

Valley air officials to consider putting \$4M into program to repair cars to pass smog test

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Valley air officials this week will consider pumping \$4 million into a program that helps residents of Stockton and other communities repair their cars to pass a smog test.

"Tune In and Tune Up" holds periodic drive-up testing events at the San Joaquin County Fairgrounds. Motorists whose cars flunk the unofficial tests are eligible for waivers to make repairs.

More than 260 motorists at the Stockton event last November have benefited from more than \$166,000 in repairs, according to statistics compiled by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Another event held in April has so far resulted in more than \$145,000 in local repairs.

But the program is about to run out of money, so air district officials on Thursday will consider allocating \$4 million from registration fees paid by all Valley drivers.

Shirley Fire: Crews contain spread despite wind

By John Cox

Bakersfield Californian, Monday, June 16, 2014

ALTA SIERRA -- Firefighters held their ground Monday against the Shirley Fire as crews near Alta Sierra doused hot spots and otherwise "mopped up" to keep the 2,200-acre blaze at least 10-percent contained.

Despite dry, windy conditions, skies punctuated Sunday by a column of thick smoke were clear Monday. Helicopters that had busily shuttled water from Isabella Lake to the front lines Sunday remained mostly grounded.

Some 1,200 firefighters and other personnel pushed against the blaze.

Gusts reaching 45 mph kept firefighters from announcing any major progress Monday, though there was a sense among fire officials that, if their crews could hold the containment lines against winds from the west, they should be able to keep the fire away from the more heavily populated community of Wofford Heights.

From Sunday night into late Monday the fire expanded just 200 acres. By comparison, from Saturday to Sunday the size more than doubled.

Near Alta Sierra, a small mountain community west of Wofford Heights and Lake Isabella, Monday's work involved at least seven brush-clearing, or hand, crews, each numbering about 20 people, all searching for possible flare-ups along a ridge off Old State Road where firefighting had been hectic the night before.

U.S. Forest Service supervisor John Armstrong sounded cautiously optimistic.

"I think the majority of the fuel's mostly burned itself out," he said.

Alta Sierra itself was all but deserted. Among the few resisting voluntary evacuation was part-time resident Keith Allred, 60, who also lives in Garden Grove. He took the fire in stride.

"So far the cabin's still standing," he said with a smile.

Allred recalled past fires, including one in 1972, that came closer to his home on Spruce Drive. It seemed to him Monday's aerial firefighting was much less intense than Sunday's, which he saw as a good sign.

"I think we're gonna make it," he said.

A few blocks away, 81-year-old Dan Christenson was pleased to see a team of firefighters cutting down manzanita and trimming black oak trees around his cabin. A full-time resident of Alta Sierra, he had meant to do that work himself but ran out of time.

"It would've taken me forever to get that done," he said, adding that the fire was "pretty scary" through Sunday night.

People were urged to leave even for advisory evacuations because in areas of active fire, the roads are narrow and firefighters need to bring equipment to the area, said Kern County Fire Department Capt. Sean Collins.

The fire, estimated to have cost \$4.2 million by Monday morning, has destroyed three homes and damaged one. At least two of the structures appeared to be abandoned.

The fire still threatens 1,000 homes, Southern California Edison power lines, communications facilities and forest timber.

Mandatory evacuations remain for Pala Ranches, Juniper Highlands, Old State Road and all residences between Old State Road and Evans Road on Highway 155, according to the U.S. Forest Service.

An evacuation advisory had been issued Sunday for Alta Sierra.

The Lake Isabella Senior Center is providing shelter for evacuees, and accepting small animals accompanied by a human.

Anyone with a large animal evacuation need is encouraged to contact Brian Shaw at 760-223-6736.

Also of note, an air tanker Sunday night assigned to the fire experienced a nose gear collapse while landing at Fresno Airport, according to the Forest Service. The P2V tanker was damaged but neither of the two crew members was injured.