

Health caution issued as smoke, dust impact the San Joaquin Valley

Press staff report

Tracy Press, Monday, August 17, 2021

Smoke and blowing dust have triggered another health caution throughout the San Joaquin Valley, which has local experts urging residents to remain indoors if they are impacted poor air quality.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued the health caution for residents in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties as smoke from wildfires burning in Northern California and Tuolumne and Mariposa counties drifts into the region.

Winds from the northwest may bring areas of blowing dust.

Smoke from wildfire contains PM2.5 pollution – smoke, dust, soot and ash particulate matter that are 2.5 microns or smaller in the wildfire smoke – that can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis and increases the risk of heart attack and stroke. People with pre-existing respiratory conditions including COVID-19 and young children and the elderly, are especially at risk.

The largest fire burning in California currently is the Dixie Fire, which continues to rage in Butte, Placer and Lassen counties. Cal Fire reports the Dixie Fire has burned through 569,707 acres and is 31% contained.

Other fires that may be contributing to the smoke and haze through the valley are the River Fire in Nevada and Placer counties, the Lava and Antelope fires in Siskiyou County, the Monument Fire and the River Complex in Trinity County, the McFarland Fire in Trinity Shasta and Tehama counties and the Tiltill Fire in Tuolumne County.

The health caution will be in effect until the fires are put out or the smoke is no longer impacting the valley.

Anyone experiencing poor air quality due to wildfire smoke should move to filtered, airconditioned environment with windows closed.

The district's wildfire information page at www.valleyair.org/wildfires has details on current and past wildfires affecting the valley and links to the district Real-time Air Advisory Network tracking air quality throughout the valley.

For more information visit www.valleyair.org.

After long run of triple digit temps, Bakersfield to see a 'refreshing' respite starting Wednesday

By Steven Mayer

Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Aug. 17, 2021

The summer of 2021 has been one of the most brutal Bakersfield has ever experienced.

The month of June was the fourth hottest June on record, according to National Weather Service climatologist Brian Ochs. And July was the hottest July Bakersfield has endured since the late 1800s when weather watchers started keeping track.

August 2021 did not disappoint. Almost every day in August has reached or surpassed 100 degrees, and it's not over yet, said NWS Meteorologist Kevin Durfee.

Monday reached 105 degrees in Bakersfield and Tuesday is expected to hit 101, Durfee said.

To make matters worse, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on Monday issued an air quality alert for the entire San Joaquin Valley due to smoke from surrounding wildfires in the region. This alert is valid until 10 a.m. Wednesday.

According to the air district, exposure to particulate matter in the smoke can aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and increase the risk of respiratory infections. Air officials are advising valley residents to stay indoors if possible and asking people to avoid prolonged outdoor physical activities.

It all sounds pretty grim.

But on Wednesday, something unexpected — good news — is arriving.

"It's going to cool off into the low-90s by Wednesday," Durfee said. "It's going to be refreshing."

Wednesday morning, Bakersfield residents are going to wake up to 72 degrees, he said. And Thursday morning should drop even lower, to 68.

Which in the context of summer 2021, sounds almost magical.

But there's more. The air flow bringing in the cooler temperatures will push out the wildfire smoke.

"We should stay below 100 for a while," Durfee said. "No return of triple digits until early next week."

Refreshing temperatures. Cleaner air. Who knew?

Winds drive nation's largest wildfire toward California city

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2021

Susanville, Calif. (AP) — Firefighters faced more dangerously windy weather Tuesday as they struggled to keep the nation's largest wildfire from moving toward a Northern California county seat and other small mountain communities.

Forecasters issued red flag warnings of critical fire weather conditions including gusts up to 40 mph (64 kph) from late morning to near midnight.

Winds spawned by a new weather system arrived Monday afternoon and pushed the Dixie Fire within a few miles of Susanville, population about 18,000, and prompted evacuation orders for the small nearby mountain community of Janesville, fire officials said.

"The fire moved fast last night," fire spokesman David Janssen said early Tuesday.

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 Department statement urged residents "to be alert and be ready to evacuate" if the fire threatens the city, although no formal evacuation warning had been issued.

Bulldozers had cut fire lines in the path of the northward-trending blaze.

"We really had our fire lines challenged," Janssen said. "This is a really big fire. It's really hard to button up the perimeters."

The weather forecast prompted Pacific Gas & Electric to warn that it might cut off power to 48,000 customers in portions of 18 California counties from Tuesday evening through Wednesday afternoon to prevent winds from knocking down or hurling debris into power lines and sparking new wildfires. Most of those customers are in Butte and Shasta counties, which have seen a number of deadly and devastating wildfires in recent years, including the Dixie Fire.

The Dixie Fire has scorched more than 900 square miles (2,331 square kilometers) in the northern Sierra Nevada and southern Cascades since it ignited on July 13 and eventually merged with a smaller blaze called the Fly Fire. 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 627 homes, and more than 14,000 structures remained threatened. Numerous evacuation orders were in effect.

The small lumber town of Westwood was still under evacuation orders and protective lines were holding but the blaze remained a threat.

California was dealing with several other massive fires, including one called the Caldor Fire that started on Saturday southeast of the Dixie Fire in El Dorado County that has grown to about 10 square miles (26 square kilometers).

About 2,500 people are under evacuation orders and warnings because of the Caldor Fire, which nearly tripled in size overnight, said Chris Vestal, a fire spokesman.

The Dixie Fire is the largest of nearly 100 major wildfires burning across more than a dozen Western 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.

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, a fire near the small community of Hays that began on Monday had burned about 8 square miles (20 square kilometers) and residents in and around the tiny enclave of Zortman were put on notice for possible evacuation.

The U.S. Forest Service said last week that it is operating in crisis mode, with more than double the number of firefighters deployed than at the same time a year ago. More than 25,000 firefighters, support personnel and management teams were assigned to U.S. blazes.

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.

Caldor Fire in El Dorado County swells overnight, prompting evacuations

By Dominic Fracassa

San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, August 17, 2021

Wildfire cameras captured a towering plume of smoke billowing from the Caldor Fire burning in El Dorado County Tuesday morning, a blaze that's grown to 6,500 acres since igniting Saturday, the U.S. Forest Service said.

The blaze, which grew rapidly overnight Monday, prompted mandatory evacuations for small towns in the fire's path, including areas near Grizzly Flats, Somerset and Happy Valley.

A complete list of territories under evacuation orders and warnings is available [here](#).

What sparked the fire wasn't clear as of Tuesday, but U.S. Forest Service officials said the fire began burning around 7 p.m. Saturday 4 miles south of Grizzly Flats and 2 miles east of Omo Ranch.

The region's steep, rugged terrain made fighting the Caldor Fire difficult, the forest service said. The forest service was also straining under staffing shortages created in part by the large number of fires tearing across the state.

Keep track of major Northern California wildfires with The Chronicle's interactive fire map and tracker.

Where's the Caldor Fire burning? Blaze threatens rural homes, Sly Park summer camp

By Michael McGough

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, August 17, 2021

The Caldor Fire swept with frenzied growth late Monday into Tuesday morning through a largely wooded part of rural El Dorado County in Northern California, destroying buildings as it tripled in size overnight.

Where exactly is it burning, and how many people live in the region?

The fire is about 60 miles east of Sacramento along the Highway 50 corridor. The largest population center nearby is Pollock Pines, home to about 7,000 residents, which straddles the highway roughly 10 miles to the northwest of the community of Grizzly Flats.

The incident started Saturday evening about four miles south of Grizzly Flats, where about 1,200 people live, and two miles east of Omo Ranch, home to roughly 300.

Extremely rapid growth led to mandatory evacuations Tuesday morning for those two communities, extending east into parts of Somerset, a community of about 3,600 people about six miles from Grizzly Flats. Happy Valley, a very sparsely populated area a couple of miles north of Grizzly Flats, was also evacuated.

Forest Service officials later Tuesday morning announced an evacuation order for the Sly Park area and a warning for the Pollock Pines area.

Cal Fire and U.S. Forest Service officials confirmed structures have been destroyed, but said it remains too dangerous for a full damage assessment.

The two agencies wrote in a morning incident report that there is continued threat to more than 2,000 structures, including homes and outbuildings in Omo Ranch and Grizzly Flats “as well as private businesses, commercial timberlands, vineyards and other agricultural lands.”

Authorities also wrote the Caldor Fire “is predicted to impact Sly Park Lake and interstate travel including important evacuation routes.” The fire is about midway between Highway 50, to the north, and Highway 88, to the south, which are the only routes toward Nevada in the area.

Sly Park is a popular campground and recreation area around Jenkinson Lake. There is also a cluster of homes east of the lake, across Sly Park Road, where roughly 500 people reside.

The fire spread toward the north early Tuesday morning, and 20 mph gusts from the southeast were in Tuesday afternoon’s forecast from the National Weather Service.

The weather service has a red flag warning in place for most of Northern California from Tuesday evening through Wednesday warning of 35 mph gusts from the northeast, which could flip the direction of the fire and its stream of smoke.

Also evacuated early Tuesday was Leoni Meadows, a youth summer camp just north of the fire’s ignition point.

Leoni Meadows around 5 a.m. posted photos and videos to Facebook showing evacuation of the camp, under a deep red sky with active flames in close proximity.

“Everyone is out safely,” Leoni Meadows wrote.

‘Extreme’ growth on Caldor Fire prompts urgent evacuations near Grizzly Flats

By Michael McGough

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, August 17, 2021

The Caldor Fire burned out of control overnight, prompting urgent evacuations early Tuesday morning in the communities of Grizzly Flats and Happy Valley.

The El Dorado County Sheriff’s Office at 6 a.m. issued mandatory evacuation orders for all roads off of Grizzly Flats and Happy Valley roads, expanding on earlier orders issued around midnight and 3:30 a.m.

The vegetation fire ignited Saturday evening about four miles south of Grizzly Flats but made aggressive runs and created spot fires from long distances Monday, according to an evening update from the U.S. Forest Service and Cal Fire.

The agencies on Tuesday reported the fire at 6,500 acres, nearly tripling in size overnight. It remains 0% contained.

Cal Fire and the Forest Service in a joint incident update Tuesday morning wrote that “extreme” fire behavior overnight led to structure loss, but that conditions are not yet safe for officials to assess the full extent of damage. More than 2,000 structures are still threatened.

“The fire continues to pose a high risk to multiple populated communities,” officials wrote. “The Fire is predicted to impact Sly Park Lake and interstate travel including important evacuation routes.”

Pioneer Union School District in a Facebook post said all three of its campuses — Pioneer Elementary, Walt Tyler Elementary and Mountain Creek Middle School — will be closed Tuesday due to the fire.

An evacuation center has been set up at Diamond Springs Fire Hall. Another center is being established at the Cameron Park Community Center. Small animals can be taken to the animal shelter in Diamond Springs, and large animals to the Amador County Fairgrounds, along Highway 49 in Plymouth.

About 240 personnel are assigned to the fire. “The organization is stretched due to staffing shortages and other fire incidents,” the Forest Service wrote in an incident report.

The Caldor Fire ignited a few miles south of Grizzly Flats, a census-designated place with about 1,200 residents located about 60 miles east of Sacramento and 10 miles south of Highway 50. Hundreds of homes, ranches and outbuildings are nestled within the largely wooded area between Placerville and Eldorado National Forest.

The southern tip of Pollock Pines is about 8 miles northwest of Grizzly Flats; several thousand people live in Pollock Pines neighborhoods south of Highway 50.

The Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District in a tweet said Metro Fire, the Sacramento Fire Department, the Cosumnes Fire Department and Folsom Fire Department were sending an “immediate need strike team” to assist with the Caldor Fire.

Crews are bracing for gusty winds to continue. The National Weather Service has a red flag warning in place across a wide swath of interior Northern California and the Sierra Nevada foothills, in effect 5 p.m. Tuesday to 8 p.m. Wednesday due to gusts that could reach 35 mph.

Gusts could hit 20 mph in Grizzly Flats on Tuesday before the red flag warning officially takes effect, forecasts show.

Forest Service officials wrote in Tuesday’s incident report that “aggressive fire growth and runs of 3+ miles are probable” amid gusty winds, unless there is an inversion produced by the smoke.

Wildfire monitoring cameras in El Dorado County showed a mammoth cloud of dark smoke towering over nearby wooded areas around 8 a.m.

Caldor Fire update: Evacuation orders issued for residents in Sly Park area

By Kristin Oh

Reno Gazette Journal, Tuesday, August 17, 2021

Update 10:37 a.m.: The Eldorado Sheriff’s Office issued additional evacuation orders for residents living in the Sly Park area.

An evacuation warning has also been issued for residents living in the Pollock Pines area.

Evacuation centers have been opened in the following areas:

- Community members can go to The Fireman's Hall. Their address is 3734 China Garden Road Diamond Springs, CA 95619
- Large animals can go to the Amador County Fairgrounds. Their address is 18621 Sherwood Street Plymouth, CA 95669

For small animal shelter needs, contact the El Dorado County Animal Services: at 503- 621-5795.

Original post, 8:56 a.m.: The Caldor Fire is burning approximately 6,500 acres in the Eldorado National Forest, about 40 miles southwest of Lake Tahoe.

Fire officials observed extreme fire behavior last night, causing immediate mandatory evacuations overnight for residents in the area. Structures were damaged and destroyed but officials have not determined how many, according to fire officials.

On Tuesday morning, the Eldorado Sheriff’s Office issued new evacuation orders in the following areas:

- Henry Diggins off Caldor Road

- Areas of Grizzly Flats off Grizzly Flats Road and Arctic Lane
- Happy Valley

Officials anticipate additional evacuation orders will be issued. The fire may also impact Sly Park Lake and interstate traveling.

There is a continued threat to structures in the Omo Ranch and Grizzly Flats neighborhoods as well as private businesses, commercial timberlands, vineyards and other agricultural lands, fire officials said.

The wildfire started on Sunday, approximately four miles south of Grizzly Flats and two miles east of Omo Ranch. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Wildfire updates: Dixie Fire swells to over 600,000 acres; Caldor Fire growth explodes

By Michael McGoug and Amelia Davidson
The Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, August 17, 2021

Multiple wildfires exploded in size across Northern California headed into Tuesday morning, as forecasters issued red flag warnings and warned of critical fire weather for much northern portion of the state.

Thousands of fire personnel continue to battle the month-old Dixie Fire, which is burning primarily in Butte, Plumas and Lassen counties. The blaze has burned 604,511 acres (944 square miles), with containment stalled at 31%, Cal Fire reported in a Tuesday morning update. It is California's second-largest wildfire ever recorded.

The fire grew 35,000 acres between Monday and Tuesday as it expanded north deeper into Lassen County. The Lassen County Sheriff's office issued a series of new evacuation order through the day, most recently for the Janesville area west of Highway 395.

In a Tuesday morning incident report, Cal Fire said winds Monday created "intense fire activity" across the blaze. Winds were sustained throughout the day between 15 and 25 mph.

And officials reported Tuesday morning sustained wind at the blaze would continue creating "critical fire weather" that could lead acreage to explode through the day. A red flag warning is in effect for the area through 11 p.m. Tuesday evening.

"Current Red Flag conditions are creating extreme fire behavior on the Dixie Fire," Cal Fire's Lassen-Modoc Unit wrote in a social media post early Tuesday morning. "Do not hesitate if told to evacuate."

The Dixie Fire has destroyed close to 1,200 buildings, at least 635 of which were homes, according to Cal Fire. It largely leveled the town of Greenville earlier this month.

A sprawling list of evacuation orders remains, largely in Plumas County but also areas of Lassen and Tehama counties. Voluntary evacuation warnings are in effect for some Butte County cThe Susanville Police Department issued a news release Monday telling residents of the city "to be alert and be ready to evacuate in the event that the Dixie Fire threatens the City of Susanville."

No formal evacuation warning or order has been issued for the city of about 15,000 people, which is the seat of Lassen County.

The National Weather Service Tuesday morning issued a red flag warning set to be in place from 5 p.m. Tuesday to 8 p.m. Wednesday, covering much of the northern Sacramento Valley and Sierra Nevada foothills, including sections of Butte and Plumas counties.

In response to the gusty conditions, Pacific Gas and Electric Co. issued a warning Sunday night saying it may black out power Tuesday to homes and businesses in parts of 16 counties. As of Tuesday morning, the utility company estimated that as many as 48,000 homes and businesses could be affected, primarily in Butte and Shasta counties.

The Dixie Fire's cause officially remains under investigation, but PG&E in a filing to state regulators acknowledged the involvement of their equipment, writing that an employee spotted a "healthy green tree" leaning up against a conductor on one of the utility company's power poles.

No fatalities have been reported in connection with the Dixie Fire. At least three first responders have been injured, Cal Fire says.

More than 5,900 firefighters are assigned to the incident.

Caldor Fire

The Caldor Fire, burning in rough terrain in Eldorado National Forest, grew over nine times in size Monday, destroying structures in some areas and prompting urgent evacuation orders Tuesday morning for Grizzly Flats and Happy Valley.

Officials reported Tuesday morning the blaze spanned 6,500 acres and was 0% contained.

The fire spanned just 754 acres Monday morning, after sparking Saturday in the Middle Fork Cosumnes River Canyon, about four miles south of Grizzly Flats. But gusty conditions Monday dramatically increased fire activity, pushing the blaze in multiple direction and causing officials to issue multiple evacuation orders through the night.

"Extreme fire behavior was observed overnight causing immediate mandatory evacuations in the area and structure loss was observed," wrote Cal Fire in a Tuesday morning incident report. "The actual number of destroyed/damaged structures is undetermined as fire conditions are not yet safe to bring in damage assessment teams."

Cal Fire reported a "continued threat to structures" Tuesday, especially in the areas of Omo Ranch and Grizzly Flats, as the fire rages on under red flag conditions.

"The fire continues to pose a high risk to multiple populated communities," Cal Fire wrote. "Additional evacuations orders are anticipated."

Mandatory orders are in place throughout the area, including parts of Barney Ridge, Leoni Meadows, Pi'Pi Valley and areas surrounding Omo Ranch. A voluntary evacuation warning is in place for the Omo Ranch community.

242 personnel are fighting the blaze. Cal Fire said Monday they were "stretched due to staffing

Trinity County wildfires

Two large fires in Trinity County that ignited during a late July lightning storm continue to burn and prompt evacuation warnings: the Monument Fire and the McFarland Fire.

Shasta-Trinity National Forest officials as of Tuesday morning reported the Monument Fire at more than 119,280 acres with 10% containment. The blaze grew 23,000 acres between Monday and Tuesday as containment remained stagnant.

Mandatory evacuations are in effect for numerous communities: Junction City, Red Hill, Canyon Creek, Coopers Bar, Big Bar, Del Loma, Big Flat, Helena, Cedar Flat and Burnt Ranch. As the fire expanded Monday, Trinity County officials issued a new evacuation order for the area of Oregon Summit west to Junction City.

The McFarland Fire also flared up significantly Monday, with the fire expanding over 16,500 acres throughout the day. Cal Fire reported Tuesday morning the blaze now spans nearly 69,000 acres. Containment is at 51%, down 17 percentage points from Monday morning.

As the fire grew rapidly through the day Monday, it prompted new evacuation orders in the area of Highway 36, Pettyjohn Road and Canon Road. Evacuation orders are also in place along a stretch of Highway 36 near Platina.

Highway 36 is closed between Highway 3 and Bowman Road.

The Forest Service says at least 11 people have been injured by the McFarland Fire.

Wildfires push more dangerous smoke toward Valley floor

By Dan Casarez

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, August 16, 2021

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a health warning Monday afternoon as gusty winds threaten to push more dangerous smoke to the Valley.

Wildfires in Northern California, Tuolumne and Mariposa counties continue to grow as thousands of firefighters battle the flames. As the winds shift, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, and Kern counties are under a health warning until the fires are out and the smoke clears.

Air quality is likely to worsen this week — despite already bad air Valleywide.

Northwest winds can cause dust to blow Tuesday through Wednesday across Central Valley.

The particulate matter (PM) can impact people who are susceptible to respiratory conditions, such as asthma attacks, chronic bronchitis, and can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Residents living in the affected areas and potentially breathing the particulate matter are urged to remain indoors and reduce their exposure. Children and the elderly, including those suffering from Covid-19, are especially susceptible to the dangerous effects of smoke.

Face masks may not be sufficient protection from the poor air quality, air officials said.

The Environmental Protection Agency has tips to stay safer:

- Keep windows and doors closed.
- Use fans and air conditioning to stay cool. If you cannot stay cool, seek shelter elsewhere.
- Reduce the smoke that enters your home.
- If you have an HVAC system with a fresh air intake, set the system to recirculate mode, or close the outdoor intake damper.
- If you have an evaporative cooler, avoid using it unless there is a heat emergency because it can result in more smoke being brought inside.
- If you have a window air conditioner, close the outdoor air damper.
- If you have a portable air conditioner with a single hose, typically vented out of a window, do not use it in smoky conditions because it can result in more smoke being brought inside.

Avoid creating more fine particles, such as:

- Smoking cigarettes.
- Using gas, propane or wood-burning stoves and furnaces.
- Spraying aerosol products.
- Frying or broiling food.
- Burning candles or incense.
- Vacuuming, unless you use a vacuum with a HEPA filter.

For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call 230-6000.

Health caution remains in effect due to gusty winds, wildfires

KGET Channel 17, Monday, August 16, 2021

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. (KGET) — A health caution will remain in effect for counties including Kern until fires burning in northern California and Tuolumne and Mariposa counties are either extinguished or their smoke no longer impacts the San Joaquin Valley.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials said Monday they have also issued an air quality alert with the National Weather Service because of wildfire smoke. Residents affected by smoke or dust are urged to stay indoors to reduce exposure to particulate matter emissions.

People with existing respiratory conditions — including COVID-19 — young children and the elderly are especially susceptible to those emissions. Anyone experiencing poor air quality is advised to move to an air-conditioned environment with the windows closed.

Gusty winds bring new worries to California fire lines

Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021

QUINCY, Calif. (AP) — Firefighters battling flames in Northern California forests girded Monday for new bouts of windy weather, and a utility warned thousands of customers it might cut their electricity to prevent new fires from igniting if gusts damage power lines.

Conditions that suppressed the huge Dixie Fire overnight gave way in the afternoon to gusty winds that pushed flames through an area where drought and summer heat have turned vegetation to tinder.

The fire was only a few miles from Susanville, the county seat of Lassen County with a population of nearly 20,000, and ash fell in the area. Portions of Janesville, a small nearby mountain community, were ordered to evacuate.

Bulldozers had cut fire lines in the path of the northward-trending blaze but “a lot of our lines are getting tested now,” fire spokesman David Janssen said.

Smoke over the fire had slowed its activity earlier in the day but gusty winds arrived in the afternoon, pushing the blaze into extreme activity, torching groups of trees and quickly propelling smaller spot fires that sprang up as much as a couple of miles ahead of the fire front, fire officials said.

“By the time we get there to fight it, it’s not only a quarter-acre, it’s already exploded,” Janssen said.

The National Weather Service issued a fire weather watch through Thursday in the fire area because of winds that could gust to 35 mph (56 kph) at times.

The Dixie Fire has scorched more than 900 square miles (2,331 square kilometers) in the northern Sierra Nevada and southern Cascades since it ignited on July 13 and eventually merged with a smaller blaze called the Fly Fire.

Ongoing damage surveys have counted more than 1,100 buildings destroyed, including 625 homes, and more than 14,000 structures remained threatened. Numerous evacuation orders were in effect.

The small lumber town of Westwood is still under evacuation orders and protective lines were holding but the blaze remained a threat.

“There are still some people staying in there,” Janssen said. “We’re hoping it won’t turn bad in there and we have to change our mission from protecting structures to saving lives ... Our biggest concern right now is that people aren’t taking the evacuation seriously.”

Investigations are continuing, but Pacific Gas & Electric 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.

On Monday evening, PG&E notified 48,000 customers in parts of 18 Northern California counties that it may have to shut off power Tuesday evening through Wednesday afternoon to prevent winds from knocking down or hurling debris into power lines and sparking new wildfires.

“PG&E meteorologists are tracking a weather system in those areas that could bring sustained winds of up to 40 mph (64 kph), gusting higher in foothills and mountains,” the utility said in a statement.

The Dixie Fire was among 97 large, active wildfires burning in the United States on Monday, the National Interagency Fire Center said. More than 25,000 firefighters, support personnel and management teams were assigned to the blazes.

California was dealing with several other massive fires, including one that started on Saturday southeast of the Dixie Fire in El Dorado County that had grown to about 3.5 square miles (9 square kilometers) and prompted evacuations.

The U.S. Forest Service said last week that it is operating in crisis mode, with more than double the number of firefighters deployed than at the same time a year ago.

The fires were also taking a toll on wildlife.

Near Taylorsville, California, some firefighters on Sunday were monitoring a bear cub who was possibly orphaned in the Dixie Fire. The emaciated cub was awaiting extraction from the fire-scarred area by a wildlife rescue team.

“Generally if you see them with a sow or a mother bear, they’ll stay with the mother bear and run off,” said firefighter Johnnie Macy, who was deployed from Golden, Colorado. “This bear hasn’t done that, so because of that we think that the bear’s orphaned as a result of the fire.”

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.

Valley under air quality alert until Wednesday due to wildfire smoke

Hanford Sentinel, Monday, August 16, 2021

Most of the Central Valley will be under an air quality alert until Wednesday morning due to wildfire smoke which has covered most of the North American West.

According to the National Weather Service, eight San Joaquin counties will be under the alert until 10 a.m. Wednesday. That alert means exposure to air pollution could cause a number of medical issues, including aggravated lung disease, asthma attacks and respiratory infections.

The Valley is also seeing triple digit high temperatures until Wednesday, which can also cause poor air quality, said Gerland Meadows, meteorologist-in-charge at the National Weather Service Hanford.

“It’s important to limit activities outside with both smoke and heat, because they compound each other,” Meadows said. “We aren’t seeing extreme heat, just elevated heat which would cause greater issues. Stay hydrated and indoors.”

According to the Valley Air District, face masks worn to protect against COVID-19 may not act as a defense against wildfire smoke. They say the best way to protect yourself is to stay in a filtered, air conditioned area with closed windows.

The Air District also says you can build your own, temporary air purifier with a 20-by-20 air filter, a box fan and duct tape. The filter can be taped to the back of the box fan.

Meadows said the Central Valley should avoid long periods of smoky conditions as long a wildfire doesn’t start closer to the area. Despite that, he said high and low pressure systems could mean weeks of intermittent smoky skies.

Wind forecasts brings new worries to California fire lines

By Associated Press

The Business Journal, Monday, August 16, 2021

(AP) — Firefighters battling flames in Northern California forests girded Monday for new bouts of windy weather, and a utility warned thousands of customers it might cut their electricity to prevent new fires from igniting if gusts damage power lines.

Conditions that suppressed the huge Dixie Fire overnight were expected to give way late in the day to winds that could push flames toward mountain communities in a region where drought and summer heat have turned vegetation to tinder.

“In this environment any type of wind, no matter what direction — especially the way the fire’s been going — is a concern for everyone,” said information officer Jim Evans.

Growing explosively at times, the Dixie Fire has scorched 890 square miles (2,305 square kilometers) in the northern Sierra Nevada and southern Cascades since it ignited on July 13 and eventually merged with a smaller blaze called the Fly Fire.

Ongoing damage surveys have counted more than 1,100 buildings destroyed, including 625 homes, and more than 14,000 structures remained threatened. Numerous evacuation orders were in effect.

Investigations are continuing, but Pacific Gas & Electric 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.

On Sunday evening, PG&E notified 39,000 customers in parts of 16 Northern California counties that it may have to shut off power Tuesday evening due to a forecast of dry winds out of the northeast.

“Given this wind event and current conditions including extreme to exceptional drought and extremely dry vegetation, PG&E has begun sending 48-hour advance notifications to customers in targeted areas where PG&E may need to proactively turn power off for safety to reduce the risk of wildfire from energized power lines,” a statement said.

The Dixie Fire was among 97 large, active wildfires burning in the United States on Monday, the National Interagency Fire Center said.

More than 25,000 firefighters, support personnel and management teams were assigned to the blazes.

The U.S. Forest Service said last week that it is operating in crisis mode, with more than double the number of firefighters deployed than at the same time a year ago.

The fires were also taking a toll on wildlife.

Near Taylorsville, California, some firefighters on Sunday were monitoring a bear cub who was possibly orphaned in the Dixie Fire.

The emaciated cub was awaiting extraction from the fire-scarred area by a wildlife rescue team.

“Generally if you see them with a sow or a mother bear, they’ll stay with the mother bear and run off,” said firefighter Johnnie Macy, who was deployed from Golden, Colorado. “This bear hasn’t done that, so because of that we think that the bear’s orphaned as a result of the fire.”

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.