

## **Creek Fire updates: More smoke expected; vehicle retrieval planned for Florence, Edison lakes**

By Joshua Tehee

Fresno Bee, Thursday, Oct. 15, 2020

More smoke is expected in the central San Joaquin Valley on Thursday and Friday as a high pressure system parks over the Creek Fire, causing the wildfire to continue its burn in high elevations and pushing smoke into lower elevations and more populated areas.

The fire grew by 4,000 acres on Wednesday, as firefighters used aerial ignition to remove fuels in the northeast area near Cassidy Meadows and south of the San Joaquin River near Junction Bluffs.

This has caused a visible smoke plume.

As of Thursday morning, the Creek Fire had burned 341,722 acres and remains 55% contained. So far, 856 structures have been destroyed. No deaths have been reported.

- The SQF Complex Fire (the Castle and Shotgun fires) remained at 70% containment on Thursday. The fires, which have been burning near Sequoia National Park since Aug. 19, is now listed at 167,766 acres.

Evacuation orders were downgraded on Wednesday for several areas: Alpine Village, Sequoia Crest and areas of Redwood Drive, along with South Fork Drive, east of Salt Creek Fire Control Road are now under an evacuation warning and open to residents only.

Some areas will remain without utilities due to extensive fire damage to the infrastructure.

- Containment remains at 60% for the Bullfrog Fire near Dinkey Creek. The fire has burned 1,185 acres.

### **Sequoia National Forest opens to some recreation**

The Sequoia National Forest has opened some recreational areas (and activities) that had been closed due to the SQF Complex fires.

Visitors may now access the Trail of 100 Giants. Roads are open from California Hot Springs to the intersection of Western Divide and with Last Chance Road. Areas west to the forest boundary and north of this route are closed, while areas south are open.

The public can also travel from the intersection of Mountain Road 99 up Sherman Pass Road to its intersection with Cherry Hill Road, where Sherman Pass Road is closed going northeast. The forest area north of that route is closed, while the area south is open to the public.

Firewood may be cut in the Hume Lake Ranger District and south of the Sherman Pass Road in the Kern River Ranger District with a valid permit. Hunting, hiking, boating and other types of general recreation are now allowed outside of the closure area, though several prohibitions remain.

More information is at [www.fs.usda.gov/sequoia](http://www.fs.usda.gov/sequoia).

### **Vehicle retrieval planned off Kaiser Pass Road**

Those who were forced to abandon vehicles at Florence and Edison lakes are being asked to retrieve them this weekend. Vehicles can be retrieved from Florence Lake on Saturday and Edison Lake on Sunday, conditions permitting.

The Fresno County Sheriff's Office has a list of vehicles and owners, and you can contact the office for more information.

### **Little change in the region's air quality**

While increased smoke is expected in the Central Valley into Friday, the air quality forecast remains much the same, if not slightly improved from Wednesday. Moderate air quality is expected for the bulk of the region with San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties forecast in the good range and Tulare and Kern counties unhealthy for sensitive groups.

In Fresno, the Air Quality Index ranged between 89-105 on Thursday morning. The PM2.5 concentration was inside level two, where it has been all week, according to the Real-Time Air Advisory Network.

## California braces for renewed fire threat from windy weather

By Associated Press

The Business Journal, Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2020

(AP) — Dry, windy weather posed an extreme wildfire risk Wednesday in Northern California, where massive blazes already have destroyed hundreds of homes and killed or injured dozens of people.

The National Weather Service issued a red-flag warning for extreme fire danger from 5 a.m. through Friday morning. With bone-dry humidity and wind gusts possibly hitting 55 mph, Pacific Gas & Electric warned that it may cut power Wednesday evening to as many as 54,000 customers in 24 counties.

The renewed dangerous weather conditions developed as most of the huge fires that erupted over the past eight weeks have been fully or significantly contained and skies once stained orange by heavy smoke were blue again.

Preemptive electricity cuts are a strategy aimed at preventing fires from being started by damaged power lines that have been damaged or knocked down amid high winds.

“We really view it as a last resort option,” said Mark Quinlan, the company’s incident commander.

The utility also has deployed generators and other measures to keep electricity flowing in some areas that might lose power during the outages, Quinlan said.

About 33,000 homes and businesses could begin losing power at 6 p.m., mainly in the Sierra Nevada foothills and northern San Francisco Bay Area, followed by 21,000 other customers two hours later in other portions of the Sierras and the Bay Area, along with portions of California’s central coast, PG&E said.

The figures for affected customers range from more than 11,300 in Butte County, 6,000 in Santa Cruz County and around 5,400 customers in Alameda County to just 10 in Yolo County, according to the utility.

About 200 people in Humboldt County in the far northern part of the state could lose power Thursday afternoon as winds affect that area, PG&E said.

All power should be restored by late Friday night, the utility said.

The outages would include regions already hit by massive wildfires. The Glass Fire that ravaged the wine country of Napa and Sonoma counties was nearly surrounded after destroying more than 1,500 homes and other buildings.

PG&E said it could cut power to more than 9,200 customers in Napa and around 1,800 in Sonoma.

Farther north, the Zogg Fire in Shasta and Tehama counties was 99% contained. Four people died in that blaze. PG&E estimated its cuts potentially could affect nearly 4,700 customers in Shasta and around 1,200 in Tehama.

More than 8,500 wildfires have burned over 6,406 square miles (16,591 square kilometers) in California since the start of the year, but mostly since mid-August. Thirty-one people have died, and more than 9,200 buildings have been destroyed.

Numerous studies have linked bigger wildfires in America to climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas. Scientists have said climate change has made California much drier, meaning trees and other plants are more flammable.

PG&E said last month that it is using smarter and shorter power shutoffs after receiving widespread criticism last year when it turned off electricity to 2 million people to prevent its equipment from sparking wildfires.

PG&E’s aging equipment has previously sparked some of the state’s largest wildfires, including the deadly 2018 fire that destroyed much of the town of Paradise and killed 85.

The utility pleaded guilty in June to 84 felony counts of involuntary manslaughter; one death was ruled a suicide. The utility paid \$25.5 billion in settlements to cover the losses from power line-sparked catastrophes.

Meanwhile, wildfires will remain a threat in California indefinitely.

"We have had a historic fire season this year," PG&E meteorologist Scott Strenfel said. "We are and will continue to be in the peak of fire season until the rain and snow returns. And all of us here hope that it returns sooner rather than later."

## **Wildfire smoke in US exposes millions to hazardous pollution**

By Matthew Brown and Camille Fasset, The Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Bakersfield Californian and other papers, Thursday, Oct. 15, 2020

SANTA CRUZ, Calif. (AP) — Wildfires churning out dense plumes of smoke as they scorch huge swaths of the U.S. West Coast have exposed millions of people to hazardous pollution levels, causing emergency room visits to spike and potentially thousands of deaths among the elderly and infirm, according to an Associated Press analysis of pollution data and interviews with physicians, health authorities and researchers.

Smoke at concentrations that topped the government's charts for health risks and lasted at least a day enshrouded counties inhabited by more than 8 million people across five states in recent weeks, AP's analysis shows.

Major cities in Oregon, which has been especially hard hit, last month suffered the highest pollution levels they've ever recorded when powerful winds supercharged fires that had been burning in remote areas and sent them hurtling to the edge of densely populated Portland.

Medical complications began arising while communities were still enveloped in smoke, including hundreds of additional emergency room visits daily in Oregon, according to state health officials.

"It's been brutal for me," said Barb Trout, a 64-year-old retiree living south of Portland in the Willamette Valley. She was twice taken to the emergency room by ambulance following severe asthmatic reactions, something that had never happened to her before.

Trout had sheltered inside as soon as smoke rolled into the valley just after Labor Day but within days had an asthma attack that left her gasping for air and landed her in the ER. Two weeks later, when smoke from fires in California drifted into the valley, she had an even more violent reaction that Trout described as a near-death experience.

"It hit me quick and hard — more so than the first one. I wasn't hardly even breathing," she recalled. After getting stabilized with drugs, Trout was sent home but the specter of a third attack now haunts her. She and her husband installed an alarm system so she can press a panic button when in distress to call for help.

"It's put a whole new level on my life," she said. "I'm trying not to live in fear, but I've got to be really really cautious."

In nearby Salem, Trout's pulmonologist Martin Johnson said people with existing respiratory issues started showing up at his hospital or calling his office almost immediately after the smoke arrived, many struggling to breathe. Salem is in Marion county, which experienced eight days of pollution at hazardous levels during a short period, some of the worst conditions seen the West over the past two decades, according to AP's analysis.

Most of Johnson's patients are expected to recover but he said some could have permanent loss of lung function. Then there are the "hidden" victims who Johnson suspects died from heart attacks or other problems triggered by the poor air quality but whose cause of death will be chalked up to something else.

"Many won't show up at the hospital or they'll die at home or they'll show up at hospice for other reasons, such as pneumonia or other complications," Johnson said.

Based on prior studies of pollution-related deaths and the number of people exposed to recent fires, researchers at Stanford University estimated that as many as 3,000 people over 65 in California alone died prematurely after being exposed to smoke during a six-week period beginning Aug. 1. Hundreds more deaths could have occurred in Washington over several weeks of poor air caused by the fires, according to University of Washington researchers.

The findings for both states have not been published in peer-reviewed journals. No such estimate was available for Oregon.

Wildfires are a regular occurrence in Western states but they've grown more intense and dangerous as a changing climate dries out forests thick with trees and underbrush from decades of fire suppression. What makes the smoke from these fires dangerous are particles too small for the naked eye to see that can be breathed in and cause respiratory problems.

On any given day, western fires can produce 10 times more particles than are produced by all other pollution sources including vehicle emissions and industrial facilities, said Shawn Urbanski, a U.S. Forest Service smoke scientist.

Fires across the West emitted more than a million tons of the particles in 2012, 2015 and 2017, and almost as much in 2018 — the year a blaze in Paradise, California killed 85 people and burned 14,000 houses, generating a thick plume that blanketed portions of Northern California for weeks. Figures for 2017 and 2018 are preliminary.

A confluence of meteorological events made the smoke especially bad this year: first, fierce winds up and down the coast whipped fires into a fury, followed in Oregon by a weather inversion that trapped smoke close to the ground and made it inescapable for days. Hundreds of miles to the south in San Francisco, smoke turned day into night, casting an eerie orange pall over a city where even before the pandemic facemasks had become common at times to protect against smoke.

AP's analysis of smoke exposure was based on U.S. Environmental Protection Agency data compiled from hundreds of air quality monitoring stations. Census data was used to determine the numbers of people living in affected areas of Oregon, Washington, California, Idaho and Montana.

At least 38 million people live in counties subjected to pollution considered unhealthy for the general population for five days, according to AP's analysis. That included more than 25 million people in California, 7.2 million in Washington, 3.5 million in Oregon, 1 million in Idaho and 299,000 people in Montana.

The state totals for the number of people exposed to unhealthy air on a given day were derived from counties where at least one monitoring site registered unhealthy air.

Scientists studying long-term health problems have found correlations between smoke exposure and decreased lung function, weakened immune systems and higher rates of flu. That includes studies from northwestern Montana communities blanketed with smoke for weeks in 2017.

"Particulate matter enters your lungs, it gets way down deep, it irrigates the lining and it possibly enters your bloodstream," said University of Montana professor Erin Landguth. "We're seeing the effects."

The coronavirus raises a compounding set of worries: An emerging body of research connects increased air pollution with greater rates of infection and severity of symptoms, said Gabriela Goldfarb, manager of environmental health for the Oregon Health Authority.

Climate experts say residents of the West Coast and Northern Rockies should brace for more frequent major smoke events, as warming temperatures and drought fuel bigger, more intense fires.

Their message is that climate change isn't going to bring worse conditions: they are already here. The scale of this year's fires is pushing the envelope" of wildfire severity modeled out to 2050, said Harvard university climate researcher Loretta Mickley

"The bad years will increase. The smoke will increase," said Jeffrey Pierce an atmospheric scientist at Colorado State University. "It's not unreasonable that we could be getting a 2020-type year every other year."

## California heat wave prompts power shutdowns, fire danger

By Olga R. Rodriguez

In the Fresno Bee, Bakersfield Californian and other papers, Thursday, Oct 15, 2020

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — More than 50,000 California utility customers were without power and others around the state were urged to conserve electricity Thursday amid a fall heat wave that brought another round of extreme wildfire danger.

The National Weather Service issued heat advisories through Friday for temperatures in the 90s and even triple digits in many parts of the state.

Red-flag warnings for extreme fire danger were in place for much of the San Francisco Bay Area where winds bringing hot, dry gusts of up to 55 mph (88.5 kph) were expected to pose a threat of sparking new blazes in a region that already has seen some of the worst wildfires in state history.

A brush fire erupted early Thursday near the inland Southern California city of Redlands, triggering a small evacuation as it grew to about 100 acres (40 hectares), but was about 30% contained before dawn.

The Pacific Gas & Electric utility began shutting off power Wednesday evening to customers in portions of 24 counties, mainly in the Sierra Nevada and the San Francisco Bay Area. The affected customers ranged from 10 in Yolo County to more than 11,300 in Butte County.

The outages were a “last resort option,” said Mark Quinlan, PG&E’s incident commander.

“These are challenging times. Not only are we right in the peak of the wildfire season... many of us are working from home, schooling from home as well,” he said. “We recognize that hardships are introduced when we shut off power.”

Several hundred more customers were expected to experience shutoffs Thursday afternoon in the far northern part of the state.

Numerous studies have linked bigger wildfires in America to climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas. Scientists have said climate change has made California much drier, meaning trees and other plants are more flammable.

Hot weather also prompted California’s electrical grid operator to issue a statewide “Flex Alert,” urging people to conserve energy between 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday by turning down their air conditioners and not using major appliances. Previous conservation efforts this summer were praised for reducing the power demand and avoiding rolling blackouts.

PG&E’s power cuts were the third in less than two months. They are aimed at preventing PG&E equipment such as power lines from sparking wildfires if they are fouled or blown down by the winds.

The utility, which was criticized last year when it preemptively turned off electricity to 2 million people, said it was making an effort to use more targeted and shorter outages this time, with power expected to be fully restored by Friday night.

PG&E senior meteorologist Scott Strenfel said the forecast calls for two “back-to-back” periods when “Diablo” winds sweep the region. In addition to high gusts, he said they bring very dry air “and essentially suck the moisture out of vegetation,” leaving it tinder-dry and vulnerable to burning.

Several of the California counties falling under the PG&E shutoffs have already been hit by massive wildfires.

The Glass Fire that ravaged the Northern California wine country of Napa and Sonoma counties was contained Wednesday after destroying more than 1,500 homes and other buildings.

Farther north, the Zogg Fire in Shasta and Tehama counties was also contained. Four people died in that blaze.

More than 8,500 wildfires have burned more than 6,400 square miles (16,000 square kilometers) in California since the start of the year, most since mid-August. Thirty-one people have died, and more than 9,200 buildings have been destroyed.

The fires in California and elsewhere on the West Coast also exposed millions of people to hazardous pollution levels, causing emergency room visits to spike and potentially thousands of deaths among the elderly and infirm, according to an [Associated Press analysis](#) of pollution data and interviews with physicians, health authorities and researchers.

Most of the huge fires that erupted over the past eight weeks are now fully or significantly contained but the gains could be hampered if new fires ignite, said Daniel Berlant, assistant deputy director with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, known as Cal Fire.

"If a new fire breaks out, that fire will be able to grow very quickly under these conditions," Berlant said.

PG&E's aging equipment has sparked several major fires in recent years, including a 2018 blaze that destroyed much of the town of Paradise and killed 85 people.

The utility pleaded guilty in June to 84 felony counts of involuntary manslaughter — one death was ruled a suicide — and paid \$25.5 billion in settlements to cover the losses from that and other recent power line-sparked catastrophes.

## **Facing new fire threat, PG&E cuts power to tens of thousands**

By Olga R. Rodriguez

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2020

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Pacific Gas & Electric began turning off power to more than 50,000 Northern California customers Wednesday evening as dry, windy conditions renewed the threat of fire in a season already marked by deadly, devastating blazes.

The utility announced that it had begun cutting power to up to 33,000 customers, with about another 20,000 to follow in a few hours.

The shutoffs will affect portions of nearly two dozen counties, mostly in the Sierras and San Francisco Bay Area, and could last 48 hours.

Preemptive electricity cuts are a strategy aimed at preventing fires from being started by power lines that have been damaged or knocked down amid high winds. PG&E equipment sparked several massive blazes that destroyed tens of thousands of homes and killed more than 100 people since 2017.

"These are challenging times. Not only are we right in the peak of the wildfire season ... many of us are working from home, schooling from home as well. We recognize that hardships are introduced when we shut off power," said Mark Quinlan, PG&E's incident commander. "It's our last resort option."

The figure represents about 1% of PG&E's 5.1 million customers. The nation's largest utility said last month that it is using smarter and shorter power shutoffs after receiving widespread criticism from the public and regulators last year when it turned off electricity to 2 million people to prevent its equipment from sparking wildfires.

A second shutoff for around 700 customers was expected Thursday afternoon in far northern counties as winds were expected to arrive there.

The National Weather Service issued a red-flag warning for extreme fire danger through Friday morning in many areas. Hundreds of firefighters from across the state were being deployed to Northern California because of the weather, with bone-dry humidity and winds possibly hitting 55 mph (88.5 kph) with gusts to 70 mph (112.7 kph) possible in the Bay Area.

PG&E senior meteorologist Scott Strenfel said the forecast calls for two "back-to-back" periods when so-called Diablo winds sweep the region. In addition to high winds, they bring very dry air "and essentially suck the moisture out of vegetation," leaving it tinder-dry and vulnerable to burning.

Several of the counties falling under the PG&E shutoffs already were hit by massive wildfires.

The Glass Fire that ravaged the Northern California wine country of Napa and Sonoma counties was surrounded Wednesday after destroying more than 1,500 homes and other buildings.

Farther north, the Zogg Fire in Shasta and Tehama counties was fully contained. Four people died in that blaze.

Hot weather also prompted California's electric grid operator to issue a statewide Flex Alert, urging people to conserve energy between 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday by turning down their air conditioners and not using major appliances. Previous conservation efforts this summer were praised for reducing the power demand and avoiding rolling blackouts.

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Most of the huge fires that erupted over the past eight weeks are now fully or significantly contained and skies once stained orange by heavy smoke are blue again.

But the gains made by thousands of firefighters assigned to the blazes that have scorched more than 4.1 million acres this year could be hampered if new fires ignite, said Daniel Berlant, assistant deputy director with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, known as Cal Fire.

"If a new fire breaks out, that fire will be able to grow very quickly under these conditions," Berlant said.

Denise Bethune lost her home of 12 years last month after a blaze razed her tiny foothills community of Berry Creek, about 160 miles (260 kilometers) northeast of San Francisco in rural Butte County. The night before, PG&E cut off power and she and her husband couldn't use their well to get water and hose down their home.

Bethune, who has multiple sclerosis, said cutting power is a double-edged sword because it can help prevent fires from starting but it causes other issues.

"Whenever there is a power outage, my main concern is the heat because I can't handle it without air conditioning due to my medical needs," she said.

Since being displaced, Bethune, her husband and three dogs have been living in a trailer they parked on her son's orchard near the city of Chico that has its own power source.

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Numerous studies have linked bigger wildfires in America to climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas. Scientists have said climate change has made California much drier, meaning trees and other plants are more flammable.

Experts say nine out of 10 wildfires are caused by people either accidentally or deliberately.

[Bakersfield Californian Community Voices Thursday, Oct. 15, 2020:](#)

## **Renewable energy the way to go for California's future**

By Bob Goon

As a retired petroleum geologist and air pollution control inspector, I disagree with Stanford Eschner's opinion piece ("COMMUNITY VOICES: Mandate for electric cars and zero future oil usage: A disaster that would smother California with solar panels," Oct. 10) on several points. Eschner states oil and gas is a reliable source of energy. He is correct, but it is not a renewable energy source. There is a finite amount of recoverable product available, and if we continue to use it as though it will last forever, we will doom future generations with shortages and non-recoverable pollution problems.

Eschner spends a lot of time computing how much land is required to provide enough solar power to replace petroleum. His calculations are in error because he fails to consider rooftops of houses, office buildings, schools, parking lots, etc. I am not going to try to compute that space, but if existing structures continue to be used, it only stands to reason there is plenty of solar panel space in California to offset petroleum use. As an example, I have solar panels on my house and in the four-plus years since

installation , I have never paid an electric bill. The payout on the panels is approximately seven years, but I would rather pay for the panels knowing I will not be paying for electricity soon. About half of my neighbors own solar panels, and it is probably the same in Eschner's neighborhood. I own a plug-in hybrid vehicle and get more than 200 mpge (mile per gallon equivalent) using the electricity from my own panels. I believe solar panels are reliable and so do my neighbors, schools, businesses, etc.

Now to the most important rebuttal: pollution. Here Eschner goes on an unscientific rant about too many people breathing, giant vacuums and world population problems. In other words, global warming does not exist and is not our fault. The consensus among the world's scientists is that global warming is a fact and a problem which needs to be addressed worldwide. Power plants, no matter what fuel source is used, pollute. I know, I inspected power plants here in the San Joaquin Valley. They are heavily regulated, but I consider a power plant to be a controlled polluter. They have to be compliant with state and local regulations but they still pollute. Reducing dependence on power plants will not offset population growth, but it will reduce pollution, making our air quality better, and therefore, reduce one contributor to global warming.

The bottom line here I think is as Californians, we need to do what we can do to reduce our negative impacts on the environment and save petroleum reserves for future generations. So buy the solar panels and electric cars, recycle when possible, bike instead of drive, walk, etc. The result will hopefully be a cleaner planet for everyone, and maybe California will be a leader in the environmental cleanup of the planet.