

Update: Evacuation warnings for wildfire in Fresno County foothills; two injuries reported

By Thaddeus Miller

Fresno Bee, Wednesday, May 11, 2022

Fire crews were responding to a wildfire Wednesday afternoon in the Fresno County foothills, according to the California Highway Patrol.

Calfire firefighters were dispatched at 12:39 p.m. to the area of Tollhouse Road and Van Vleet for a fire, said Cal Fire/Fresno County Fire Battalion Chief Dan Urias.

In addition, CHP officers closed off roads near Burrough Valley Road and Pittman Hill where they each cross Tollhouse Road.

Firefighters began calling in air support as well.

At 2 p.m., Cal Fire reported the blaze, dubbed the House Incident, at 75 acres in grass and oak woodland with 0% containment.

At 3:15 p.m., the wildfire was at 120 acres with 10% containment.

At 4 p.m., acres grew to 150 with 10% containment.

Crews are making significant progress, just before 6 p.m., with 50% containment as the fire is at 171 acres.

Two injuries were also reported.

An US Forest Service employee sustained a leg injury and a California Highway Patrol helicopter conducted an air rescue. A Cal Fire employee sustained a shoulder injury. Both are listed in stable condition.

Urias reported threats to structures and powerlines, with a "significant augmentation of additional fire resources."

EVACUATION WARNINGS

The Fresno County Sheriff's Office and U.S. Forest Service also responded and more resources are on the way, according to sheriff's spokesperson Tony Botti.

Evacuation warnings are in place for the immediate area, he said. "We encourage residents to begin getting ready to leave should we have to elevate it to an evacuation order," he said.

California Air Board Plan Lays Out Drastic Cuts to Fossil Fuel Use

Associated Press

Thursday, May 12, 2022

New homes built in California starting in 2026 need to be powered by all-electric furnaces, stoves and other appliances if California is to meet its ambitious climate change goals over the next two decades, according to a state pollution-reduction plan released Tuesday.

The roadmap by the California Air Resources Board sets the state on a path to achieve "carbon neutrality" by 2045, meaning as much carbon is removed from the air as is emitted. The state's timeline is among the most ambitious in the nation; Hawaii has a similar goal and some other states have a 2050 deadline.

California could reach its goals through a drastic transition away from fossil fuels that power cars, trucks, planes, ships, homes, businesses and other sectors of the economy. The board staff recommends the state cut the use of oil and gas by 91% by 2045 and use technology to capture and store carbon emissions from remaining sources.

The plan was put together by air board staff and it is not final; a public comment process will begin and the political appointees who make up the air board will ultimately decide whether to make any changes.

The Legislature or other regulatory bodies would have to agree to put the various policies in place. The California Energy Commission, for example, sets building codes.

Still, state officials said the document represents an important step for California and the rest of the nation. California is the nation's most populous state and has the world's fifth largest economy compared to other nations. That economic power means the state's policy choices can drive major business changes, and other states often follow California's lead on climate policy.

"When final, this plan will serve as a model for other industrial economies around the world," said Jared Blumenfeld, secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency.

But neither environmental justice advocates nor the oil industry were happy. Environmental groups blasted the plan for its reliance on carbon capture technologies, which they say allows oil refineries, cement plants and other industries to continue polluting in disadvantaged neighborhoods. They also pointed to a little-noted element of the plan that calls for the expansion of natural gas capacity as a failure by the air board.

"At a time when we need to be planning for a phaseout of fossil fuels, our top air regulators are instead planning for a massive expansion of dirty gas-fired power plants," Ari Eisenstadt, campaign manager for Regenerate California, said in a statement. The group is a partnership between the California Environmental Justice Alliance and the Sierra Club that advocates for clean energy.

The Western States Petroleum Association, meanwhile, decried the plan would mean more "bans, mandates and expensive regulations."

"Forcing people to pick certain jobs, certain cars, certain homes, and certain times to use energy is out of touch with how ordinary people live," WSPA President Catherine Reheis-Boyd said in a statement.

Changing how buildings and means of transportation are powered is at the center of the air board's plan. It suggests the state require all new homes to have electric appliances starting in 2026 and new businesses by 2029. For existing homes, 80% of appliance sales should be electric by 2030 and 100% by 2035. That would help ensure older homes transition to electric-powered appliances when owners need to upgrade.

Transportation, meanwhile, is the state's largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions. The state is already on track to require all new passenger cars sold to be zero-emission by 2035. The plan also recommends: All truck sales to be zero-emission by 2040, 10% of airplane fuel demands to be met with hydrogen or batteries by 2045, 100% of drayage trucks to be zero-emission by 2035, and 100% of passenger train sales to be zero-emission by 2030.

The plan would put significant new demand on the electric grid, requiring the state to rapidly scale up solar power and storage options, as well as hydrogen infrastructure including pipelines.

California's 2045 carbon neutrality goal stems from an executive order then-Gov. Jerry Brown signed in 2018. But the air board has been required to release a roadmap for achieving the state's climate goals every five years since 2008.

The last version of the plan explored how California will meet a state law requiring a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 2030. Some observers of the process had called for a robust analysis of the state's progress toward the 2030 goal, including the role California's signature cap-and-trade program was expected to play.

But the 200-plus page document released Tuesday includes just a small section on the state's progress toward 2030 and does not directly lay out what level of emissions reductions are expected from the various programs the state already has in place. It says the role of cap and trade in achieving the state's goals will likely diminish. The program requires businesses to buy credits equal to how much carbon they want to emit, with the goal of spurring reductions overtime as the price of credits increase.

The air board won't assess whether changes are needed to reach the 2030 goal until after the scoping plan is finished, the plan said.

Wildfire in Fresno County now 60% contained, crews continue to battle hotspots

By Nic Garcia

ABC 30 News, Thursday, May 12, 2022

FRESNO, Calif. (KFSN) -- A wildfire in Fresno County that prompted evacuation warnings and led to two firefighters being injured on Wednesday is now 60% contained.

The House Fire sparked near Tollhouse and Pittman Roads at about 12:30 pm.

It spread to more than 170 acres of brushland, threatening structures and power lines.

The Fresno County Sheriff's Office issued evacuation warnings for some residents in the area, asking them to prepare to leave quickly should the blaze spread out of control.

But crews were able to get a handle on the fire, as they attacked the flames from the air and on the ground. After working through the night, CAL FIRE announced on Thursday morning that crews had reached 60% containment.

A day shift of firefighters will continue working Thursday, mopping up hotspots until 100% containment is achieved.

On Wednesday, two firefighters were injured after a boulder struck them - one, a US Forest Service firefighter, had to be airlifted to the hospital. The other, a firefighter from CAL FIRE, was taken by ground ambulance with a shoulder injury. Both are expected to be ok.

From the sky, two of CAL FIRE's new Sikorsky FireHawk helicopters aggressively attacked the flames.

"That's some of CAL FIRE's newest air resources," says CAL FIRE/Fresno County Fire Assistant Chief Ryan Michaels. "They're faster, carry more capabilities for water-dropping and that was instrumental in helping us contain the fire."

They can hold 1,000 gallons of water - that's three times the amount a regular fire helicopter can drop. Fueling the fire, grass, trees and the steep terrain posed a challenge for firefighters.

But cool temperatures brought some relief by evening.

"The weather will be in our favor, so we're hopeful firefighters can continue to battle, gain the upper hand through the night and then tomorrow, hopefully, we're just eliminating hot spots," Michaels said.

Still - fire crews aren't taking anything for granted.

"It just takes one ember falling across that containment line and we're off to the races again," Michaels said.

If you want to find out if your home is affected, you can enter your address in this map provided the sheriff's office.