

Firefighters 'cautiously optimistic' at the Caldor Fire after a night of progress

By Omar Shaikh Rashad

San Francisco Chronicle, Friday, Sept. 3, 2021

Aided by cooperative weather conditions, firefighters continued their assault against the Caldor Fire in El Dorado County overnight Thursday, which grew to just under 213,000 acres.

Firefighters reported Friday morning that the fire was 29% contained after a night of low winds and rising humidity levels.

Cal Fire Assistant Chief Tim Ernst summed up the sentiment among fire officials as “cautiously optimistic” at a briefing Friday morning, the result, he said, “of a lot of hard work” by fire crews.

He implored firefighters to continue their mop-up work in less active areas of the fire. As evacuation orders lift and areas repopulate, he anticipated a glut of 911 calls for reports of smoke.

Another day of favorable wind conditions was expected for Friday’s firefight, a welcome change after days of red flag warnings. But Cal Fire meteorologist Jim Dudley cautioned that the Tahoe region’s natural topography created its own, often unpredictable winds.

“Just because we don’t have red-flag conditions across the fire, the wind threat is still there and it’s all localized,” Dudley said.

Nearly 500,000 gallons of water and retardant dumped on Caldor Fire

By Amy Graff

SFGATE, Friday, Sept. 3, 2021

Good news continues to come out of the Caldor Fire as containment on the 212,907-acre blaze near Lake Tahoe increased to 29% on Friday morning.

Amid calmer winds, crews made progress gaining the upper hand on the blaze chewing through parched forest land, and aircraft dropped nearly 500,000 gallons fire retardant and water from local reservoirs on flames, Capt. Parker Wilbourn, a firefighter with Sacramento Metro Fire deployed to the incident, said.

Friday's forecast called for lighter winds but also extremely dry daytime weather, with a warming trend through the weekend as high pressure builds over the West, fire officials said.

The Caldor Fire's northeast tip was only 3 miles south of South Lake Tahoe, which was emptied of 22,000 residents days ago.

The wind-driven fire that began Aug. 14 had raged through densely forested, craggy areas and still threatened more than 30,000 homes, businesses and other buildings ranging from cabins to ski resorts.

But there was optimism and progress as winds eased on the fire's western flank while in the northeast, despite gusty ridgetop winds, firefighters with bulldozers and shovels were steadily hacking out fire lines or burning away vegetation to box in the flames before they reached Tahoe.

“In the valleys we're doing plenty of work,” fire information officer Marco Rodriguez said. “The crews are working and they're doing controlled fires ... to try to make those containment lines a little bit stronger.”

Wilbourn noted that crews Friday will be focused on three main problem spots near Wrights Lake, Kirkwood and Heavenly.

He said massive dozer lines have been constructed that tie into the granite rock between Heavenly Mountain Resort and flames to protect the area.

“We’re using the weather to our advantage,” he said. “We’re doing backfiring, building up the containment lines ... a lot of the success we have had is due to the forest reduction, people being mindful of defensible space. Those three things have helped to reduce the fuels.”

Wilbourn noted that no homes have been lost in the Kirkwood area or the Tahoe Basin.

Residents who were forced to flee South Lake Tahoe earlier this week remained evacuated along with people across the state line in Douglas County, Nevada.

The resort town can easily accommodate 100,000 people on a busy weekend but on Thursday, just before the Labor Day weekend, it was eerily empty.

Yet after days of flames threatening to engulf the resort town at any moment, any respite was welcome.

"I feel like we are truly the luckiest community in the entire world right now. I'm so incredibly happy," said South Lake Tahoe Mayor Tamara Wallace, who evacuated to Truckee, California.

"It's finally a chance to take a breath," said Clive Savacool, chief of South Lake Tahoe Fire Rescue. "It's a breath full of smoke. Nonetheless, I think we're all breathing a little bit easier and we feel like we're making some progress."

Farther west, evacuation orders were lifted or downgraded to warnings in several areas of El Dorado County.

More than 15,000 firefighters were battling dozens of California blazes that have destroyed at least 1,500 homes. One blaze, the Dixie Fire, was about 65 miles north of the Caldor Fire. It is the second-largest wildfire in state history at about 1,350 square miles and is 55% contained.

California has experienced increasingly larger and deadlier wildfires in recent years as climate change has made the West much warmer and drier over the past 30 years. Scientists have said weather will continue to be more extreme and wildfires more frequent, destructive and unpredictable. No deaths have been reported so far this fire season.

California wildfire updates: Dixie Fire nearing 900,000 acres as evacuations shift

By Michael McGough and Rosalio Ahumada
Modesto Bee, Friday, Sept. 3, 2021

The Dixie Fire, California's second-largest wildfire ever recorded, surpassed 850,000 acres this week.

Authorities have made numerous changes in evacuation orders — some new ones introduced and older ones eliminated or reduced to warnings — as activity has ebbed and flowed around the sprawling perimeter of the fire.

The blaze is nearly two months old. It sparked July 13 near the Cresta Dam in Feather River Canyon and has flared multiple times amid gusty winds, including this week with red-flag winds Monday through Wednesday.

The fire has reached 868,781 acres (1,357 square miles) with 55% containment, Cal Fire and the U.S. Forest Service stated in a joint update Friday morning. Authorities said the fire burned "actively through the night with terrain driven winds."

The Dixie Fire is burning in parts of Butte, Plumas, Lassen and Tehama counties, mostly near sparsely populated areas. It has also burned a large portion of Lassen and Plumas national forests.

The Governor's Office of Emergency Services reported Thursday morning that about 2,700 residents remain evacuated, most of them in Plumas County. The Caldor Fire in El Dorado County, by comparison, has displaced about 48,000.

Plumas County downgraded some mandatory orders to warnings for areas north of Highway 36. Meanwhile, Lassen County sheriff's officials on Wednesday ordered new evacuations near the communities of Milford and Herlong, east of Highway 395, due to flaring.

Sheriff's officials on Thursday afternoon lifted all remaining evacuation warnings for Tehama County, which had been in place for areas just north of Highway 36 near the Butte and Plumas county lines.

Cal Fire and the Forest Service say nearly 13,000 structures are threatened, a total that includes structures under mandatory evacuation orders and voluntary warnings.

The blaze has destroyed nearly 700 homes, close to 140 businesses and hundreds of minor structures, fire officials said Thursday. Damage assessment remains ongoing, Cal Fire said in Friday's update.

Authorities have split the vast incident into a west zone and an east zone. Both zones are working to keep the fire away from Highway 395, according to the update from Cal Fire and the Forest Service.

The west zone is also “working aggressively” for containment and structure protection near the communities of Janesville, Milford, Buntingville, Herlong and Junction, according to Thursday’s update. Crews on the east zone are trying to bolster dozer lines to protect areas along Highway 70.

The official cause of the fire remains under investigation, but Pacific Gas and Electric Co. in a filing to the state’s utility regulator said one of its employees located a “healthy green tree” leaning on one of PG&E’s power poles near the origin point of the fire.

OTHER CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES STILL BURNING

As of Thursday morning, more than 15,300 firefighters continued to battle 16 major wildfires and five extended attack wildfires burning throughout California as flames threatened more than 57,500 structures. Cal Fire officials said 20 new initial attack wildfires were sparked on Wednesday and quickly extinguished.

As Labor Day weekend approaches, the U.S. Forest Service has temporarily closed all National Forests in California through Sept. 17 due to the burning wildfires. California has temporarily closed until further notice several state parks in and around the Lake Tahoe Basin as firefighters continue trying to corral the Caldor Fire, which Cal Fire says is the 15th-largest fire in California history.

FRENCH FIRE

Firefighters had 43% containment of the French Fire in Kern County, where flames had burned 25,871 acres, according to Cal Fire. The fire, west of Lake Isabella in the Sequoia National Forest, continues to burn amid gusty winds and low humidity.

But there was a bit less wind Thursday, and a lot of areas were not in alignment to support rapid growth, according to the latest incident update. Evacuation orders and warnings in the area remained in place, and the estimated full containment was set for early Tuesday.

AIROLA FIRE

Cal Fire officials said there was “minimal fire activity” Thursday on the Airola Fire, which started burning Aug. 25 near Vallecito in Calaveras County. Flames there have burned 639 acres, and the fire was 92% contained as of Thursday evening.

Crews are conducting mop-up operations, suppression repair and patrol. Cooler high temperatures helped Thursday, with a slight increase in humidity and calmer wind.

TRINITY COUNTY WILDFIRES

Two lightning-sparked wildfires, the Monument and McFarland fires, continued to burn near Trinity County.

The Monument Fire, west of Big Bar in Shasta-Trinity National Forest, had burned 177,222 acres and was 33% contained, Cal Fire reported Friday morning.

The Monument Fire, the 20th largest fire in California history, is threatening about 8,200 structures. Evacuations orders and warnings remain in place; however, some areas have been deemed safe for re-population.

Firefighters have had more success with the McFarland Fire, west of Platina in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, which had burned 122,653 acres but was 98% contained, Cal Fire reported.

MCCASH FIRE

In Siskiyou County, the McCash Fire has burned 48,733 acres since it started Tuesday. Firefighters had 1% of the fire contained, and officials there don’t expect to have it fully contained until Oct. 31.

The fire, caused by lightning in the Six Rivers National Forest, is expected to grow farther into the wilderness toward the east, along with a spot on the northwest of the fire that will also continue to grow.

RIVER COMPLEX FIRE

The River Complex Fire has burned 114,359 acres in Siskiyou and Trinity counties and was 15% contained. Officials said containment, previously reported at 23%, decreased because of the fire's growth and more accurate mapping.

The fire caused by lightning started Monday morning and has burned areas in the Klamath and Shasta-Trinity national forests.

Caldor fire smoke and ash are clouding Lake Tahoe's famously clear water

By Tony Barbosa and Anita Chabria – Los Angeles Times
In the Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Friday, Sept. 3, 2021

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. — The Caldor fire has triggered mass evacuations in two states, torched hundreds of homes, made the air hazardous to breathe and spurred President Joe Biden to issue an emergency declaration.

But the erratic wildfire is also causing another problem for Lake Tahoe: Smoke and ash particles are entering the lake and clouding its world-famous crystal blue waters.

Burning for nearly three weeks now, the fire has scorched more than 210,000 acres and blanketed the region in a haze of smoke.

Readings in recent days show the lake's clarity — which is tracked by lowering a white disk below the surface and measuring the depth at which it disappears from view — has dropped to below normal for this time of year.

"We would expect to see something like 65 feet and we're seeing something more between 50 and 55 feet," said Geoff Schladow, director of the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center.

By Thursday, the heavy winds that had driven flames to the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe and the Nevada border earlier in the week had begun to subside, giving fire crews the opportunity to expand containment of the blaze. It also fueled a cautious optimism among some that the resort city had avoided devastation.

Scientists are trying to figure out whether the clouding of Tahoe's waters is a temporary impairment that will go away after the smoke clears and ash stops falling, or something that could bring lasting damage to one of the lake's most treasured attributes.

Researchers and environmental advocates worry that the Caldor fire — already one of the largest in California history — is an example of how the bigger, more intense wildfires we are experiencing due to climate change are emerging as a new threat to the movement to "Keep Tahoe Blue." It's a slogan that adorns countless vehicle bumper stickers and a mantra that has guided a decades-long effort and billions in public and private spending to reverse the degradation of Tahoe's sparkling azure waters.

"It's looking like there's going to be megafires with smoke affecting the lake more frequently: We're talking two years in a row, and 60 to 90 days of unhealthy air quality and that's depositing in the lake," said Jesse Patterson, chief strategy officer for the League to Save Lake Tahoe. The environmental organization is helping fund a recent flurry of research into the smoke's impact on water quality. "We need to understand what's going on. Is Tahoe at risk of losing what attracted us all to it?"

The fires are degrading Lake Tahoe's clarity in multiple ways.

Under normal conditions, sunlight at the high-elevation lake is so intense that algae grow only deep under the water, but the thick smoke has changed that, making conditions more favorable for algae growth closer to the surface. Smoke and ash particles that enter the lake get pushed around by waves and currents and make the water murkier. Those tiny particles also contain nutrients that stimulate the growth of algae, further diminishing the lake's clarity.

Brant Allen, field lab director for the Tahoe Environmental Research Center, was one of the few people on the lake's eerily empty, smoke-shrouded waters Wednesday. Standing aboard the 37-foot research vessel the John LeConte, Allen was taking measurements all the way down to the bottom of the 1,645-foot-deep lake.

“The clarity loss we’re measuring right now is fire-related,” Allen said.

Scientists are using research boats, buoys, underwater robots and other instruments to collect data on water clarity, temperature, concentrations of algae and tiny smoke and ash particles and other metrics that will help them understand the extent of the impacts, and how long they could persist.

An initial look at water samples taken by an autonomous underwater vehicle called a glider — which is currently surveying the upper 450 feet of lake water — suggest there has been a dramatic jump in particle concentrations, said UC Davis associate professor Alexander Forrest.

“Fine particles are affecting clarity, and are effectively creating a haze in the water that can last much longer than the smoke in the air,” Forrest said. “These particles, when in the water, can last on a time scale of weeks or months.”

He and other scientists are trying to understand the long-term implications of that change on the clarity of the lake, and the health of its ecosystem. They will be monitoring the lake to see how it fares in the months to come.

Tahoe is among the deepest lakes in the world and one of California and Nevada’s most prized natural wonders. Its waters, marinas, beaches, ski resorts, forests and casinos draw some 15 million visitors a year.

Tahoe’s clarity was declining by about a foot each year from the 1960s through the 1990s, driven largely by development-caused storm runoff into the lake. But that trend was halted and has stabilized over the last 20 years, when billions of dollars were spent on projects to clean up the watershed and restore meadows and streams. Building restrictions and other measures have also helped to reduce the flow of sediment, nutrients and other pollutants into its waters.

“We’ve arrested the decline,” said Patterson, of the League to Save Lake Tahoe, or Keep Tahoe Blue. “The clarity has some good years and bad years, but what we’re seeing in the last five years is that climate change has changed the entire playing field. It’s like you’re playing a different sport because the variability is so great.”

It was an otherworldly scene at Lake Tahoe on Tuesday afternoon as fierce winds picked up and smoke brought on an early evening. The lake’s waters turned choppy as hundreds of empty boats bobbed listlessly. A few intrepid seagulls coasted in the gusts. On beaches usually crowded in the last days of summer before families return to school, there was only ash. Ash on picnic tables, ash blowing across the sand, and ash mixing with the turbulent waters before sinking into the lake’s depths.

Even when the ash stops floating through the air, additional threats to water quality could emerge later, when rain falls or snowpack melts in the spring. Erosion in burn areas could send more runoff into the lake and further degrade water quality.

That’s exactly what worries Arthur Talsma, a wildlife biologist from Idaho who runs a potable water service for fire camps. He was on his way to the incident command center for the Caldor fire Tuesday night, and stopped at a picnic bench overlooking the lake, where he was surrounded by hungry squirrels and ducks looking for handouts in the evacuated town.

The ash floating through the air, he said, was of less concern to him than the runoff that could be unleashed over the next year, especially if heavy rains were to flush material from the burned areas into the lake.

“It’s going to change things,” he said. “And it can really change an awful lot if it’s in the watershed.”

Lake Tahoe’s water quality has suffered from fires before. Algae growth was affected by the 3,100-acre Angora fire in 2007 that burned in the Tahoe Basin and sent a lot of ash into the lake. But water clarity bounced back to normal about a month later.

This time however, scientists are concerned that the massive size of the Caldor fire and its proximity to Lake Tahoe could make for a bigger threat.

“There’s just way more material coming in this time, and it’s not over yet,” Schladow said. “So I’m expecting there to be a longer-lasting change from this fire compared to the Angora fire.”

Experts have historically been most concerned about fires affecting water quality through the erosion of watersheds. But this event raises concerns about smoke and ash becoming their own growing threat to the health of Lake Tahoe and other water bodies across the West — one that could begin undermining watershed protection and restoration efforts.

“The core issue,” Schladow said, “is whether these sorts of conditions are going to persist year in, year out.”

Barbecue ban during wildfire season? Residents in this California county are demanding it

By Margo Rosenbaum and Dale Kasler

Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee and other papers, Friday, Sept. 3, 2021

Last Saturday, Janet Maineri saw the unthinkable: fresh coals littering the ground from an overflowing barbecue grill at Henningsen Lotus Park, on the South Fork of the American River in rural El Dorado County.

Maineri, a Coloma resident for over 20 years, snapped pictures of the barbecue and surrounding dead brush, completely baffled that someone would light a fire at the park with the Caldor Fire devouring more than 200,000 acres of the county.

“Why are we still allowing barbecues and campfires in our parks?” Maineri said.

With Labor Day weekend approaching, Maineri is spearheading a petition drive asking the Board of Supervisors to immediately ban open fires and charcoal grills in the county – on both public and private lands – through the end of the wildfire season.

The Caldor Fire began about 20 miles northwest of Coloma. With almost half of the county’s territory under a mandatory evacuation order, Maineri has seen evacuees flood into her town. The rest of the county remains at a high fire risk, with the majority of the county at the highest level of drought conditions.

“We want our county to implement an emergency ban on all open fires in El Dorado County ... effective immediately so that we don’t become the next Caldor Fire,” Maineri said. The petition has more than 400 signatures.

Because the Forest Service has closed all of California’s national forests, and the state has banned open fires at some of its parks, Maineri and other petition signers fear that the county’s parks will be inundated with visitors hosting barbecues.

“We welcome them, but we don’t want anyone to be lighting fires,” Maineri said.

Sue Novasel, a supervisor who represents the Tahoe area and much of the Caldor burn zone, said she supports a ban on open fires at public parks. She said she’d want to give more thought to whether open fires should be banned on private property, too.

“We need to be responsible; we have people who’ve lost everything because of the fires,” said Novasel, a South Lake Tahoe resident who was among the thousands who evacuated. “I think we have an obligation to keep our community safe. I certainly am concerned about public lands and open fires.”

Lotus resident Mary DeRiemer, who supports the petition, said she’s worried about people firing up grills this weekend, even as much of the county is plagued with foul air from the Caldor Fire.

“We will see it,” she said. “It is insane that people are lighting fires when the air quality is bad.”

STATE BANS WOOD AND CHARCOAL FIRES IN SIERRA DISTRICT

Other government agencies have already moved to restrict fires.

Days after the Caldor Fire started, the state Department of Parks and Recreation banned wood and charcoal fires in its Sierra district, which includes Donner, Tahoe State Recreation Area, Ed Z’berg Sugar Pine Point State Park and Emerald Bay. All have since been closed altogether as the Caldor Fire has poured into the Tahoe basin.

Meanwhile, the Sierra County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to ban outdoor fires in June on all private property in the unincorporated area of the county. The ban is reviewed monthly and will either be terminated if conditions improve or on Nov. 1, whichever comes first.

Before the new ban in California's state parks, campgrounds in the Tahoe region allowed campfires and charcoal grills except for days with red flag warnings. In some parts of the county, fire districts were already prohibiting wood and charcoal fires at people's homes.

The petition signers say it's time to surrender the joy of barbecue to keep the county safe.

"If we're willing to give up some of the little pleasures, we'll gain so much more," said Linda Whitney, a resident of Somerset, near the western edge of the Caldor Fire burn zone, who evacuated at the beginning of the fire and returned home this week. "We may not have a campfire in our campsite, but we'll still have a campsite to go to."

Lake Tahoe live updates: Firefighters increase containment of Caldor Fire to 27%

By Andres Picon, Jessica Flores, Matthias Gafni, Lauren Hernández
San Francisco Chronicle, Thursday, Sept. 2, 2021

Heavenly ski resort is running snowguns at full blast to save itself from the Caldor Fire. The blaze was stifled on its way to Kirkwood, sparing the ski town and resort, for now. The Caldor Fire is upending lives and livelihoods in South Lake Tahoe. After South Lake Tahoe emptied, one retired firefighter stayed behind to defend his home. Bay Area health experts weigh in on the effects of days or weeks of "moderate" air quality.

Keep track of Northern California wildfires with The Chronicle's interactive fire map. See air quality information down to the neighborhood level in real time with The Chronicle's air quality map.

Caldor is 210,893 acres and 27% contained: Latest estimates for the fire shows it at 210,893 acres with 27% containment. Fire crews tonight face cooler temperatures and lighter winds and are constructing more control lines, according to Cal Fire.

Coast Guard urges mariners to avoid Lake Tahoe until wildfires contained: Officials with the U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Southwest region are urging mariners to avoid all "recreational activities" at Lake Tahoe until the wildfires are contained and until air quality in the region has improved. Capt. Taylor Lam said in a statement Thursday night that "Current conditions in the Lake Tahoe region present a persistent and serious threat to the health and safety of mariners." Lam added that the safety of the public, Coast Guard crews and first responders in the area "remain the top priority." Coast Guard officials said the "availability of Coast Guard Station Lake Tahoe boat crews and other emergency first responders on the water may be significantly reduced until area wildfire operations are completed."

Black bear with burned paws euthanized by state wildlife officials: An adult black bear that had third-degree burns on its paws from the Caldor Fire was euthanized by state wildlife officials, authorities said. As of Thursday, this has been the only case where state wildlife officials have euthanized an animal in response to wildfire burns for the Caldor Fire, according to California Department of Fish and Wildlife officials. [Click here to read more about the bear.](#)

More than 50,000 wildfire evacuees in California: As of Thursday afternoon, there were 53,506 residents currently evacuated from their homes because of the wildfires blazing across the state, according to the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services. In El Dorado County, where the Caldor Fire is blazing, 47,754 people were evacuated as of Thursday afternoon, Cal OES officials said.

Firefighting mutual aid reaches season high: California's firefighting effort reached a new peak Thursday as officials reported that the state was using the most fire engines in the field at one time this season. About 560 fire engines and 2,240 firefighters from the California Office of Emergency Services and municipalities across the state are helping to put out the wildfires, the agency said.

'How many more days?' Caldor Fire evacuees face exhaustion, crowds and the threat of COVID-19: Even for South Lake Tahoe residents familiar with chaos, the Caldor Fire has brought on fresh anguish for those fleeing the flames. [Read the story here.](#)

Caldor Fire stifled en route to Kirkwood, sparing the ski town and resort for now: Following three days of stress and worry over the Caldor Fire's southern push toward the mountain resort town of Kirkwood, it appeared on Thursday afternoon that both the community and ski area property were in the clear. Read the story here.

Retired firefighter stays behind and defend his home: South Lake Tahoe and the surrounding South Shore communities emptied into ghost towns Monday as the Caldor Fire crept closer to town. About 22,000 residents left in a briefly log-jammed but ultimately successful evacuation. Deputies and police went door-to-door and found only 38 individuals stayed behind, officials said. One of those stalwarts was Scott Swift, a retired firefighter who has lived in the South Lake Tahoe area most of his life. Read the story here.

Caldor Fire upends life, livelihoods for South Lake Tahoe's service workers: For service workers, the Caldor Fire's timing has been painful, harming not only the economy but also the livelihoods of business owners and employees. Businesses in the local service sector, a cornerstone of the Tahoe economy, were thrust into financial uncertainty by the fire. Read the story here.

'If it gets in there, we have a problem': How a Caldor Fire crew saved a row of Tahoe cabins: A fire crew stood between were the a live edge of the Caldor Fire and a row of aging wood cabins just outside the tiny downtown of this community south of Lake Tahoe. It was late afternoon, and the gusty winds carried ash as knee-high flames danced down a hillside on South Upper Truckee Road. Read the story here.

South Lake Tahoe officials pleased with Caldor Fire evacuation: The mayor and police chief of South Lake Tahoe praised the city's mass evacuation at a city council meeting, saying despite an hours-long traffic jam, the plan worked. More than 100 law enforcement officers lined Highway 50 intersections directing traffic and providing updates to motorists leading to a 4.5-hour exit along the one way out of town. "All in all, it went off without a hitch," said Chief David Stevenson at Tuesday's meeting. Residents "stayed calm and poised, even though they had to sit in traffic for quite some time." Mayor Tamara Wallace was one of the motorists sitting in the traffic. She wound up evacuating and spoke at the meeting from a vacation rental in Truckee with her six dogs and five other people. "We sat in traffic for awhile, but honestly it was so incredibly orderly," she said. Council colleague John Friedrich also complimented the evacuation. "It was the right thing to do at the right time."

Where South Lake Tahoe evacuees can pick up their mail: Residents of the South Lake Tahoe areas that have been evacuated should pick up their regular and P.O. Box mail at the Carson City post office at 1111 Roop Street. Mail will not be forwarded to individual homes after repopulation begins, according to El Dorado County.

Could the Caldor and Tamarack fires merge?: Even as the Caldor Fire advances east toward the 68,637-acre Tamarack Fire, fire officials are not worried about the possibility of the two massive wildfires merging. "It hasn't been mentioned once," said Dominic Polito, a Caldor Fire spokesperson. "You can make the assumption that it's not a concern at this point." Fire officials have expressed optimism that calmer winds and more humid conditions this week will help slow the spread of the Caldor Fire, which is 25% contained.

El Dorado County evacuations downgraded: Cal Fire announced that evacuation orders in several parts of El Dorado County, where the Caldor Fire is burning, had been downgraded to evacuation warnings. Evacuation warnings were lifted entirely in other locations. See the full list of evacuation changes here.

Heavenly resort to become Cal Fire command post: The iconic Heavenly Mountain Resort in South Lake Tahoe will become the base camp for firefighters battling the eastern front of Caldor Fire, officials said. Extra space was needed to accommodate the growing number of firefighters and other personnel battling the blaze, a Cal Fire spokesperson said.

Damage assessment ongoing in Tahoe Basin: Crews were working to assess structure damage in the Tahoe Basin area Thursday morning, said Rita Henderson, a public information officer with the U.S. Forest Service. "As of right now, we know there have been impacts but we are waiting on the damage assessment teams to finish and share their reports," Henderson said in a text message. It was

unclear when the reports would become public, but Henderson said local agencies will likely notify residents and homeowners first before sharing the information with the public.

Unhealthy air hanging over Truckee: While the flames of the Caldor Fire isn't headed toward Truckee, smoke from the blaze made was making air quality at the Nevada County town unhealthy for people with respiratory conditions, according to The Chronicle's air quality map.

After frantic preparations, firefighters are winning the battle for Kirkwood: Thanks in part to days of strenuous preparations, firefighters said they were optimistic they'd be able to protect the small ski resort community of Kirkwood from the Caldor Fire. Read the story here.

The air battle against the Caldor Fire, by the numbers: Cal Fire fixed-wing planes dropped around 95,000 gallons of retardant on the Caldor Fire Wednesday, officials said at a morning briefing. Helicopters dropped 435,500 gallons of water.

Threat of wind diminishes — but not gone entirely: While the risk of 50 mph gusts around South Lake Tahoe all but disappeared Thursday, Cal Fire officials said they were still concerned about winds that can whip up due to the region's natural topography. The natural terrain of the Tahoe region lends itself to unpredictable wind events, a Cal Fire meteorologist said at a morning briefing, advising firefighters to be wary as they combat the blaze.

More than 600 homes destroyed by Caldor Fire: At least 622 homes have been destroyed by the Caldor Fire, according to Cal Fire damage assessments, which are ongoing. A preliminary damage map for the Caldor Fire is available here.

Caldor Fire grows to more than 210,000 as containment grows: The Caldor Fire grew to 210,259 acres overnight, as fire crews bolstered containment lines. Calmer winds overnight and moderate humidity levels helped firefighters battle the blaze, which was 25% contained.

Is it bad for your health when air quality is 'moderate' for days and weeks?: Just how bad for your health is a span of days or weeks with moderate air quality readings? The impacts of higher AQI categories, in the 150-300 range, are clear — they're horrible for our health — but less is known about the relative risks of breathing moderate air for extended periods of time. At the very least, according to pulmonary experts in the Bay Area, it's probably not very good. Read the story here.

South Lake Tahoe air quality index shows widespread hazardous conditions: Persistently hazardous air quality lingered over South Lake Tahoe Thursday due to the smoke billowing off the Caldor Fire, according to The Chronicle's air quality map. Unhealthy air was reported all around Lake Tahoe, including Incline Village across the Nevada state border.

5 ways the Caldor Fire shows the extreme new reality for California firefighting: With stunning speed and intensity, the Caldor Fire has roared through El Dorado County and is now threatening to spread into South Lake Tahoe. Fire officials say the Caldor has some things in common with other monster California wildfires, but crews are also encountering challenges in this year's fire season that they haven't seen before. Here are five things to know about the Caldor Fire that are making it such a formidable foe.

White House approves Presidential Emergency Declaration for Caldor Fire: Just hours after Gov. Gavin Newsom requested a Presidential Emergency Declaration for federal assistance to boost emergency response efforts related to the Caldor Fire, the White House approved the declaration, the governor's office announced Wednesday night. Newsom thanked President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris for their "steadfast support to California as we battle these challenging fires." The declaration will bolster local, tribal and state government emergency services for the "protection of lives, property, public health and safety," officials said.

Caldor Fire grows to 207,931 acres: The blaze — which has been burning for 18 days — has scorched 207,931 acres and was 23% contained as of Wednesday evening, Cal Fire officials said. Firefighters were challenged on Wednesday by dry conditions and strong winds, which "dramatically" increased fire behavior along the northern area of the blaze in the morning, Cal Fire officials said. Crews were expected to "look for opportunities to build control line" wherever possible on Wednesday night, Cal Fire officials said in an incident update.

Newsom requests a Presidential Emergency Declaration for federal assistance for Caldor Fire:

Gov. Gavin Newsom on Wednesday requested a Presidential Emergency Declaration for federal assistance to boost emergency response efforts related to the Caldor Fire in El Dorado, Amador, Alpine and Placer counties. Newsom said officials are using “every available tool to protect lives and property and urge residents to stay safe and remain alert for instructions from local authorities amid these dangerous fire weather conditions.” Newsom’s request comes two days after he proclaimed a state of emergency in Alpine, Amador and Placer counties due to the Caldor Fire.

Wildfire smoke prompts Bay Area air quality advisory: Smoke from Northern California wildfires prompted Bay Area officials to issue an air quality advisory for Thursday and Friday. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District says there will be smoky and hazy skies across the Bay Area on both days, with air quality levels expected to be in the good to moderate range. A Spare the Air alert was not needed because levels are not forecast to exceed federal health standards.

Caldor Fire pushes east, away from Truckee and North Lake Tahoe: The quickly growing Caldor Fire remained largely south and east of Highway 50 Wednesday and was not yet threatening towns to the north or west of the Lake Tahoe Basin. The fire has not been moving toward the lake’s northern communities, said Dominic Polito, a fire spokesperson.

California homes saved by 2 bickering, badmouthing brothers from Montana: James and JC Metcalf don’t always get along, bickering and badmouthing each other, a 2-year-age difference fueling a stereotypical sibling rivalry. But on the fire line, that all fades away. On Tuesday, the brothers from Montana stood side-by-side in California as winds sent flames into the air, threatening homes along the Highway 50 corridor in Strawberry. Read the story here.

A major effort is underway to save Tahoe’s biggest ski resort from the Caldor Fire: Lake Tahoe’s biggest ski resort is preparing for the Caldor Fire to cross its property in the next 24 hours. Winds carried the flame front of the voracious fire eastward, putting it on target to broadside Heavenly Mountain Resort overnight. The property straddles the California-Nevada border in the mountains above South Lake Tahoe, and the fire’s trajectory is carrying it toward the ski area’s highest point. Read the story here.

This map shows the feared path of the Caldor Fire toward Heavenly Ski Resort: With gusty winds expected until at least Wednesday night, firefighters worry that the Caldor Fire could continue its unrelenting push towards Heavenly Ski Resort, a popular destination for Tahoe tourists. See the map here.

Devastating fires could damage Lake Tahoe’s iconic blue waters: Smoke and ash from wildfires near Lake Tahoe — one of the deepest lakes in the world — is already clouding the lake’s famously clear water, researchers say. Read the story here.

Wildfire cameras show the Caldor Fire inching toward Tahoe in real time: An array of wildfire cameras dotted around Lake Tahoe provide a live look at the Caldor Fire. Cameras positioned at the Heavenly Ski resort show smoke-choked skies, but no active fires. And farther away from the lake, the plume of smoke emanating from the fire can be seen rising over Tahoe’s topography. See the AlertWildfire cameras here.

Tahoe officials urge residents not to leave water running during evacuations: Tahoe officials asked area residents not to leave irrigation, garden hoses and sprinklers on as they evacuate their homes. Residents leaving water running is not effective at protecting homes or vegetation and is causing reductions in the local water supply and pressure, which can get in the way of firefighting efforts. Before evacuation, people should clear combustible materials like outdoor furniture, pine needles and leaf litter from their property, according to the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team.

State parks in the Tahoe Basin closed: All state parks in the Tahoe Basin are now closed until further notice due to the Caldor Fire, the state’s Department of Parks and Recreation announced Wednesday on Twitter.

How much wildfire pollution enters your home depends on your behavior, study says

By Katie Camero

In the Fresno Bee, Thursday, Sept. 2, 2021

What you do in your home as wildfires rage outside can significantly reduce — or increase — the amount of smoke pollution you are exposed to, according to a new study.

Based on more than 2.4 million hours of indoor and outdoor air sensor data in over 1,400 California buildings, the study found that closing windows and running an air filter can cut the amount of tiny harmful particles from smoke inside a home by half on days when wildfires burn.

Though less controllable, the characteristics of your home make a difference, too.

The University of California, Berkeley, researchers found that homes constructed more recently and those built with central air conditioning were “significantly better at keeping wildfire smoke out.”

While the study’s findings were expected, the team says its research fills some gaps that other similar research has neglected: the concentration of smoke pollution indoors — where people spend most of their time — and how simple indoor efforts are paying off.

The paper was recently published in the journal PNAS.

“One thing that we’re deeply interested in is understanding what happens to people in indoor environments, because that’s where people spend most of their time, and there’s still an awful lot we don’t know about indoor pollution exposure,” study co-author Joshua Apte, an assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering and of public health at UC Berkeley, said in a statement. “I think that these new methods of sensing the indoor environment are going to allow us to grapple a lot more with questions of environmental justice and find out more about who gets to breathe cleaner air indoors.”

The team analyzed air sensor data in San Francisco and Los Angeles area buildings collected during August and September 2020, when the regions experienced a high number of “fire days.” These days are those that exceeded average levels of particulate matter in the air deemed safe by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Researchers also studied the real estate website Zillow “to estimate the characteristics of buildings.”

Although scientists are still trying to learn what types of chemicals are lodged in wildfire smoke, some evidence suggests “it may be even worse for human health” than particulate matter from other sources, the researchers say.

Not everyone has the same sensitivity to wildfire smoke, but the EPA says the mixture of microscopic particles and gases can get stuck deep in your lungs, triggering burning eyes and runny noses for some. The pollution can also aggravate chronic heart and lung diseases.

HOW TO REDUCE EXPOSURE TO WILDFIRE SMOKE POLLUTION INDOORS

Aside from closing your windows before smoke arrives in your area, setting up an efficient air filter can help reduce your exposure to wildfire smoke — and its location matters.

The team suggests setting it in your bedroom if you only have one in your home. Make sure the door is closed while you sleep to ensure the air is as clean as possible.

Try to cook as little as possible when fires are burning, too.

Cooking can produce its own harmful particles and gases that cannot be “easily ventilated out of the house without inviting wildfire smoke in,” the researchers said. The same thinking applies to kitchen and bathroom exhaust fans, which can pull in smoky air from the outside.

If you can’t afford a portable filter or a home with central air conditioning, the team suggests making your own with a box fan, a furnace filter and some tape.

Western side of French Fire becomes closer to containment

The Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 2, 2021

The French Fire has scorched 25,871 acres and was 43 percent contained as of Thursday afternoon, according to the Kern County Fire Department.

Land on the northwest and southwest flanks did not experience much growth from the fire throughout Wednesday, according to the California interagency management team. The fire continues to "creep and smolder," but the containment lines created by the firefighters continue to hold, the team added.

The Red Cross evacuation shelter shifted into standby notice as of 3 p.m. Wednesday, said Cindy Huges, the public information officer for the Red Cross. Many residents who used the center have returned to their homes, Huges added.

The shelter will reopen if the need arises, said Taylor Poisall, the spokeswoman for the Red Cross. As of Thursday afternoon, Red Cross has shifted into recovery mode, she added.

There are no evacuation warnings, according to the Kern County Fire Department. Evacuation orders include areas around Keysville, Shirley Meadows, Alta Sierra, Slick Rock, Waggy Flat and Black Gulch.

Road closures include:

- Highway 155 to the western Sequoia National Forest boundary
- Sawmill Road to the top of Sawmill Pass
- Old State Road at Dollar Road.

About 706 residents have been evacuated because of the French Fire, according to the California Governor's Office of Emergency. Around 1,500 firefighters, from all over the country, arrived to battle the blaze.

Chris Stewart, from Southern California Edison, said high voltage lines powering residences within Alta Sierra should be repaired in a week. For Shirley Meadows and the Slick Rock area, the power lines will be repaired in three weeks to a month.

Calmer winds aid California fire fight but hot weekend looms

By Sam Metz and Janie Har Associated Press
The Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 2, 2021

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. (AP) — Fire crews took advantage of decreasing winds to battle a California wildfire near popular Lake Tahoe and were even able to allow some people back to their homes but dry weather and a weekend warming trend meant the battle was far from over.

The Caldor Fire remained only a few miles from South Lake Tahoe, which was emptied of 22,000 residents days ago, along with casinos and shops across the state line in Nevada.

The wind-driven fire that began Aug. 14 had raged through densely forested, craggy areas and still threatened more than 30,000 homes, businesses and other buildings ranging from cabins to ski resorts.

But there was optimism and progress as winds eased on the fire's western flank while in the northeast, despite gusty ridgetop winds, firefighters with bulldozers and shovels were steadily hacking out fire lines or burning away vegetation to box in the flames before they reached Tahoe.

"In the valleys we're doing plenty of work," fire information officer Marco Rodriguez said. "The crews are working and they're doing controlled fires ... to try to make those containment lines a little bit stronger."

Residents who were forced to flee South Lake Tahoe earlier this week remained evacuated along with people across the state line in Douglas County, Nevada.

The resort can easily accommodate 100,000 people on a busy weekend but on Thursday, just before the Labor Day weekend, it was eerily empty.

Yet after days of flames threatening to engulf the resort at any moment, any respite was welcome.

"I feel like we are truly the luckiest community in the entire world right now. I'm so incredibly happy," said Mayor Tamara Wallace, who evacuated to Truckee, California.

"It's finally a chance to take a breath," said Clive Savacool, chief of South Lake Tahoe Fire Rescue. "It's a breath full of smoke. Nonetheless, I think we're all breathing a little bit easier and we feel like we're making some progress."

Russ Crupi, who two days ago was arranging sprinklers around his mobile home park in South Lake Tahoe just miles from the fire line, had turned off the water for now, feeling confident his neighborhood was no longer under threat. The nearby mountains, cloaked in smoke for most of the week, had become visible.

"I'm just happy they stopped it. It looked close," he said.

Farther west, evacuation orders were lifted or downgraded to warnings in several areas of El Dorado County.

Friday's forecast called for lighter winds but also extremely dry daytime weather, with a warming trend through the weekend as high pressure builds over the West, fire officials said.

The Caldor Fire spanned some 330 square miles (855 square kilometers) and was 27% contained. Its northeast tip was about 3 miles (5 kilometers) south of South Lake Tahoe.

More than 15,000 firefighters were battling dozens of California blazes that have destroyed at least 1,500 homes. One blaze, the Dixie Fire, was about 65 miles (105 kilometers) north of the Caldor Fire. It is the second-largest wildfire in state history at about 1,350 square miles (3,496 square kilometers) and is 55% contained.

California has experienced increasingly larger and deadlier wildfires in recent years as climate change has made the West much warmer and drier over the past 30 years. Scientists have said weather will continue to be more extreme and wildfires more frequent, destructive and unpredictable. No deaths have been reported so far this fire season.

Here are steps you can take to make the air quality cleaner during a California fire

By Hanh Truong

In the Fresno Bee, Thursday, Sept.. 2, 2021

Residents of El Dorado and Placer counties, as well as surrounding areas throughout Northern California are experiencing air quality readings in the unhealthy zone, as the Caldor Fire continues to blaze through the Lake Tahoe region.

While wind gusts will inevitably blow smoke, ashes and dust into the air, everyone can still take steps to reduce pollution during a wildfire. The Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District and California Air Resources Board (CARB) highlight day-to-day activities and things that people should consider avoiding to help prevent adding particulate matter into the air.

AVOID DRIVING

Sam Pournazeri, Mobile Source Analysis Branch Chief at CARB, said people should drive less during wildfire events. He said passenger vehicles are significant contributors to emissions, which can further worsen local air quality.

Additionally, driving high speeds down dirt roads can increase the amount of dust in the air, according to a flier from the management district.

LANDSCAPING AFFECTS AIR QUALITY

Lawn and gardening equipment can produce pollutants, similar to cars.

Pournazeri equates operating a leaf blower for about one hour to driving a passenger vehicle for about 1,100 miles. When operating these tools during a wildfire, Pournazeri said it "not only can contribute to more emissions, but also dust and PM 2.5," which are small inhalable particles that can cause health issues.

DIESEL TRUCKS EMIT POLLUTION

When burned, diesel fuel from trucks can emit harmful pollutants, such as hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide, as reported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It also produces oxides of nitrogen — a gas mixture responsible for the formation of smog.

Pournazeri said people should consider avoiding one-day deliveries for their online purchases, as most delivery trucks are powered by diesel. Doing so will “reduce the travel of these delivery trucks in neighborhoods” and prevent the local air quality from increasing.

FIRE PITS, RECREATIONAL BURNING

Cooking outdoors and using fireplaces and wood-burning stoves will increase the amount of smoke and particulate matter in the air. Burning dry wood in outdoor fire pits is also cautioned by the management district during events of high air pollution and wildfires because it can produce “harmful smoke.”