

Wildfires Turn Valley and All of California Into a Sci-Fi Landscape

By Bill McEwen

GV Wire, Thursday, Aug. 20, 2020

As crews battle 367 wildfires in heatwave-baked California, the satellite view from above shows a state enveloped in smoke.

On the ground, firefighters are doing their best to contain the blazes — many of them ignited by nearly 11,000 lightning strikes during a 72-hour period.

Strong winds are spreading some of the fires, as well as the smoke that is darkening skies, dropping soot, and making the sun look like something from a sci-fi movie.

Bay Area Air Is Some of the Worst in the World

As bad as the air is in Fresno, it's worse in parts of the Bay Area, which customarily enjoys clear air scoured by ocean breezes.

With wildfires burning north, east, and south of San Francisco, the air quality index there on Wednesday among the worst in the world, KQED reported.

To compare the Bay Area's air quality to that in the Valley today, click on this link.

Because of the wildfires, the Valley Air District has issued a health caution. And, district officials are advising residents to reduce exposure to particulate matter emissions by staying indoors.

"PM pollution can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke," the district said in a news release. "Anyone experiencing poor air quality due to wildfire smoke should move indoors, to a filtered, air-conditioned environment with windows closed."

District officials also advise that common cloth and paper masks people are wearing because of COVID-19 "may not protect them from wildfire smoke."

A wildfire in Del Puerto Canyon near Patterson in the North Valley is contributing to Fresno area smoke. That fire grew to 137,495 acres overnight — or about 215 square miles — Cal Fire said Thursday morning.

Breathing in Smoke Raises COVID-19 Risk

Dr. Madhavi Dandu, professor of medicine at UCSF, told KQED that breathing smoky air could make people more susceptible to COVID-19.

"Air pollution and all type of particulate matter, but especially the particulate 2.5 that we see in fires, can really impact both lung health as well as just general immune health," Dandu said. "One of the things that it does is destroy these little hairs that we call cilia that are in the lungs, which are ways to protect the lungs. They basically wipe off the germs, or spread off the germs, so that they don't eventually get into the bloodstream."

Tracking Valley Air Quality

The air district's Real-time Air Advisory Network tracks air quality throughout the Valley, myRAAN.com.

In addition, anyone can follow air quality conditions by downloading the free "Valley Air" app on a mobile device.

Heatwave, Rabid Bats, COVID, Smoky Air, Flex Alert. What's Next for Fresno?

By Bill McEwen

GV Wire, Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020

Today defines what it means to be Fresno Strong.

Public health officials are telling folks not to touch dead bats because they could be rabid.

The heatwave continues, electricity conservation is a must, the air is smoky, and there's a rabid bat warning amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Wednesday's high temperature is expected to be 107 degrees, and an Excessive Heat Warning remains in effect.

Though the state — thanks to conservation efforts by residents — avoided rolling electricity blackouts on Monday and Tuesday, there's a Flex Alert today from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Because of wildfires, the Valley Air District has issued a Health Caution and is advising residents to remain indoors.

Meanwhile, Fresno is one of 42 counties on California's COVID-19 watch list.

And, that means children and parents are having to navigate the first days of distance learning and the usual family dynamics that can be challenging in so-called "normal times."

So, where do we begin?

Report but Don't Touch Dead Bats

This heatwave isn't just straining the electricity grid and causing wildfires. It's deadly for bats. Don't be surprised if you find one on the ground near your house or somewhere else.

"These bats can be potential carriers of rabies," said the Fresno County Department of Public Health in a news release. "Rabies is a very serious disease and is almost always fatal if not treated before symptoms appear."

The department reports that a rabid bat was found in central Fresno recently and six bats last year tested positive for rabies.

Make sure dogs and cats are vaccinated.

If you come across a dead bat in the city of Fresno, call the Central California SPCA, (559) 233-7722. Residents in unincorporated county areas should call Fresno Humane Animal Services, (559) 600-PETS.

For more information on rabies, call (559) 600-3332 or visit www.fcdph.org/PETS.

Wildfires Filling Valley With Smoke

Multiple wildfires are bringing smoke into the San Joaquin Valley and making breathing difficult.

People "with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young children and the elderly, are especially susceptible to the health effects from this form of pollution," the Valley Air District said in a news release. "Anyone experiencing poor air quality due to wildfire smoke should move indoors, to a filtered, air-conditioned environment with windows closed."

The three fires cited by air officials as being responsible for the health: the Lake Fire in Southern California, the Canyon Zone Fire in Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties, and the Hills Fire nine miles south of Coalinga near Highway 33.

The Hills Fire has burned 1,500 acres and is 35% contained. Cal Fire reports that 462 personnel are battling the blaze in steep terrain. Containment is expected by Aug. 27.

These are a few of the many wildfires underway in California.

On Tuesday, Gov. Gavin Newsom declared an emergency, easing the way to secure federal grants and also out-of-state firefighting help.

Rolling Blackouts Averted, but Conservation Still Needed

After warning Tuesday that as many as 2 million homes and businesses might be subject to rotating blackouts, the California Independent System Operator canceled its emergency declaration Tuesday night.

"That's a wrap. You did it, California consumers," California ISO tweeted, adding: "Thank you for keeping the electricity flowing."

Wednesday morning, the managers of the state's electricity grid, said that today's Flex Alert would move up an hour. During a Flex Alert, residents are asked to do whatever they can to save power.

How to See If Your House Might Go Dark

You can follow the state's electricity supply, current demand, and expected peak demand in real-time at [this link](#).

In addition, PG&E customers can look up their address to determine if their household will be affected by a rolling blackout. Visit www.pge.com/rotatingoutages to check your address.

This face mask can also help you with wildfire smoke, experts say. If you can find one

By Summer Lin

Fresno Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, August 20, 2020

People have been wearing masks to curb the spread of COVID-19, but as wildfires burn in California, resulting in elevated levels of pollution, you also may need a mask to protect yourself from smoke.

Cloth face coverings and medical masks have been recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to slow the spread of the virus, but they aren't effective in filtering out smoke, ABC7 News reported.

It's best to wear N95 masks, which filter out 95 percent of hazardous matter, but they've been in short supply during the pandemic, according to SFGate.

The N95 masks with an exhalation valve, which reduces moisture in the mask and makes it easier to breathe, isn't the best to wear to stop COVID transmission because it allows air to leave the mask, according to ABC7 News.

If someone happens to be asymptomatic, the virus could still leave the mask and infect others. A way to solve this is to block the valve with tape or wear another cloth mask over the N95 mask, SFGate reported.

Wildfire smoke can make you more prone to lung illnesses, including COVID-19, because it irritates the lungs, affects the immune system, and causes inflammation, according to the CDC.

"Unfortunately, wildfires continue to burn throughout the Bay Area and we expect several days of smoky conditions," said Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "As respiratory health is top of mind for all of us during the pandemic, it's crucial that residents take steps to avoid exposure to unhealthy air."

The CDC recommends limiting time spent outdoors, using a portable air cleaner, air conditioners, heat pumps, fans, and window shades inside, and avoiding creating more pollution by frying food, vacuuming, sweeping or using gas appliances.

People more at risk of wildfire smoke effects include: children under 18 years old, pregnant women, adults aged 65 and older, people with health conditions including asthma, diabetes, and lung disease, people of lower socioeconomic status, those who are immunocompromised or taking drugs suppressing the immune system, and outdoor workers.

Multiple wildfires bring toxic smoke to Fresno area. Here is who's at risk

By Jim Guy

Fresno Bee, Thursday, August 20, 2020

Multiple wildfires burning throughout California are sending billowing clouds of toxic smoke into the central San Joaquin Valley, prompting a warning to residents from the air pollution control district.

Blazes near the region are reported in the Coalinga area, and near Lebec and Turlock. The National Weather Service forecasts that the air quality will not improve until the fires are extinguished.

The health caution was issued to residents in Fresno, Merced, Madera, Kings and Tulare counties. The residents were warned to reduce exposure to particulate matter by remaining indoors as much as possible.

The air warning will remain in place until the fires are extinguished.

Pollution can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Those with respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young children and the elderly are especially vulnerable to the effects of the pollution. Common cloth and paper masks may not be effective against the smoke.

For more information, go to www.valleyair.org.

How do you keep wildfire smoke out of your house and car? Tips to keep air pollution away

By Michael McGough

Fresno Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, August 20, 2020

Hundreds of wildfires across California are creating poor air quality conditions throughout most of the state.

If you can smell smoke or it makes your eyes sting, you should limit your outdoor time as much as possible because it can be harmful to your respiratory health.

If you're in your home and still can smell smoke, you may want to take some preventive steps to prevent even more of that smokey air from getting in.

Amid wildfire smoke, "if you are advised to stay indoors, take steps to keep indoor air as clean as possible," the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency advises.

How exactly do you do that? Here's some advice compiled from the EPA, the American Lung Association, Sacramento region's Spare the Air and other organizations, including the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

- Keep your home's doors and windows closed.
- Run your home air conditioner, but use the "recirculate" setting. Make sure the air conditioner filter is clean. If the filter is dirty or old, you should replace it.
- Use an air purifier, but make sure it is one that does not produce ozone.
- Check your home's walls, windows and doors for potential openings. Repair or replace any doors or windows with major air leak issues; use caulk on walls or weather-proofing tape or sealants on window to cover up smaller openings. Older homes may be more susceptible to these types of problems, while newer homes are generally built a little bit tighter.
- A ceiling fan won't change the quality of the air within your home; it just recirculates it. But if you are choosing to use a ceiling fan in an effort to keep cool rather than air conditioning because you have concerns about your AC system's filtration, be sure to clean the fan, especially if you don't use it frequently, to rid it of any dust particles that may have built up.
- While driving, also use your air conditioner's recirculate setting. Do not roll down the windows.
- Close air conditioning vents in your vehicle while driving through a particularly smokey area.

Live updates: Fires near Patterson roar to 137,000 acres; evacuation orders expanded

By Patty Guerra

Fresno Bee, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Thursday, August 20, 2020

The series of fires that includes the blaze burning in Del Puerto Canyon near Patterson exploded overnight to 137,495 acres, Cal Fire said in a news release Thursday morning. That's roughly 215 square miles burning in fires believed to be caused by lightning starting on Sunday night.

"Crews were once again engaged in structure defense throughout the night," the release said. "Damage assessment is ongoing."

High temperatures and low humidity have made fighting the fire, which is burning some areas of steep terrain that have never had fire before so the overgrowth is feeding the fire, Cal Fire said.

“Fire perimeter and control efforts have been hampered by extreme fire behavior and accessibility issues,” the news release said. “Crews will continue to scout for safe access points and build direct and indirect fire line where possible.”

On Wednesday, at least five people were injured in the fire and had to be rescued, authorities said.

Smoke and ash in the air for miles around led to a health warning from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. According to the district's air monitors, air quality in cities as far away as Modesto, Turlock and Merced remained poor at 9:45 a.m. Thursday, though it was down from its peak about 8 a.m.

Stanislaus County Sheriff Jeff Dirkse said that the department's helicopter was able to fly from the canyon to Frank Raines Park to assess the damage on Wednesday, and found that more than half the buildings, which he described as either houses, hunting shacks or outbuildings, did not have noticeable damage.

He said the helicopter would be back Thursday when deputies could do a more complete search of the canyon. On Friday, they planned to assess damage west of Newman. They could not get to that area on Wednesday because of the fire.

Thursday update: Merced's air quality remains at unhealthy levels from wildfires

By Shawn Jansen

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, August 19, 2020

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is advising Merced residents to stay inside, as the air quality has reached unhealthy levels due smoke accumulating from wildfires in the state.

The fine particle matter measurement in Merced reached Level 5 — the highest level of air pollution — for the second consecutive day on Thursday, said district spokesperson Heather Heinks. Merced climbed to Level 5 at 7 a.m. and has remained at that unhealthy level through noon.

“The smoke impact is definitely more widespread today,” Heinks said. “The last three hours (from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.) we're seeing significant particle matter pollution in Merced. Today is a day to be cautious and stay inside if you can.”

Heinks also recommends changing the air filters in your home and car to make sure they are working properly so they keep the smoke out.

Heinks say people with respiratory conditions, including those suffering from COVID-19, should stay away from air pollution as much as possible. Those who are required to work outside should check with their employer, Heinks says.

“If you can see it and smell it, the air is having an impact on you,” Heinks said.

The Canyon Fire, located near Turlock, the Hills Fire, which is located in Fresno County and the Lake Fire located in Los Angeles are all contributing to the smoke that has settled in the San Joaquin Valley.

According to experts, particle matter pollution can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Heinks says the poor air quality will continue for the next couple days.

“We do expect it to linger the next couple days as long as the fires are raging,” Heinks said. “Prepare to hunker down inside for the next couple days.”

Information on air quality due to wildfires can be found at www.valleyair.org/wildfires.

Air quality hits danger zone in Bay Area as thick smoke, ash blanket the region

By Susanne Rust and Rong-Gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times
Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, August 20, 2020

SAN FRANCISCO - Massive fires ringing the San Francisco Bay Area are continuing to create dangerous air quality.

In many neighborhoods, a layer of ash has covered the ground, distributed by gusty winds and adding to the pollution that is clouding much of the area.

The American Lung Association warned that excessive heat, wildfire smoke and COVID-19 posed risks to those most vulnerable to respiratory problems.

"The combination of uncontained wildfires and extreme heat has created conditions that put even healthy individuals at risk," said Dr. Afif El-Hasan, an association spokesman. "The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic only makes these potential effects more serious."

Intense smoke and heat can trigger coughing and wheezing, worsen lung function and lead to bronchitis or even death, he said.

"The best thing you can do is to avoid outdoor air," San Francisco Mayor London Breed said.

The poor air quality will likely continue until the fires are mostly contained, officials said. A status report Wednesday from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection on the fires that make up the LNU Lightning Complex suggests conditions may not improve until Sept. 1.

Officials noted that although most cloth masks, including bandannas, help protect against the spread of COVID-19, they do not protect against particulate matter from the smoke.

The Air Quality Index is the yardstick the Environmental Protection Agency uses for reporting air quality. Levels ranging from 151 to 200 are considered unhealthy; from 201 to 300, very unhealthy; and 301 and above, hazardous.

"Smoke can irritate the eyes and airways, causing coughing, a dry, scratchy throat and irritated sinuses," the Bay Area Air Quality Management District said. "Elevated particulate matter in the air can trigger wheezing in those who suffer from asthma, emphysema" and other chronic respiratory ailments.

Here are some tips and warnings from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District on dealing with the bad air:

- Staying indoors, where the air quality is better, with windows and doors closed is the best way to protect your health. During high-heat and heavy-smoke events, keep indoor air cool or visit a cooling center.
- Set air conditioning units and car vent systems to recirculate to help prevent outside air from moving inside.
- Avoid adding additional air pollution. Curtail activities such as wood burning, lawn mowing, leaf blowing, driving, barbecuing, or other dust-producing activities.
- Bandannas and typical surgical masks do nothing to protect against wildfire smoke particles.
- If individuals desire a mask, only N-95 or N-100 respirator masks should be worn. But there's no clear evidence that N-95 respirator use by the general public is beneficial to an individual's health during wildfire smoke air quality events. Further, officials warn that, when dealing with heavy smoke from fires, taking a mask on and off can cause fine particulate matter to build up in the mask, which the wearer will breathe when it is put back on the face. In addition, those who wear a mask to protect from fire smoke can have a false sense of security that leads to overexertion.
- Do not save and reuse N-95 masks.
- When dealing with heavy-smoke events, N-95s may be dangerous for some people with lung or heart conditions.

– Certified N-95s are not available for children. Children should not wear these masks – they do not fit properly and can impede breathing.

California slammed by wildfires, heat, unhealthy smoky air

By Daisy Nguyen and Seth Borenstein, Associated Press
Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, August 19, 2020

SAN FRANCISCO - Northern Californians were confronted with multiple threats as wildfires, unhealthy smoky air, extreme heat, the looming possibility of power outages and an ongoing pandemic forced many to weigh the risks of staying indoors or going outside.

Ash sprinkled the ground and smoke from several wildfires cast an eerie glow over much of the San Francisco Bay Area on Wednesday, creating unhealthy air quality and heightening concerns about people most prone to respiratory illnesses.

As ozone pollution reached unhealthy levels in some places, the region's air district and public health officials urged people to stay inside with windows and doors shut until the smoke subsided.

There was no relief in sight: the forecast for Thursday called for some of the worst air in the world, with the air quality index doubling in the densely populated parts of the Bay Area. The region's air district extended a "Spare the Air" alert through Sunday, which makes it illegal to burn wood.

Smoke can irritate the eyes and airways, causing coughing, a dry scratchy throat and irritated sinuses. Elevated particulate matter in the air can trigger wheezing in those who suffer from asthma, emphysema or COPD.

"I'm feeling lightheaded and I'm a healthy 30-year old. Imagine what it's like if you're an older person or have asthma," said Kyle Laurentine of San Mateo. "I worry, especially in the COVID-19 era, that we're in a state of respiratory vulnerability."

But with a statewide call to conserve energy to avert another rolling power outage, people sweltering in a prolonged heat wave and surrounded by smoke must choose between cranking their fans and air conditioners or shutting them down to conserve energy.

"These disasters need solutions that are in direct conflict with each other," said Jennifer K. Balch, a fire scientist at the University of Colorado. "COVID-19 is forcing us outside to reduce transmission risk while extreme wildfire smoke is forcing us back inside where the air is better. We're running out of options to cope, under the weight of compound disasters."

If it gets too hot indoors, Erin DeMerritt with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District suggested visiting cooling centers where they are available or any indoor space with filtered air while following mask-wearing and social distancing protocols.

"It's also important to note that bandannas and masks used to protect yourself from the coronavirus do nothing to protect against smoke from wildfires," she added.

The Bay Area has seen unhealthy levels of air pollution the last four consecutive years from smoke blowing from huge wildfires that devastated wine country in 2017 and the town of Paradise in 2018 and caused widespread evacuations in Sonoma County last year.

Wednesday's poor air quality came on quickly as the Bay Area was socked in by exploding wildfires to the north, south and east. Scientists said over the decades climate change's warmer, drier weather is making much more of California burn.

Exposure to wildfire smoke can lead to real health problems, including asthma and heart attacks, said Colorado State University atmospheric scientist Jeff Pierce, who has worked with epidemiologists on the health effects of wildfires.

"Very unhealthy" air quality forecasts usually double hospitalizations for asthma but it may be different this year with people afraid to go to the hospital because of the coronavirus, he said.

Smoke can even penetrate homes, making it hard for vulnerable people, including those sick from coronavirus, to escape, Pierce said.

Scientists said a top health concern with smoke are the fine particles that get deep into the lungs.

"I consider wildfire smoke kind of like tobacco smoke without the nicotine," said Dr. John Balmes, a professor of pulmonary medicine at University of California, San Francisco and environmental health at University of California, Berkeley.

Recent studies from China and Europe suggest such particles can increase the risk of progression for patients who have milder coronavirus cases to more severe symptoms, he said. The particles can damage the lung lining, triggering the body's natural immune system to overreact with inflammation to fight off a non-existent infection. In that way it makes the injury worse, he said.

Other immune system responses can also cause more problems than the smoke itself, something that can happen in coronavirus situations, he said.

The coronavirus was on Fae Gershenson's mind when she opened her 70-acre ranch to people fleeing a lightning-sparked wildfire north of Santa Cruz Tuesday evening. She had the space for evacuees' tents, stalls for their farm animals and an outdoor composting toilet to allow for physical distancing.

But when a family arrived with a 95-year-old grandmother, Gershenson said she was worried about the smoke's effect on older people and invited the woman into her house.

"We talked about how to keep each other safe; everyone's conscious about wearing masks," Gershenson said.

She said wildfires have threatened her property in the Santa Cruz mountains a few times before, and with a neighbor helping manage her children's distance learning, she has the ability to help evacuees.

"I have no idea how people can do it right now," she said. "I don't think it's going to be normal for quite some time."

Lightning blitz keeps wildfires raging across California

By Janie Har and Martha Mendoza, Associated Press

Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Thursday, August 20, 2020

SANTA CRUZ, Calif. - More than two dozen major fires were scorching California on Thursday, largely the result of an unprecedented lightning siege that dropped nearly 11,000 strikes over several days.

"This is definitely a historic lightning event," said Daniel Berlant, an assistant deputy director with the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. "The last time we had a lightning siege that was even comparable was in 2008."

The fires have destroyed 175 structures, including homes, and are threatening 50,000 more, he said; 33 civilians and firefighters have been injured. Most of the activity is in Northern California, where fires have chewed through nearly 500 square miles (1,250 square kilometers) of brushland, rural areas, canyon country and dense forest surrounding San Francisco.

Fires also burned in the Sierra Nevada and Southern California wild lands.

With so many burning at once, firefighters say they're unable to tap resources such as extra personnel and equipment. In Marin County, just north of San Francisco where a small fire is burning near the Pacific Ocean, county fire chief Jason Weber said they are waiting for assistance from Montana to arrive this weekend.

He said that in his 25 years in fire service, "we've never seen this level of draw-down" with heavy competition within the state and in the western U.S. for equipment and people.

Berlant said the state has requested 375 engines from out of state, with some already in the state and others scheduled to arrive soon.

About 26,000 people in Santa Cruz County were under orders to evacuate, sheriff's department chief deputy Chris Clark said Thursday. Another 1,000 people in neighboring San Mateo County were also under evacuation orders as the so-called CZU August Lightning complex fire grew overnight to 62 square miles (160 square kilometers).

Officials said the fire had the potential to grow significantly in the next 24 hours and one of the tools they have— given stretched resources— was for people to leave their homes when told. But some people refused when officers went door-to-door Wednesday night, said Cal Fire Chief Mark Brunton.

"With the resources that we are lacking, we ask you to help us to help us to do our jobs and to keep the public safe," he said.

Kevin Stover, 42, was struggling with indecision early Thursday morning when a mandatory evacuation order was issued for the rugged and small town of Felton outside the beach city of Santa Cruz.

"I don't want to leave," said Stover, a camera operator and rigger now driving for Door Dash and Lyft because of the pandemic. His car, loaded with important papers, his father's urn and some arrowheads that meant a lot to him, had a flat tire. He had put a plug in the tire and patched it with gaff tape.

"I'm trying to figure out if I should cut these original oil paintings out of the frame to salvage them," he said.

In addition to about two dozen major blazes, small fires kept erupting, though most were quickly stopped.

In central California, a pilot on a water dropping mission in western Fresno County died Wednesday morning when his helicopter crashed. The pilot was working with Fillmore-based Guardian Helicopters, which had a contract with the state fire agency to provide emergency services, said Zoe Keliher, an investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board.

A Pacific Gas & Electric utility worker died at a fire in the Vacaville area between San Francisco and Sacramento but circumstances were not clear. The worker was found in a vehicle and CPR was performed but he was pronounced dead at a hospital, said a California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection statement.

He had been clearing poles and lines to make the area safe for firefighters, Cal Fire said.

The state recorded nearly 11,000 strikes in 72 hours, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Wednesday.

Two fires in Sonoma County prompted evacuation orders for 8,000 residents near the Russian River Wednesday and residents of Healdsburg, which has a population of about 12,000, were warned late Wednesday night to be ready to flee.

Ash and smoke filled much of the air in San Francisco from another cluster of fires — known as the LNU Lightning Complex — in Sonoma and other counties north of San Francisco that destroyed more than 100 buildings, including some homes, and threatened 25,000 others in five counties.

"Fires are making runs in multiple directions and impacting multiple communities. A critically dry air mass is moving over the area bringing strong winds," a Cal Fire statement said Wednesday night.

Travis Air Force Base ordered non-mission essential personnel to evacuate, officials said.

Residents in nearby Vacaville, a city of about 100,000, were roused before dawn Wednesday by orders to flee.

In eastern San Francisco Bay, a cluster of 20 separate lightning-sparked fires called the SCU Lightning Complex threatened about 6,200 buildings in five counties.

California State Parks announced full or partial closures of more than two dozen parks, including Big Basin Redwoods in the Santa Cruz Mountains, where the park headquarters and other facilities were damaged. The park featuring magnificent towering stands of ancient coast redwoods dates to 1902 and is the state's oldest.

Some firefighters were working 72-hour shifts instead of the usual 24 hours.

In Southern California, firefighters worked in high heat to increase containment of fires in mountains north and east of Los Angeles. A huge fire also burned in the remote Mojave National Preserve.

2,500-acre fire near Big Sur is 0% contained, leading to Highway 1 and parks closures

By Cassandra Garibay

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, August 20, 2020

The Dolan Fire near Big Sur held at 2,500 acres and was 0% contained as of Thursday morning, according to the Los Padres National Forest Service.

Highway 1 remained closed from Ragged Point in San Luis Obispo County to Pfeiffer Burns State Park in Monterey County, according to CalTrans.

The area east of Dolan Canyon was evacuated Wednesday, and many state parks in and near Big Sur were closed.

According to the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the following parks are closed for camping, hiking and day use:

- John Little State Natural Reserve,
- Limekiln State Park,
- Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park,
- Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park,
- Andrew Molera State Park,
- Point Sur State Historic Park,
- Garrapata State Park, and
- Point Lobos State Natural Reserve.

Officials believe the Dolan Fire was started intentionally around 8 p.m. Tuesday in John Little State Nature Reserve south of Slaters Hot Springs.

The Monterey County Sheriff's Office arrested 30-year-old Fresno resident Ivan Geronimo Gomez on suspicion of arson of forest lands, according to a Sheriff's Office Facebook post on Wednesday.

The Los Padres National Forest Service tweeted that smoke inversion prevented firefighters from using air resources Wednesday.

The fire was burning through steep terrain and had lots of fuel, but little wind, according to the national forest service.

The Dolan Fire has contributed to smoky skies throughout San Luis Obispo County — and the worst air quality in the nation in parts of the county, according to air quality monitoring company IQ Air.

The River Fire and Carmel Fire in south Monterey County have also been a factor in the dangerous increase in particulate matter in San Luis Obispo County.

The River Fire began Sunday and had grown to 33,653 acres as of Thursday morning, Cal Fire reported. The wildfire near Salinas had destroyed six structures, damaged two and continued to threaten 2,500 more as of Thursday morning, according to the agency.

The River fire was 7% contained and burning in all directions Thursday morning. Full containment is expected by Aug. 30, according to Cal Fire.

As of Thursday, four firefighter have had minor injuries as a result of that fire, according to Cal Fire.

The Carmel Fire near Carmel had grown to 4,385 acres as of Thursday morning and remained 0% contained, Cal Fire said. Three structures were destroyed and 311 were threatened as of Thursday.

Wildfires continue to make California's air quality unhealthy, including Sacramento

By Michael McGough

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, August 20, 2020

The skies are darkened by haze, and you may have woken up to ash on your car for a second straight day.

How unhealthy might Thursday's air conditions be in Northern California?

Smoke from ongoing wildfires, especially the two major lightning complexes raging in the North Bay and the Santa Cruz area, continues to seriously impact air quality across the state, including the capital region.

Conditions in many parts of the state are bad enough to pose a hazard to those spending any significant stretch of time outdoors, or anyone who may be allowing outside air into their home.

The air quality index Thursday morning ranged from "unhealthy" to "very unhealthy" levels across wide swaths of the greater Sacramento area, according to the nationwide monitor at [AirNow.gov](https://www.airnow.gov) and local readings from [SpareTheAir.com](https://www.sparetheair.com). There's significant particulate matter (PM 2.5) pollution across a vast majority of California, those monitors show.

A general rule of thumb: If you can smell wildfire smoke or it stings your eyes or throat, any significant time spent in those conditions can be hazardous to your health. If you're outside, head indoors; if you're inside your home and you can still smell it, you should take measures from air conditioning improvements to sealing up window cracks, to smoke-proof your home.

In terms of actual measurable pollution levels, Thursday's worst readings are predictably in the immediate vicinity of the two 120,000-plus-acre fires currently burning in the North Bay and South Bay areas.

The SCU Lightning Complex burning in the Santa Cruz mountains has surged AQI levels past 300, into "hazardous" territory for roughly the northern half of Santa Cruz County, according to AirNow.

And the LNU Lightning Complex, which since early Wednesday has rolled into the areas just east into Solano County from Napa, pumped the AQI up to around 285 in the Vacaville area shortly before 8:30 a.m., according to a Spare the Air alert.

Air quality maps also show AQI levels from 101 to 150 (orange shading, denoting "unhealthy for sensitive groups") and 151 to 200 (red, meaning unhealthy for the general population) blanketing essentially the entire Sacramento region.

The south and east parts of Sacramento County, including all of Elk Grove, Galt, Sloughhouse, Rancho Murieta and parts of Folsom, are in red; the rest of the county is in orange.

In Yolo County, the Davis area was in orange territory as of 10 a.m. Thursday, and most of the county from Esparto to its west border with Napa is in red, unhealthy territory. The southwest corner of Yolo, in and around Winters, has "very unhealthy" AQI readings between 201 and 300 that are marked light purple on the maps.

A solid chunk of the foothills and all of the Lake Tahoe area are in the red, too: the entirety of Amador, Calaveras and Alpine counties, plus most of El Dorado County and the east half of Placer County had unhealthy air conditions Thursday morning, according to AirNow.

Heat, smoky air fill Modesto, but for how long? MID, TID hit record for power demand

By John Holland

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, August 19, 2020

One of the worst hot spells in years continued Wednesday, with Modesto-area temperatures expected to top 100 for a seventh straight day.

The heat combined with wildfire smoke to make breathing hard for people with respiratory conditions. But everyone might want to just stay inside if possible to avoid heat stress and related ills.

The National Weather Service forecast a high of 104 in Modesto on Wednesday. The heat peaked at 102 to 109 over the previous six days, according to the Modesto Irrigation District.

The threat extends over the Central Valley and adjacent foothills, which have seen a sudden burst of fires, including one in the hills west of Patterson.

“The entire population could be impacted by long-duration extreme heat with little to no relief overnight,” said a Wednesday morning advisory from the Sacramento office of the Weather Service.

The weather service’s extreme heat warning was set to expire Wednesday night at 9 p.m. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District extended its Air Quality Alert, which it issued on Monday.

The weather service also issued Wednesday a Red Flag Warning for the low humidity and high winds, which will continue to hamper firefighters. That will remain in effect until Thursday at 9 a.m.

A dozen cooling centers await around Stanislaus County for people who don’t have their own air conditioning. They do not include Vintage Faire Mall, which had been on an initial list and is mostly closed by the pandemic.

The heat wave caused record electricity demand in both MID and the Turlock Irrigation District. Both reported no major outages so far this week but urged customers to conserve.

A brief dip into the upper 90s

The forecast calls for Modesto highs of 97 on Thursday and Friday, followed by three days at 100 and 99 on Tuesday.

Also of concern is the lack of nighttime cooling that usually happens during Modesto-area summers. The city got down to only 80 early Wednesday and 82 a day earlier, MID reported.

Heat-stressed people and livestock usually benefit from overnight breezes from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

The good news: Overnight lows around 70 are forecast over the next few days, including a brisk 67 as Friday dawns.

MID and TID prepared for demand

MID had record demand of 702 megawatts Monday, followed by 695 on Tuesday, spokeswoman Melissa Williams said by email.

The district got through it by activating a program where some customers agree beforehand to have their AC switched off temporarily. Some commercial and industrial users also cut demand.

“Despite the heat and record peak, we experienced only a few heat-related power outages Monday,” Williams said.

Wednesday’s smoke layer was expected to tamp down the demand to about 690 megawatts, she said.

TID’s electricity demand hit a record 692 megawatts Monday, spokesman Brandon McMillan said by email. It dipped to 690 on Tuesday and was forecast at 680 on Wednesday.

TID reported no major outages, but McMillan advised that the heat can cause localized stresses on the lines.

“The district has procured enough energy resources to meet the increased demand throughout the heat wave,” he said. “However, we appreciate our customers’ conservation efforts to help reduce the strain on the system.”

Update for customers of PG&E

Some people in Stanislaus County get power from Pacific Gas & Electric Co., which also serves Tuolumne and other mountain counties.

The utility said California avoided rotating outages for a third straight day on Tuesday. It credited conservation efforts and urged customers to keep it up.

Among the tips:

- Run the AC in the morning, when electricity supplies are not stressed, then keep the thermostat at 78 degrees when at home during the rest of the day, health permitting. Turn it up to 85 or turn it off when not at home.
- Use a ceiling fan to help spread the cooled air. Turn off fans and lights when you leave the room.
- Cover windows with shades and awnings.
- Avoid using the oven in favor of the stove top, microwave or outdoor grill.
- Don't open the fridge too often. The average family does it 33 times a day.
- Run dishwashers and laundry machines early in the day or late at night.
- Check on elderly or frail people at risk from the heat.
- Drink plenty of water, even when you are not thirsty.
- Take a cool shower or bath and wear lightweight, loose, light-colored clothing.
- Stay out of direct sunlight.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine.

Wildfires prompt poor air quality, health caution

By Sabra Stafford

Turlock Journal, Tuesday, Aug 18, 2020

Multiple wildfires burning in and around the Central Valley, including one in Del Puerto Canyon in Patterson, are creating some unhealthy air conditions for Valley residents.

As a result, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is issuing a health caution, which will remain in place until the fires are extinguished.

Air pollution officials caution Valley residents to reduce exposure to the particulate matter emissions by remaining indoors.

PM pollution can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Individuals with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of PM exposure. Those with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young children and the elderly, are especially susceptible to the health effects from this form of pollution. Anyone experiencing poor air quality due to wildfire smoke should move indoors, to a filtered, air-conditioned environment with windows closed. The common cloth and paper masks individuals are wearing due to COVID-19 concerns may not protect them from wildfire smoke.

The fire in Del Puerto Canyon is part of the SCU Lightning Complex fire being fought and monitored by Cal Fire. It includes 20 fires in three zones - Deer, Calaveras and Canyon - and has burned an estimated 25,000 acres, most of which is in the Canyon Zone. It is 0 percent contained as of Tuesday afternoon.

"Overnight, crews worked hard to improve and strengthen existing control lines while aggressively attacking fires where accessible," Cal Fire wrote in the incident update. "Challenges for firefighters include dangerous rate of spread, medium range spotting and inaccessible terrain combined with triple digit temperatures."

A mandatory evacuation order has been issued for residents on Del Puerto Canyon Road from Frank Raines Park (Stanislaus County) west to Mines Road (Santa Clara County) due to increased fire activity on the Canyon Fire.

'Extreme behavior': Residents flee California fire as blaze storms into Vacaville

Staff Reports

The Stockton Record, Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020

VACAVILLE – Vacaville residents awoke in the darkness Wednesday morning to frantic evacuation orders as an uncontrolled wildfire burned into the western edge of the city and destroyed at least 50 structures.

In Solano County, a rural area southeast of Vacaville, some residents fled for the first time ever.

"I've lived here for 30 years, never had to evacuate before," resident Tim Lukehart said. "There's been fires of course, but not like this one."

Travis Air Force Base has ordered immediate evacuations for non-mission essential personnel; mission essential personnel should contact their chain of command for duty status, the base said in a statement Wednesday evening.

Vacaville, a city of about 100,000 is located between San Francisco and Sacramento. The blaze moved quickly Monday night in the sweltering temperature.

The air had an orange, smoke-filled hue for miles, with ash covering vehicles. Homes were burned down on both sides of Pleasant Valley Road, the street where Lukehart lives with his wife Sarah. Wooden fences were still in flames, and one family was chasing their cattle through a field as they tried to bring the animals home to safety as the grass smoldered.

A rescue effort to save about 125 horses failed as owners could not get trailers to the area or access by foot.

The LNU Lightning Complex fire is the second-largest burning in California Wednesday, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. As of 8 a.m. Wednesday, it had burned 46,225 acres and firefighters had zero containment. The fire began Tuesday at 9:20 p.m. and is now burning in both Sonoma and Napa counties, Cal Fire said.

The state is currently battling multiple fires as the August heatwave is taking its toll on California. The LNU lightning complex fire stretches across parts of three counties and the fire threatens more structures, according to officials.

At about 5 p.m., a portion of Interstate 80 was shut down by the California Highway Patrol because of wildfires.

Governor declares state of emergency

Gov. Gavin Newsom said firefighters are battling 367 known wildfires across California, including 23 that are considered major fires. Of those 367 fires, "the prospect of that number going up is very real," he said at a press conference Wednesday.

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokeswoman Lynnette Round told Reuters that "in the last 72 hours we've experienced an historic lightning siege with 10,849 strikes causing more than 367 new fires."

Newsom declared a statewide emergency Tuesday, saying the blazes were "exacerbated by the effects of the historic West Coast heat wave and sustained high winds."

Television footage showed some homes in flames and thick ash dropping in a rural area near Interstate 80 as the fire appeared to head toward more densely populated areas.

In all, the fires have burned more than 71 square miles of land in Napa and Sonoma counties.

No evacuations in Winters

As of 11 a.m. Wednesday, evacuation orders had not been issued within the city limits, according to Mayor Wade Cowan. The unincorporated town has about 7,200 residents and is just over 16 miles north of Vacaville.

The city's public safety facility, the combined police and fire departments, opened in the morning to assist residents, but no one has needed shelter in the city at this point, he said.

“The evacuation order that is mandatory is to the west of us,” he said. “The last I heard from our fire chief, they are currently doing some back fires to try to make a better buffer between the city and the fire lines.”

The fire moved quickly Monday night, forcing residents to flee their homes before the sunrise. Sarah Lukehart said she left at about 2 a.m. Tuesday, and her husband a few hours later.

“I left at 5 a.m., and there was fire on three sides of me,” Tim Lukehart said Wednesday afternoon. “A neighbor came down a few hours later and said our house was OK. But who knows now.”

Fire departments from the cities of Oakland, Hayward, Berkeley, and Fairfield and the counties of Contra Costa and Alameda sent crews to battle the blaze. Local residents set up areas for people to gather and watered down fields in the path of the fire.

Due to the fire, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued a health caution because of the hazy conditions caused by smoke from the wildfires burning throughout California. Officials are asking Valley residents to reduce their exposure to particulate matter by remaining indoors.

Particulate matter can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Those with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young children and the elderly, are especially susceptible.

Common cloth and paper masks being worn because of COVID-19 concerns may not provide protection from wildfire smoke.

It has become a waiting game for many involved to see what, if any, of their property survives. Farm owner John Pierson, had decided not to evacuate, stating that his property is surrounded by green grass and he has stored plenty of water for the livestock.

Rachel Hawkins, her family and pets, which includes a dog and cat, evacuated early on Tuesday.

She spent the next several hours parked in her car in an orchard, hoping she had a home to return to.

“The fires was moving fast Monday night, but seems to have slowed down a bit,” Hawkins said. “All you can do is hope.”

This is a developing story and will be updated throughout the day.

Smoke from California wildfires impacting San Joaquin Valley air quality

By Genette Brookshire

The Stockton Record, Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued a health caution because of the hazy conditions caused by smoke from the wildfires burning throughout California. Officials are asking Valley residents to reduce their exposure to particulate matter by remaining indoors.

Particulate matter can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Those with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young children and the elderly, are especially susceptible.

Common cloth and paper masks being worn because of COVID-19 concerns may not provide protection from wildfire smoke.

- If you see or smell smoke in your immediate area, stay indoors, if possible, with windows and doors closed and use air conditioning to recirculate air to avoid drawing outside air inside. Also, in your vehicle, use the “recirculating” air function.
- Those with heart or lung disease, older adults, pregnant women and children should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outside. Outdoor activities should be moved or rescheduled for when the air quality improves. If that’s not possible, at least take several breaks during the outdoor activity.
- Ensure family members with heart disease or lung problems such as asthma, bronchitis or emphysema are following their doctor’s advice about medicine and their respiratory management plan. Seek help if symptoms worsen.

For people who have not been previously diagnosed with a chronic lung or heart disease, health officials note that smoke can “unmask” or produce symptoms of those conditions such as chest pain or tightness, shortness of breath or fatigue. If they appear, contact a doctor.

It also is advised to keep airways moist by drinking lots of water. You also can breathe through a warm, wet washcloth to help relieve dryness.

Residents can track air quality at myRAAN.com and find out which fires are affecting the air at www.valleyair.org/wildfires.

Sunny, stagnant and smoky conditions continue

By Elaina Rusk

KERO ABC 23, Thurs., Aug. 20, 2020

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. — If you were outside Wednesday, you know that the Valley was covered in a thick layer of smoke.

As the high pressure responsible for our heat the last two weeks starts to shift south into Arizona today, that will allow more of a westerly flow for Kern County. Unfortunately that shift in wind direction will also push more smoke from the complex fires near the Bay Area into the valley, leading to more dense smoke filling into Kern County.

The 5-15 mile per hour winds are enough to push the smoke in, but not enough to push it out, so it remains trapped here in the south valley and mountains and will continue to get worse the next few afternoons. So air quality is unhealthy for everyone and we have an Air Quality Alert in effect through Tuesday next week. Everyone should avoid exposure to this particle pollution and remain inside in the air conditioning as much as possible.

As a result of that shifting high pressure and westerly ocean wind today, we should "cool down" a few degrees from yesterday's 104 to today's expected 101 in Bakersfield. That's obviously still hot and above average, but not near daily heat records. As a result of that downward shift in temperatures, our Excessive Heat Warning was allowed to expire early here in the south valley, after being in effect for a week. The Excessive Heat Warning for the Kern Desert was extended through tomorrow as they are expecting afternoon highs of 105 and hotter the next two afternoons. The Kern River Valley finally gets a break from the triple digits, with a forecast in the 90s this afternoon. The low 90s are expected again today in Tehachapi and Frazier Park.

We're staying sunny, stagnant, hot and dry for the next several afternoons, then we'll start dragging more tropical moisture into the region Sunday, leading to a renewed thunderstorm threat for Kern County through Tuesday. So it will feel more humid with the continuation of the heat and haze with a chance that thunderstorms could lead to heavy localized rain, small hail, dangerous cloud-to-ground lightning and gusty winds.

The long range forecast keeps Bakersfield hovering around that 100 degree mark through the end of the month.

Back to that bad air quality... Our partners at the Valley Air District say if you can smell smoke and see ash, that is an indication that you should be treating air quality conditions as RAAN Level 4 or 5 and take the following steps to limit your exposure:

1. Limit your outdoor activities, especially children and people with chronic heart and lung diseases.
2. Remain inside air conditioned buildings. Note: If you do not have an air conditioner, staying inside with the windows closed may be dangerous in extremely hot weather. In these cases, seek alternative shelter.
3. If you have asthma or other lung diseases, make sure you follow your doctor's instructions about taking your medicines and following your asthma management plan. Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.
4. If you are an older adult, have children, or if you have heart or lung diseases, talk with your doctor about whether you should leave the area.

Please note: Smoke is a mixture of gases and fine (microscopic) particles that can cause health problems. The RAAN monitors are designed to detect these fine particles. Ash pieces, however, are much larger in size and will not be detected. If an area is covered in ash, air quality should be considered a RAAN Level 4 or higher, even if the monitor reflects a lower reading.

'Historic lightning siege:' Thousands flee as hundreds of wildfires blaze across California

By Doyle Rice, Scott Linesburgh and Elinor Aspegren
USA TODAY, Thurs., Aug. 20, 2020

VACAVILLE, California — Thousands of people are under evacuation orders in regions around the San Francisco Bay Area on Wednesday as wildfires blazed across the state amid a blistering heat wave now in its second week. Smoke blanketed San Francisco, and could be seen from space, per satellites at the National Weather Service.

In all, Gov. Gavin Newsom said firefighters are battling 367 known wildfires across California, including 23 that are considered major fires. Of those 367 fires, "the prospect of that number going up is very real," he said at a press conference Wednesday.

Newsom blamed "the extraordinary weather we're experiencing and all of these lightning strikes" for the fires. He said the state has recorded nearly 11,000 lightning strikes in 72 hours.

A helicopter fighting the blaze crashed in Coalinga, California Wednesday morning, killing the pilot and sparking a new wildfire, which then merged into the nearby Hills Fire.

The blaze burning near Vacaville was dubbed the Hennessey Fire, but there are so many fires burning in the area that firefighters have put them all under one incident – the LNU Lightning Complex – for reporting purposes, Weather.com said. In all, those fires have burned around 72 square miles of land in Napa and Sonoma counties, and are 0% contained.

Residents of Vacaville, a city of about 100,000 between San Francisco and Sacramento, awoke in the darkness Wednesday morning to frantic evacuation orders as an uncontrolled wildfire burned into the western edge of the city and destroyed at least 50 structures.

In Solano County, a rural area southeast of Vacaville, some residents fled for the first time ever.

"I've lived here for 30 years, never had to evacuate before," resident Tim Lukehart said. "There's been fires of course, but not like this one."

The air had an orange, smoke-filled hue for miles, with ash covering vehicles. Homes were burned down on both sides of Pleasant Valley Road, the street where Lukehart lives with his wife Sarah. Wooden fences were still in flames, and one family was chasing their cattle through a field as they tried to bring the animals home to safety as the grass smoldered.

A rescue effort to save about 125 horses failed as owners could not get trailers to the area or access by foot.

In an alert issued just after 7 p.m. Wednesday, the Travis Air Force base commander ordered a partial evacuation of "non-mission essential personnel."

Wednesday afternoon, the fire jumped Interstate 80, forcing highway officials to close a five-mile freeway section.

The LNU Lightning Complex is the second-largest fire burning in California on Wednesday, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

The largest fire burning in California, a blaze made up of 20 separate fires burning near San Jose, has been named the SCU Lightning Complex Fire. The fire ballooned from 54 square miles to burning at least 132 square miles over Tuesday night. It is 5% contained, and threatens more than 1,400 structures, according to the SCU branch of Cal Fire.

Another group of 30 fires in Chico, called the Butte Lightning Complex fires, has consumed 2 square miles with 10% containment, with Cal Fire, and are not expected to impact residents, according to a Cal Fire-Butte County news release.

Will Powers, a state fire spokesman, said "throughout the state of California right now, we are stretched thin for crews" because of the fires. "Air resources have been stretched thin throughout the whole state."

Much of California is enduring a sweltering late summer heat wave that has broken several record highs in recent days, including a 130-degree reading Sunday in Death Valley, Weather.com said. The hot, dry conditions are expected to continue at least into the weekend.

The extreme heat was being generated by a strong ridge of high pressure over the western U.S., which also produced an onslaught of thunderstorms and lightning that ignited many of the wildfires burning in California.

"We have a very large area of high pressure over the area," National Weather Service meteorologist David Sweet said. "It's sitting right over us, and it's not moving."

There was "no relief" expected Wednesday from the sweltering heat, the Weather Service said, as temperatures were forecast to again soar above 100 degrees across much of the western U.S. In all, some 37 million people were under excessive heat warnings in the West, mainly in California, Arizona and Nevada.

One of the major consequences of the heat wave over the past several days has been the threat of temporary power outages, also known as rolling blackouts, to conserve electricity usage along the state's power grid.

Grid managers again called for voluntary energy conservation during afternoon and evening hours Wednesday to try to avoid having to order utilities to cut power to selected areas, which happened twice last week but has been narrowly avoided since then.

In Northern California, police and firefighters went door-to-door before dawn Wednesday in a frantic scramble to warn residents to evacuate as fire encroached on Vacaville. Fire officials said at least 50 structures were destroyed and 50 were damaged and that four people were injured.

Television footage showed some homes in flames and thick ash dropping in a rural area near Interstate 80 as the fire appeared to head toward more densely populated areas.

Diane Bustos told KPIX-TV that she and her husband tried to drive out but their vehicle caught on fire and they had to flee on foot. "I got all these flames on me and I lost my shoe, but I made it. God saved me," she said.

Due to the Hennessey fire, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued a health caution because of the hazy conditions caused by smoke from the wildfires burning throughout California. Officials are asking Valley residents to reduce their exposure to particulate matter by remaining indoors.

Particulate matter can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Those with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young children and the elderly, are especially susceptible.

Common cloth and paper masks being worn because of COVID-19 concerns may not provide protection from wildfire smoke.

In Napa County, Gail Bickett, 80, loaded up her three dogs in a truck to evacuate as the fire burned behind houses across the road, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

"It's scary," she said. "It's overwhelming."

State Sen. Bill Dodd, who represents the area in the state Legislature, said the fires burning in Napa and Sonoma counties were mostly affecting less populated areas.

"I think the people around here, even the people that have structures in harm's way, understand that they're in a more rural area and that the people in more densely populated areas have to get the resources first," he said.

Several fires were also were burning in northern coastline areas and in Southern California.

The cluster of wine country fires threaten an area that only last year grappled with another massive blaze that forced 200,000 to flee – a task made more complicated this year because of the pandemic.

No evacuations for Tracy as nearby wildfires fill sky with smoke

Press staff report

Tracy Press, Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020

Fires started by lightning that have been burning since Sunday in Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties have covered the area in smoke, but they pose no immediate threat to Tracy residents or need for evacuations.

Tracy's local fire department, the South San Joaquin County Fire Authority, put out a statement Wednesday afternoon in response to concern about evacuation orders in neighboring counties.

The Canyon Zone fires south of Tracy, burning in and around Del Puerto Canyon northwest of Patterson, are part of a collection of 20 fires in several counties designated by Cal Fire as the SCU Lightning Complex. The other fires are grouped into the Deer Zone and Calaveras Zone. By Wednesday morning, they had collectively burned 85,000 acres and were only 5% contained.

An orange glow in the sky to the south and flames visible Tuesday night, along with heavy clouds of smoke, have put some people in the Tracy area on edge.

The fire department confirmed Wednesday that there were no evacuation warnings or orders for the Tracy area or within San Joaquin County, and none were expected.

The fire is expected to grow to the south and east over the next 48 hours, and smoke will remain throughout the area. Officials are preplanning for potential impacts and making contingency plans for areas within the South San Joaquin County Fire Authority jurisdiction. However, the fire department does not anticipate any need to evacuate area residents.

Earlier Wednesday, some local residents had received emergency alerts from Alameda County about evacuations in the Livermore area that had a "Tracy, CA" heading, leading to confusion and concern.

People in Tracy and other parts of San Joaquin County can sign up for local emergency alert notifications at sjready.org, the website of the San Joaquin County Office of Emergency Services. The notification system provides critical information for emergency situations, such as severe weather, unexpected road closures and evacuations of neighborhoods.

Note: [The following clip in Spanish mentions the Health Caution for Stanislaus county due to wildfire smoke impacting the Valley and how residents can protect themselves.](#)

Emiten alerta de calidad del aire por incendios en Stanislaus

Telemundo 33, Wednesday, August 19, 2020

El humo de los incendios de Canyon Zone, en el oeste del condado de Stanislaus, está afectando la calidad del aire en el condado, informaron las autoridades este miércoles.

El humo de los incendios forestales podría afectar afectar la salud. Los síntomas más comunes son irritación de ojos y garganta, tos y dificultad para respirar. Las personas con problemas de salud, especialmente afecciones cardíacas o respiratorias, deben tener especial cuidado.

Sigue estas precauciones para proteger su salud:

- Minimiza las actividades al aire libre
- Quédate adentro con las ventanas y puertas cerradas tanto como sea posible
- No enciendas ventiladores que traigan aire exterior con humo al interior
- Enciende el aire acondicionado o la calefacción solo si no trae humo del exterior
- Considere abandonar el área hasta que mejoren las condiciones del humo si experimenta síntomas relacionados con exposición al humo
- Conoce la calidad actual del aire consultando <https://www.valleyair.org/myraan/>

Para trabajadores al aire libre:

- Limita el esfuerzo
- Toma descansos frecuentes
- Si la actividad prolongada al aire libre es inevitable, las máscaras adecuadas (por ejemplo, máscaras N95) pueden proteger contra la exposición dañina
- Consulta con su empleador si tiene inquietudes específicas

Cuándo buscar atención médica:

Comunícate con tu proveedor de atención médica si experimenta los siguientes síntomas que no mejoran después de mudarse al interior o en un entorno de calidad del aire seguro:

- Falta de aliento o dificultad para respirar
- Sibilancias
- Opresión o dolor en el pecho
- Palpitaciones
- Náuseas o fatiga inusual
- Mareos y / o sensación de desmayo