in the evening.

Evacuation centers have been set up at the Cameron Park Community Services District center and Green Valley Church in Placerville, as well as Diamond Springs Fire Hall, which was full as of Tuesday night, according to Cal Fire.

The Forest Service announced late Tuesday that Eldorado National Forest will be closed to the public now through the end of September due to the Caldor Fire.

The Caldor Fire ignited Saturday evening about 4 miles south of Grizzly Flats, which is about 10 miles south of Highway 50 at Pollock Pines. Activity remained relatively calm until Monday night, when the two

agencies reported “extreme” growth beginning in the northeasterly direction. Evacuations began, some of them issued around 3:30 a.m. Tuesday.

Authorities also on Tuesday morning ordered the evacuation of Sly Park, a popular campground by Jenkinson Lake.

Very rapid spread continued essentially all of Tuesday, day and night, as crews continued to struggle with rugged terrain, extremely dry vegetation brought on by drought conditions and limited personnel due to other major fires burning in Northern California, most notably the Dixie Fire.

“We are all competing for the same precious resources,” Cal Fire incident commander Dusty Martin said during a briefing Tuesday evening.

#### THICK SMOKE PROMPTS AIR QUALITY CONCERNS

Massive, multi-layered smoke plumes resembled volcanic eruptions at times: so-called pyrocumulus clouds, as seen throughout Tuesday on Alert Wildfire network cameras maintained by the Forest Service.

The skies adopted a thick haze tens of miles away in each direction, darker and more ominous to the east, including near Lake Tahoe, but also significant near the Sacramento area. The National Weather Service in Reno shared a short video taken in Gardnerville, Nev., showing red skies and ash falling in a snow-like trickle.

Making matters worse, a red flag warning from the National Weather Service warned that strong gusts could sweep heavy amounts of smoke from the wildfire to the south and southwest. Not only will that stir more intense fire behavior, but it is also likely to plague wide swaths of the Sacramento region, Central Valley and the greater Bay Area with poor to dismal air quality for much of this week.

#### NEWSOM DECLARES EMERGENCY

Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency for the Caldor Fire on Tuesday.

California also on Tuesday secured a fire assistance grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The state received two additional FEMA grants earlier in the day, for the Dixie Fire burning in Lassen County and Monument Fire in Trinity County.

### **If you can smell it, get inside: Here’s how to protect yourself from wildfire smoke**

By Mila Jasper

Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2021

The Caldor Fire, as seen from the 50 Grand Restaurant in Pollock Pines. KIMBERLY MCCARTHY SPECIAL TO THE BEE

California wildfires including the <https://www.sacbee.com/news/california/fires/article253519799.html>, and more fires means more smoke.

Jamie Arno, spokesperson for the Sacramento Air Quality Management District, said though the air looks ugly in Sacramento today, it’s going to get worse on Wednesday and Thursday. A wind from the north is going to push smoke down to ground level throughout the region, Arno said.

“When you can smell smoke, that means it’s there, it’s unhealthy to breathe,” Arno said. “So the suggestion is you either go indoors or move to another location where you’re not breathing the smoke.”

By the weekend, that smoke is expected to get pushed out by another shift in the winds, Arno said.

The California Air Resources Board on Tuesday issued guidance explaining how to stay safe from wildfire smoke, which can carry harmful air pollutants and aggravating particulate matter. Here’s a breakdown of the CARB recommendations.

When wildfires are burning, it’s important not only to stay on top of evacuation orders, but also to check air quality updates. <https://fire.airnow.gov/> map provides near real-time air quality updates. And if you are evacuating, drive with the windows up and the air conditioner set to recirculate air.

CARB also advises to use common sense: if it looks or smells smoky, avoid the outdoors, particularly exercise or other strenuous activities. Children, especially those with asthma, need to be extra careful.

“The single most effective way to protect yourself from smoke is to stay inside with windows and doors closed,” the CARB guidance reads.

Clean your air indoors or get to a clean air center

To keep indoor air clean, first close your windows and doors. Just leave exits unblocked. It’s also best to avoid any activities like smoking, burning candles, cooking without a range hood or even vacuuming, because these activities increase indoor air pollution, according to CARB. Mopping or wiping surfaces with a damp cloth can help prevent irritants from circulating in the air.

CARB recommends installing a clean air filter for central air conditioning units. Air filters with a Minimum Efficiency Report Value of 13 or higher can remove more than 85% of fine particulate matter, according to CARB. But not all air conditioning systems can handle filters at that high of a MERV value, so make sure to check your user’s manual. Central air systems should also operate in recirculate mode.

You can also make a temporary box fan filter out of a box fan, an air filter with a MERV rating of 13 or higher, and some duct tape. But CARB suggests these devices should be used with extreme caution and only if other options for air cleaning are unavailable.

That device should never be left unattended, and you should only use box fans made in or after 2012 that display UL or Intertek safety marks, which mean the fans have a fused plug capable of preventing electrical fires should the device be knocked over.

All other options for cleaning indoor air failing, you can head to a local clean air center.

Gear up

If you’ve got to be outside, wear an N95 mask. We’re all used to wearing masks now after more than a year living during a global pandemic, and CARB recommends N95s to guard against particles if you have to be outside. While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say N95s work against wildfires, <https://www.sacbee.com/news/california/fires/article253091833.html>. Just make sure the mask is fitted tightly against your nose with one strap above and one strap below the ears to maximize safety.

## **San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties under health caution as wildfire smoke drifts into the valley**

By Kristie Gross, Katelyn Stark  
FOX40, Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2021

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY, Calif. (KTXL) — The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a health caution as gusty winds pushed smoke into the valley.

“It’s very gloomy, like the sun wants to come out, but there’s like no clouds,” said local student Astrid Aguilar.

Aguilar and Lanna Torres said they’ve noticed a change in the air quality.

“All that smoke with the current pressure system that we have is just, you know, coming right into the San Joaquin Valley and lingering on top of us,” said Cassandra Melching, with the San Joaquin Valley APCD.

Melching told FOX40 that the shift in the winds prompted the district to issue a health caution for San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties.

“It’s like a bowl, we have mountains on all sides of us,” she explained. “And so what, essentially, that means is that any type of pollutant that’s created, whether that be, you know, through the daily business or through forest fires, it has nowhere to go. It blows into the valley, and then it gets trapped by those mountains and it becomes stuck.”

The smoke and dust pollute the air with particulate matter, which at elevated levels can be a health hazard for pets and people.

"It's really, really detrimental to one's health," Melching said. "It can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis. It increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes, and so it's a very gnarly pollutant."

Satellite images show the smoke high in the air, blanketing the San Joaquin Valley.

Right now, the air quality is only at a level 2 in parts of San Joaquin County, but the district expects it to take a turn for the worse in the coming days.

"Eventually, what goes up must come down," Melching said. "So, you know, in certain areas, folks are going to smell the smoke and they're going to see ash falling, and that's how you know you're definitely being impacted. And when you come across that scenario, stay indoors where there's cool, filtered air and limit your exposure."

The air district recommends downloading the Valley Air App. With a touch of a button, users can monitor the air quality in real-time.

"And that will give you hourly air quality concentrations for any specific site," Melching told FOX40. "You can type in an address and it'll tell you exactly what air quality is like."

Torres and Aguilar said as long as the fires are burning, they'll do their best to pay attention to the air quality and plan their activities accordingly.

"Just try to stay indoors, stay hydrated, don't go out too much and breathe all the bad air," Torres said.

"It does affect your health and the way you breathe, and like, you really have to watch what you do," Aguilar said.

According to the San Joaquin Valley APCD, the health caution will remain in place until the fires impacting the region are extinguished or until the smoke can no longer impact the region.

## **Fueled by winds, largest wildfire moves near California city**

By Terence Chea, Ethan Swope and John Antczak Associated Press  
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Aug 17, 2021

GRIZZLY FLATS, Calif. (AP) — A wildfire raged through a small Northern California forest town Tuesday, burning dozens of homes as dangerously dry and windy weather also continued to fuel other massive blazes and prompted the nation's largest utility to begin shutting off power to 51,000 customers.

The Caldor fire in the northern Sierra Nevada had burned an estimated 50 homes in and around Grizzly Flats, a town of about 1,200 people, fire officials said at a community meeting.

Gov. Gavin Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency for El Dorado County because of the blaze, which tripled in size between Monday and Tuesday afternoon to nearly 50 square miles (129 square kilometers),

To the north the Dixie Fire — the largest of some 100 active wildfires in more than a dozen Western states — was advancing toward Susanville, population about 18,000.

Meanwhile, Pacific Gas & Electric announced it had begun shutting off power to some 51,000 customers in small portions of 18 northern counties to prevent winds from knocking down or fouling power lines and sparking new blazes.

The utility said the precautionary shutoffs were focused in the Sierra Nevada foothills, the North Coast, the North Valley and the North Bay mountains and could last into Wednesday afternoon.

Very few homes were left standing in Grizzly Flats, where streets were littered with downed power lines and poles. Houses were reduced to smoldering ash and twisted metal with only chimneys rising above the ruins. A post office and elementary school were also destroyed.

Two people with serious or severe injuries were airlifted to hospitals from the Grizzly Flats area, fire officials said.

Derek Shaves and Tracy Jackson were helping their friend salvage food and other supplies from the Grizzly Pub & Grub, a business in the evacuation zone that wasn't touched by the blaze.

Shaves said he visited Grizzly Flats Tuesday and saw his home and most of the houses in his neighborhood had been destroyed by the fire.

“It’s a pile of ash,” he said. “Everybody on my block is a pile of ash and every block that I visited — but for five separate homes that were safe — was totally devastated.”

At the Dixie Fire, numerous resources were put into the Susanville area, where residents were warned to be ready to evacuate, said Mark Brunton, an operations section chief.

“It’s not out of play, and the next 24 hours are going to be crucial to watch as to what the fire is going to do there,” he told an online briefing.

To the east, spot fires became established south of the small community of Janesville, which had been ordered evacuated. Some structures were lost there — images captured by The Associated Press showed a home consumed by flames — but a surge of firefighters was able to herd the fire around the majority of the town, Brunton said.

The Dixie Fire, which had burned some 600 homes, is the largest of the major wildfires burning in Western U.S. states that have seen historic drought and weeks of high temperatures and dry weather that have left trees, brush and grasslands as flammable as tinder. Climate change has made the U.S. West warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more destructive, according to scientists.

Susanville is the seat of Lassen County and the largest city that the Dixie Fire, named for the road where it started, has approached since it broke out last month. The former Sierra Nevada logging and mining town has two state prisons, a nearby federal lockup and a casino.

Ash fell from the advancing fire, and a police statement urged residents “to be alert and be ready to evacuate” if the fire threatens the city.

The Dixie Fire has scorched more than 940 square miles (2,434 square kilometers) in the northern Sierra Nevada and southern Cascades since it ignited on July 13 and eventually merged with a smaller blaze. It’s less than a third contained.

Investigations are continuing, but PG&E has notified utility regulators that the Dixie and Fly fires may have been caused by trees falling into its power lines. The Dixie Fire began near the town of Paradise, which was devastated by a 2018 wildfire ignited by PG&E equipment during strong winds. Eighty-five people died.

Ongoing damage surveys have counted more than 1,100 buildings destroyed, including 630 homes, and more than 16,000 structures remained threatened. Numerous evacuation orders were in effect.

Near the Caldor Fire, people were offering assistance to evacuees, including the four-footed kind. Susan Collins of Placerville used her horse trailer to help move two horses Tuesday after offering help on an El Dorado County Facebook page.

“I know not everybody is prepared when something like this happens, and my purpose in life is to be there to help people,” she said.

Across the state line in Nevada, school administrators delayed start times in the Reno-Sparks because of a cloak of wildfire smoke from the Dixie Fire blanketing the region. Smoke plumes from the Caldor Fire were also visible from northern Nevada.

Two dozen fires were burning in Montana and nearly 50 more in Idaho, Washington and Oregon, according to the National Fire Interagency Center.

In Montana, authorities ordered evacuations on Tuesday for several remote communities in north-central Montana as strong winds propelled a large wildfire toward inhabited areas.

The mandatory evacuation covered Lodge Pole, a town of about 300 people on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, and the former mining town of Zortman, which has about two dozen people, KOJM reported.