

Creek Fire live updates: Air quality forecast unhealthy for forest, Valley floor

By Brianna Calix

Modesto Bee & Fresno Bee, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Thurs., Sept. 10, 2020

8:00a.m.: Creek Fire grows to 175,000 acres, find your address on evacuation map

The U.S. Forest Service reported Thursday morning the Creek Fire surpassed 175,000 acres in size. Sixty residences, two commercial structures and 278 other mixed commercial and residential structure have been destroyed.

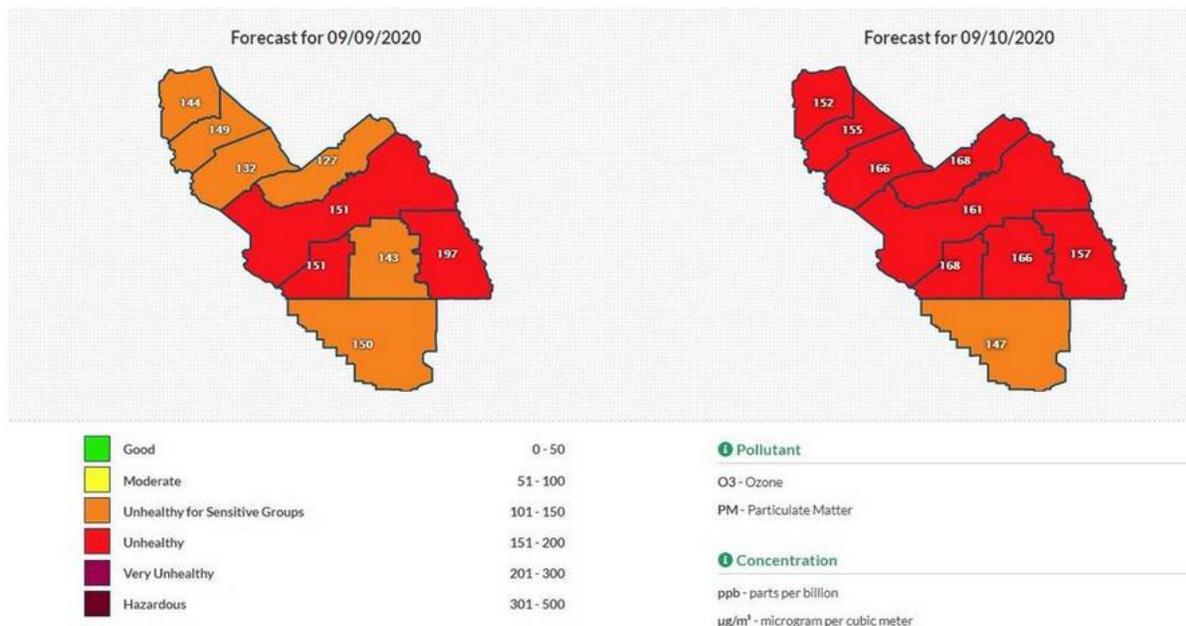
Firefighting crews are making progress building a containment line from the San Joaquin River northwest toward Castle Peak in Madera County, the forest service reported. Additionally, dozers are removing vegetation near structures in Cascadel woods.

The U.S. Forest Service also posted an interactive evacuation map for the Creek Fire. The map shows which areas are under evacuation orders and evacuation warnings. The map is searchable so residents can find their address.

7:30 a.m.: Air quality forecast unhealthy for Valley floor, forest

District forecast predicted unhealthy air quality on Thursday for San Joaquin Valley counties from San Joaquin to Kings. That forecast also is true for the Sequoia National Forest and Sequoia National Park.

The air district lists particulate matter as the top pollutant.



The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District forecast predicted unhealthy air quality on Thursday, Sept. 10, 2020 for all central San Joaquin Valley counties and the Sequoia National Forest from wildfire smoke. Screen grab ValleyAir.org

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District forecast predicted unhealthy air quality on Thursday, Sept. 10, 2020 for all central San Joaquin Valley counties and the Sequoia National Forest from wildfire smoke. Screen grab ValleyAir.org

Earlier this week, the air district renewed a health caution for air quality due to smoke from the Creek Fire, noting winds were expected to blow smoke directly into the Valley, causing increased particulate matter pollution and potential high levels of ozone.

Particulate matter pollution can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, the air district reports. Young children, older people and those with existing

respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, are especially susceptible to the health effects from this type of pollution.

The air district advised residents in the poor air quality areas to remain indoors and in a filtered, air-conditioned environment with closed windows.

Air quality experts warn to keep indoors while wildfire smoke blankets Central Valley

By Kristi Gross

KTXL FOX40, Wed., Sept. 9, 2020

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY, Calif. – From the grey and hazy skies in San Joaquin and Sacramento counties, to yellow and orange-tinted skies in Yuba and Solano counties, smoke blankets the air across all of the Central Valley.

“It absolutely looks like a mid-December day outside, except until you get outside you feel the heat. the sky is full of smoke,” said Heather Heinks, the spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. “The air quality in the Central Valley is very unhealthy and it actually almost doesn’t matter which way the wind direction is blowing. We’re literally surrounded by wildfires.”

Heinks told FOX40 that with smoke and ash in the air, it’s recommended that those in sensitive groups stay indoors and even healthy people lessen their exposure to particulate matter pollution.

“Those those thin masks that we use to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, do not prevent you from inhaling, a tiny microscopic particulate matter pollution. That’s what we want to stress. It’s not OK to just throw in one of those masks and go for a run,” Heinks explained.

Sacramento Metro Air Quality Management index maps show, red, unhealthy air quality stretching from Sacramento to Modesto throughout the day Wednesday.

Air quality experts say it’s important to pay attention— if you can see the ash falling or smell smoke it’s best to stay indoors because it could impact your health.

“You breathe in those tiny particulate matter pieces and it’s foreign matter in your body. And it goes into your bloodstream and it makes any existing condition worse if you’ve got asthma, bronchitis, any kind of respiratory condition. Exposure to particulate matter pollution is going to exacerbate those conditions and make them worse,” Heinks said.

Heinks said the air quality has been poor since August and has recently gotten worse as the Creek and Bear fires continue to grow and the lightning complex fires continue producing smoke.

She said she doesn’t see it improving much in the next few days.

“This particulate matter pollution is going to linger with us for weeks unfortunately, until we get a major system, major wind mass change of air mass, to move it out,” Heinks explained. “It’s not going to leave.”

Massive Smoke Clouds, Thick Air Darken Western US Skies

AP News

In GVWire, Thursday, September 10, 2020

SAN FRANCISCO — People from San Francisco to Seattle woke Wednesday to hazy clouds of smoke lingering in the air, darkening the sky to an eerie orange glow that kept street lights illuminated into midday, all thanks to dozens of wildfires throughout the West.

“It’s after 9 a.m. and there’s still no sign of the sun,” the California Highway Patrol’s Golden Gate division tweeted, urging drivers to turn on their headlights and slow down.

Social media was filled with photos of the unusual sky and many people complained their cellphone cameras weren’t accurately capturing the golden hues.

Despite the foreboding skies, there was little scent of smoke and the air quality index did not reach unhealthy levels. That’s because fog drifting from the Pacific Ocean was sandwiched between the smoke

and surface. Meanwhile, smoke particles above the marine layer were only allowing yellow-orange-red light to reach the surface, said Ralph Borrmann, a spokesman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

He said conditions were expected to remain until Friday; by then the district expects to issue its 25th consecutive Spare The Air alert requiring residents to cut pollution — the longest stretch since the program began in 1991.

The previous streak was a 14-day alert issued in 2018 when the Bay Area was choked by smoke from a fire that devastated the town of Paradise and killed 85 people.

This time, strong winds from the north and northeast pushed smoke from devastating wildfires in Oregon and Washington state into lower elevations, said Roger Gass, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service Bay Area.

“The sheer amount of smoke, the multiple layers of smoke above us in the atmosphere are combining to darken our sky,” he said.

The darkened skies also prevented California’s largest utility, Pacific Gas & Electric, from doing some aerial inspections needed to restore power to about 167,000 customers because of poor visibility, said spokesman Jeff Smith. The power was proactively cut Monday in an effort to prevent power line-sparked wildfires.

As Long as the Fires Keep Burning They’re Going To Continue To Produce Smoke

Air quality warnings were issued throughout the Pacific Northwest, and people in communities from southern Oregon to north of Seattle have seen blood red skies and choking smoke.

“It was scary. Especially as red as the sky was,” said Patricia Fouts, who evacuated from a senior living center due to a massive fire east of Salem, Oregon.

Gass said winds coming from the Pacific Ocean will likely continue to push the smoke across the West, worsening air quality.

In Denver, a thick blanket of haze covered the skyline Wednesday, obstructing mountain views typically visible from the city. The haze from fires across the West, including a blaze in western Colorado that is the largest in state history, led Colorado’s state health department to issue an air quality alert on Labor Day.

Scott Landes, chief air quality meteorologist for Colorado’s health department, said a cold front improved air quality but he said the state may start getting a new wave of out-of-state smoke over the weekend because of drier, warmer temperatures.

In Phoenix, the skies were finally blue on Wednesday after a cold front swept through the region, keeping the wildfire smoke west and southwest of Arizona. In Reno, Nevada, the skies were also blue for the first time in days after air quality reached the hazardous level a day earlier, prompting the Washoe County School District to cancel all in-classroom lessons.

The smoky skies, which have also plagued Salt Lake City, Seattle and cities in Oregon, brought one silver lining that has filled social media feeds: Spectacular sunsets with a reddish-orange sun popping amid grainy skies.

“Everybody wants to know, when is this going to get better,” Gass said. “We have to remember as long as the fires keep burning they’re going to continue to produce smoke.”

Massive smoke clouds from wildfires darken West Coast sky

By Daisy Nguyen, Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Thursday, September 10, 2020

Hazy clouds of smoke from dozens of wildfires darkened the sky to an eerie orange glow over much of the West Coast on Wednesday, keeping street lights illuminated during the day and putting residents on edge.

The California Highway Patrol urged drivers to turn on their headlights and slow down. Social media was filled with photos of the unusual sky, and many people complained that their cellphone cameras weren't accurately capturing the golden hues.

"It's really just strange and ominous outside, it feels like I should be in bed sleeping," said Aamir Vaid, who canceled plans to have lunch in downtown San Francisco because of the dark sky.

While satellites show a towering band of smoke hovering along the coast, there was little scent of smoke and the air quality index did not reach unhealthy levels. That's because fog drifting from the Pacific Ocean was sandwiched between the smoke and ground. And smoke particles above the marine layer were acting like a filter, scattering blue light and only allowing yellow, orange and red light to reach the ground, said Ralph Borrmann, a spokesman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

The smoke blocked out so much sunlight that a forecast for temperatures to climb to 90 degrees (32 Celsius) instead dipped to the 60s (15.5 Celsius) as though "we're in perpetual morning without the sun to help us warm up," said Drew Peterson, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Bay Area office.

Some of the smoke settled in San Francisco Bay and formed a 15-mile (24-kilometer) trail of ash along the tidal line, the U.S. Coast Guard said.

Borrmann said the conditions were expected to linger until Friday. By then, the district expects to issue its 25th consecutive Spare The Air alert requiring residents to cut pollution — the longest stretch since the program began in 1991. The alerts began Aug. 18 after thousands of lightning strikes ignited three massive wildfires to the north, south and east of San Francisco.

The previous streak was 14 days of alerts in 2018 when the Bay Area was choked by smoke from a fire that devastated the town of Paradise and killed 85 people.

This time, strong winds from the north and northeast pushed smoke from devastating wildfires in the Sierra Nevada foothills and in Oregon and Washington state into lower elevations. A fire that exploded in size Tuesday and prompted evacuation orders for some 20,000 people in Oroville sent the air quality index in Sacramento to a hazardous reading at one point.

Poor visibility because of the dark sky also prevented California's largest utility, Pacific Gas & Electric, from doing some aerial inspections needed to restore power to about 167,000 customers, spokesman Jeff Smith said. The power was deliberately cut Monday to try to prevent power lines from sparking wildfires in windy weather.

Air quality warnings also were issued throughout the Pacific Northwest, and people in communities from southern Oregon to north of Seattle have seen blood-red skies and choking smoke.

"It was scary. Especially as red as the sky was," said Patricia Fouts, who evacuated from a senior living center because of a massive fire east of Salem, Oregon.

Winds coming from the Pacific Ocean will likely keep pushing the smoke across the U.S. West, worsening air quality, said Roger Gass, another weather service meteorologist.

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Scott Landes, chief air quality meteorologist for Colorado's health department, said a cold front improved air quality but the state may start getting a new wave of smoke over the weekend because of drier, warmer temperatures.

In Phoenix, the sky was finally blue after a cold front swept through, keeping wildfire smoke west and southwest of Arizona. Reno, Nevada, also saw blue for the first time in days after air quality reached a hazardous level a day earlier, prompting the Washoe County School District to cancel all in-classroom lessons.

"Everybody wants to know, when is this going to get better," Gass said. "We have to remember, as long as the fires keep burning, they're going to continue to produce smoke."

Cancellations soar as Yosemite's air quality turns 'very unhealthy'

By Ashley Harrell

SFGATE, Thursday, September 10, 2020

Andrei Zimin and his wife were just starting to hike in Yosemite National Park on Saturday when ash began to rain down on them. "My wife's eyes got pretty irritated, and we both developed quite a headache," Zimin said, "so we had to return to the hotel pretty early that day."

The air quality improved Sunday, allowing Zimin and his wife, visitors from San Diego who had secured coveted reservations for the park, to hike all day long and take photos. But later in the week the air quality again plummeted.

As the Creek Fire continued to incinerate nearby Sierra National Forest on Wednesday, Yosemite's beloved rock formations have remained obscured, its visitors' lungs polluted beneath an opaque orange sky. Ash intermittently flies in, blanketing cars. A heavy campfire smell wafts on the air.

Although air-quality monitors in several locations within Yosemite showed that the environment had become a health risk, all entrances remained staffed by rangers and open to visitors.

"The air-quality index for Yosemite (Wednesday) was 'unhealthy' to 'very unhealthy' and forecast to remain that way (Thursday)," the Yosemite Conservancy wrote on Instagram. "When air quality is unhealthy, you should reduce or avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors; strenuous hikes are not recommended."

Many of the park's professional guides say they have been canceling their excursions. So far this week, YExplore Yosemite Adventures founder John DeGrazio has canceled nine Yosemite tours, including a Half Dome trek for Thursday. He estimates the total loss to his business this week at \$4,000.

Elisabeth Barton, founder of the worker-owned Echo Adventure Cooperative, said that about a third of the company's Yosemite tours have been called off this month due to poor air quality. Unhelpfully, Barton's power went out Wednesday, so she tried to escape to Lassen County. There was no power there, either, she said.

Paul Wignall, owner of Skydive Yosemite in Mariposa, grounded his Cessna 182 over Labor Day weekend — and it hasn't taken off since. "We've rescheduled somewhere around 100 jumpers," he said. Wignall added that some folks were based too far out of town, so they canceled. Although Wignall is trying to keep a positive attitude about the whole thing, he emphasizes that the struggle is real.

"It's just crazy," he said. "There's the whole COVID thing, then the fires on top of that ... so many businesses are getting worked right now in this community and all over California."

Meanwhile, intrepid visitors continued entering the park, enduring irritated eyes, scratchy throats and smoke-induced headaches all for the opportunity to see what they could of Yosemite's soaring cliffs, and snap otherworldly photographs.

"It was eerie, yet beautiful, to see an orange sky above Half Dome," said visitor Zain Ahmed, who traveled to the park from Livermore. "It was snowing ash all over. ... On our way back to our lodge, we saw sunset through smoke clouds, which was yet another beautiful scene."

Creek Fire: It may be weeks before residents are allowed to check on homes

By Sheyanne N Romero

Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, September 10, 2020

Thousands of residents who evacuated the hillsides of Fresno and Madera counties will not be returning home any time soon.

That was the message in Wednesday's Creek Fire virtual briefing. It will be weeks before residents are allowed back to their homes and many might not have a home to return to.

In less than a week, the Creek Fire has burned through 175,893 acres and destroyed or damaged at least 356 structures. The fire was 0% contained, as of Thursday morning.

"When we experienced the Aspen Fire, then the French Fire... we never dreamed that we would be experiencing a fire that would not only go through those two footprints but also cross onto both districts and affect the Sierra National Forest," District Ranger Denise Tolmi said.

'Fighting a treacherous fire'

Residents are anxious to get to their homes, but authorities are urging people to be patient. First, utility companies — water, sewer, and electric — will have to ensure it's safe for people to return.

Caltrans will also need to make sure roadways are secure.

For now, it's unsafe for even these companies to enter the evacuated areas, according to Incident Commander Nick Truax.

"We are still actively fighting a treacherous fire," he said. "It's going to be a long process, so please be patient."

On Wednesday, Fresno County sheriff's deputies made two arrests after drivers failed to stop at the roadblock. Deputies took chase.

"We will chase you," Lt. Brendon Pursell said. "We will arrest you for that. Please stop at the roadblocks."

Madera Lt. Zack Zamudio echoed Truax's warning.

"When it is safe, we will allow people to go back to their homes," he said. "Your homes are being protected."

Roughly 4,000 Madera County residents are under a mandatory evacuation order, and another 15,000 are under an evacuation warning. So far, 82 structures have been lost in the Madera County portion of the blaze, according to Zamudio.

Eight damage inspection teams are spread throughout the two counties to determine which properties are still standing. Initial assessments in Fresno County are 50% complete. The "windshield" (a visual assessment) process in Madera County is 30% complete, according to Truax.

Next, teams will view assessors' records to confirm if a structure is in the county's database — this is known as "validation." The process takes time.

"We've seen historical events in the last 48 hours," Truax said. "It's not just us. It's all over California."

In California, 64,000 people are under evacuation orders — 11,936 in the Creek Fire. More than 2 million acres have burned and the death toll is growing.

On Wednesday, the Bear Fire claimed the lives of three people. The fire merged with the Claremont Fire to form the North Complex Fire in Butte, Lassen and Plumas counties. Not long after, it was announced the Slater Fire in Siskiyou County killed one person.

Creek Fire Evacuation Orders:

Madera County

- Bass Lake Basin, including Wishon
- Bass Lake Annex, and Manzanita
- The town of North Fork and the surrounding area

Fresno County

- Shaver Lake down to Cressman Road, including Cressman Road
- Big Creek
- Huntington Lake
- Camp Sierra

- High Sierra areas, which include: Florence Lake, Ward Lake, Portal Forebay, Edison Lake Mono Hot Springs, Kaiser and all campgrounds
- The area west of Tollhouse, along Auberry Road west to Powerhouse Road
- Alder Springs, Mile High, Meadow Lakes, Big Sandy, Mono Wind Casino, Jose Basin & Italian Bar
- Dinkey Creek, Wishon & Courtright Reservoirs
- Tollhouse Road at Peterson Road down to Lodge Road
- Beal Fire Road
- Powerhouse Road to the San Joaquin River
- The entire town of Auberry, which extends from the San Joaquin River on Powerhouse Road to Auberry Road in both directions out to Highway 168. This includes the points next to Prather and next to Cressman's General Store.
- Sycamore and Burrough Valley
- Watts Valley from Maxon Road to Pittman Hill Road
- Maxon Road to Trimmer Springs Road
- Humphrey's Station to Tollhouse Road
- Humphrey's Station to Pittman Hill Road to Sample Road

Creek Fire Evacuation Warnings:

Madera County

- Oakhurst
- O'Neals
- Walker Grade
- Chukchansi
- Indian Lakes
- The portion of Coarsegold east of Highway 41

Fresno County

- Community of Prather
- South of Little Sandy / Lodge Rd.
- North East of Tollhouse Rd. North of Millerton Rd. / Nicholas Rd.
- East Auberry Rd.

Evacuation points are located at Mariposa County Fairgrounds and Clovis North High School, 2770 E. International Ave. Red Cross has established a hotline for shelter information at 571-595-7401. Text your zip code to 888-777 for text alerts.

The Clovis Rodeo Grounds are open to large animals displaced by the Creek Fire. The rodeo grounds are located at 748 Rodeo Drive in downtown Clovis.

For missing persons call:

- Fresno County Sheriff's Office - (559) 600-3111
- Madera County Sheriff's Office - (559) 658-2555

Poor air quality expected to persist until next week

By Erick Torres

Patterson Irrigator, Thursday, Sept. 10, 2020

The Creek Fire, located in the mountain and foothill regions of Fresno and Madera counties, has emitted smoke that is creating unhealthy air quality conditions in the San Joaquin Valley. Patterson residents have already dealt with varying levels of poor air quality since the SCU Lightning Complex fires began on Aug. 16. A total of six fires (SCU Lightning Complex, CZU August Lightning Complex, LNU Lightning Complex, SQF Complex, August Complex and Creek Fire) may be impacting air quality in the valley according to valleyair.org.

Air quality readings on Tuesday reported an unhealthy air quality index rating (AQI) of 554.

Winds on Tuesday and Wednesday were expected to continue blowing the smoke from the Creek Fire directly into the valley. The increased particulate matter pollution blown by the winds caused officials to caution valley residents to remain indoors to reduce exposure to the poor air quality.

These emissions can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. A news release by San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District shared that individuals with heart or lung disease should follow their doctor's advice for dealing with exposure. People with respiratory conditions, including those diagnosed with COVID-19, young children, and the elderly, are "especially susceptible to the health effects from this form of pollution."

Even healthy individuals may experience temporary symptoms such as irritation of the eyes, nose, throat, coughing, phlegm, chest tightness and shortness of breath.

It is advised that all residents stay indoors as much as possible in a filtered or air-conditioned environment with windows closed.

Avoid activities that make you breathe faster or more deeply, and consider purchasing filters for your home and avoid using anything that burns, such as wood fireplaces, gas logs, and even candles or incense. Avoid smoking, and advice from airnow.gov suggests not using a vacuum unless your vacuum has a HEPA filter to avoid stirring up particles in your home.

Officials warned that common cloth and paper masks individuals have worn during the COVID-19 pandemic may not protect the user from wildfire smoke while outdoors. Disposable respirators such as N-95 or P-100 respirators will help if you have to be outdoors for a period of time.

Residents looking to track data on the current state of air quality can use myRAAN.com or airnow.gov. Air quality conditions can change rapidly. Residents are advised to check local air agency websites for the most recent hourly air quality conditions.

Air monitoring stations are designed to detect microscopic particulate matter particles (PM 2.5) that exist in smoke. Large particles such as ash may not be detected by monitoring stations.

"If you smell smoke or see falling ash in your immediate vicinity, consider air quality "unhealthy" (RAAN level 4 or higher) even if RAAN displays lower pollution level," the press release by San Joaquin Valley air pollution officials stated.

The public can find more information by visiting valleyair.org or calling the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District offices in Modesto at 209-557-6400, Fresno 559-230-6000 Bakersfield at 661-392-5500.

Residents can also download the free "Valley Air" app on their mobile device to follow air quality conditions.

Bleak skies as smoke lingers over Valley

Press staff report

Tracy Press, Wednesday, Sept. 9, 2020

Smoky skies and unhealthy air conditions are expected to linger over Tracy through the week as smoke from the Creek Fire burning in Fresno and Madera counties and other wildfires throughout the state filters into the San Joaquin Valley.

On Tuesday the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reissued a health caution for residents until the fires are extinguished.

The health caution originally went up on Aug. 17 after a lightning ignited a series of wildfires around the valley.

On Wednesday Tracy residents woke to orange skies a fine layer of ash across cars and outdoor furniture as the smoke settled over the city.

The Creek Fire began on Friday and has quickly exploded to 163,138 acres with 0% containment as of Wednesday morning.

Shifting winds on Tuesday and Wednesday are expected to push smoke directly into the San Joaquin Valley bringing increased particulate matter pollution -- called PM 2.5 made of smoke, dust, soot and ash that are 2.5 micrometers or smaller -- along with the potential for high levels of ozone.

The winds are also expected to gust bring dust and elevated of particulate matter, 10 microns and smaller called PM10, through the valley. The air district warned that microscopic particles in the smoke can trigger asthma, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Young children, older adults, and anyone with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, are especially at risk from this type of air pollution.

Anyone who can smell smoke or see falling ash should consider the air unhealthy and should move indoors to a filtered, air-conditioned environment and keep windows closed.

The air district emphasized that cloth and paper masks used to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 via respiratory droplets are not sufficient to filter out the microscopic particles that make up smoke.

Current air quality conditions can be monitored through the air pollution districts Real-time Air Advisory Network at www.myraan.com.

Information about wildfires affecting the valley can be found at www.valleyair.org/wildfires.

California wildfires growing bigger, moving faster than ever

By Don Thompson, Associated Press
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 10, 2020

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — When it comes to California wildfires, it now takes days, not decades, to produce what had been seen as a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence.

Last weekend, a fire burning in California's Sierra National Forest exploded in size, trapping hundreds of Labor Day holiday campers who could only be rescued by helicopters that made a series of white-knuckle flights into the smoke. Fire officials said they'd never seen a fire move so fast in forestland — 15 miles (24 kilometers) in a day.

On Wednesday, a wildfire in Plumas National Forest northeast of San Francisco spread 25 miles (40 kilometers) in a day and devoured an estimated 400 square miles (1,036 square kilometers),

In between those events, a massive fire in Monterey County doubled in size overnight, trapping 14 firefighters who had to deploy their emergency shelters; one was critically injured.

They are only the latest examples of what a half-dozen fire experts agreed is more extreme fire behavior driven by drought and warming temperatures they attribute to climate change. Among the most concerning developments is that fast-moving wildfires leave less time for warnings or evacuations.

Recently "we have seen multiple fires expand by tens of thousands of acres in a matter of hours, and 30 years or more ago that just wasn't fire behavior that we saw," said Jacob Bendix, a professor of geography and the environment at Syracuse University who studies wildfires.

Hotter temperatures, longer fire seasons and an estimated 140 million dead trees from a five-year drought mean that "fires in California are moving faster and growing larger," said University of Utah fire expert Philip Dennison.

Mike Flannigan, who directs the Western Partnership for Wildland Fire Science at Canada's University of Alberta, remembers the first report of a fire-created thunderstorm in 1986.

"They were rare events, and now they've become commonplace," he said. "It's because these fires are higher intensity."

A prime example is the so-called Creek Fire in Sierra National Forest near Yosemite National Park, which exploded through miles of drought- and beetle-killed timber, moving so fast that it trapped hundreds of campers.

"When you have a fire run 15 miles in one day, in one afternoon, there's no model that can predict that," U.S. Forest Service forester Steve Lohr said. "'The fires are behaving in such a way that we've not seen.'"

The phenomenon isn't restricted to California. Doug Grafe, chief of Fire Protection at the Oregon Department of Forestry, said it was unprecedented in his state for fires this week to spread from the crest of the Cascade Mountains into the valleys below, and so quickly, "carrying tens of miles in one period of an afternoon and not slowing down in the evening — (there is) absolutely no context for that in this environment."

California already has seen a record 3,900 square miles (10,100 square kilometers) burn and it's only now is entering what traditionally is the most dangerous time for fires. Labor Day weekend brought record-breaking temperatures across the state that exacerbated what already are drought conditions in a large swath of the state.

On Thursday, a Northern California wildfire was threatening thousands of homes after winds whipped it into a monster that incinerated houses in a small mountain community and killed at least three people.

University of Colorado-Boulder professor Jennifer Balch said measurements of how quickly the hot, dry air is sucking moisture out of fuels are "the highest seen in at least four decades" across major parts of the West.

The abundant dry tinder produces more heat energy, which in turn super-heats the air so it becomes more buoyant and creates a strong updraft that condenses with the smoke plume, "creating its own wind to feed that thunderstorm," Flannigan said.

The cloud itself is called a pyro-cumulonimbus, which may or may not produce lightning, and strong winds that can pick up burning embers and ignite new fires far in front of the initial blaze.

An extreme example in July 2018 spun off what was then only the second documented "firenado," killing a firefighter as he helped evacuate residents from a fire in the Northern California city of Redding.

Yet just this month a fire north of Lake Tahoe spun off at least two and as many as four firenadoes, while the Plumas National Forest fire appears to have produced "a handful" overnight Tuesday, said Neil Lareau, a professor of atmospheric science at the University of Nevada, Reno.

The Creek Fire produced at least two firenadoes that appeared to touch down Saturday, he said, one straddling an access road to a popular campground at Mammoth Pool Reservoir where 214 people became trapped.

"It's really kind of a testament to the remarkable extremes that we're seeing right now," Lareau said. "It really is kind of this vicious cycle that it gets into, and that's when the fire really takes off and becomes these unstoppable infernos."

Two California National Guard helicopters called in to rescue the trapped campers Saturday night found visibility deteriorating so swiftly that the crews opted to load their aircraft "to the absolute maximum" and well beyond normal safety limits in an unprecedented mission.

On one trip, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Joseph Rosamond and his three-member crew took on 102 desperate campers in a CH-47 Chinook twin-rotor helicopter designed for 30 passengers. A UH-60 Black Hawk ferried 22 evacuees in a helicopter with a normal operating capacity of 11 or 12 passengers.

The overloaded Chinook slowly climbed to 8,000 feet (2,440 meters) to clear surrounding mountains and dense smoke.

"It was an absolute emergency and people's lives were at stake," Rosamond recalled. "It was pretty dicey. The charts don't go that high."

Such harrowing escapes are only likely to become more common, the experts said.

Columbia University's Williams said California's record heat and record acreage burned already this year are part of a trend that has been accelerating for 50 years due to global warming.

"So, while the magnitudes of the current heat wave and the resultant wildfires have been shocking, they're consistent with what scientists have been predicting for decades," Williams said in an email.

California fire that killed 3 threatens thousands of homes

By Terence Chea and Brian Melley

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 10, 2020

OROVILLE, Calif. (AP) — A Northern California wildfire threatened thousands of homes Thursday after winds whipped it into a monster that incinerated houses in a small mountain community and killed at least three people.

Several other people have been critically burned and hundreds, if not thousands, of homes and other buildings are believed to have been damaged or destroyed by the North Complex fire northeast of San Francisco, authorities said.

Some 20,000 people were under evacuation orders or warnings in Plumas, Yuba and Butte counties.

Between Tuesday and Wednesday, the fire — which had been burning for weeks in forestland and was 50% contained — exploded to six times its size as winds gusting to 45 mph drove a path of destruction through mountainous terrain and parched foothills.

The winds subsided Wednesday but the fire was only 24% contained and the danger remained.

"Time and time again we have seen how dangerous wildfires can be. ... So I ask that you please, please please be prepared, maintain situational awareness and heed the warnings," Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea pleaded.

Honea announced the three deaths but declined to provide details. California Highway Patrol Officer Ben Draper told the Bay Area News Group that one person was found in a car and apparently had been trying to escape the flames.

Many homes were incinerated in the Butte County hamlet of Berry Creek, with a population of 525 people.

John Sykes, a 50-year resident, managed to flee on Tuesday with his car and some clothes but he watched the town burn from about a mile away.

"The school is gone, the fire department's gone, the bar's gone, the laundromat's gone, the general store's gone," he told the Sacramento Bee, adding, "I'll never go back."

"I don't want to see it," he said. "That's why I'm leaving. I never want to see California again."

Four burn victims were taken to UC Davis Medical Center in critical condition, the Bee reported.

The fire also threatened Paradise, a town devastated just two years ago by the deadliest blaze in state history that prompted a deadly traffic jam as panicked residents tried to escape. Eighty-five people lost their lives and nearly 19,000 buildings were destroyed in that fire.

On Wednesday, the sky turned from black to cherry red and ash carried on strong winds rained down in a scene reminiscent from the fateful morning of Nov. 8, 2018, former Mayor Steve "Woody" Culleton said.

"It was extremely frightening and ugly," Culleton said. "Everybody has PTSD and what not, so it triggered everybody and caused terror and panic."

Even in the midst of its dry, hot, windy fire season, California has seen wildfires advancing with unprecedented speed and ferocity. Since the middle of August, fires in California have killed 11 people, destroyed more than 3,600 structures, burned old growth redwoods, charred chaparral and forced evacuations in communities near the coast, in wine country and along the Sierra Nevada.

Thick smoke choked much of the state and cast an eerie orange hue across the sky. In some areas of the San Francisco Bay Area and the Sacramento Valley, the smoke blocked out so much sunlight that it dropped the temperature by 20 to 30 degrees over the previous day, according to the National Weather Service.

More than two dozen major fires were burning around the state, some of them among the largest ever recorded in recent California history.

The U.S. Forest Service, which had taken the unprecedented measure of closing eight national forests in Southern California earlier in the week, ordered all 18 of its forests in the state closed Wednesday for public safety.

In Southern California, fires burned in Los Angeles, San Bernardino and San Diego counties. People in foothill communities east of Los Angeles were warned to be ready to flee, but the region's notorious Santa Ana winds were weaker than predicted.

"We're encouraged that the wind activity appears to be dying down," Gov. Gavin Newsom said. "The rest of the week looks a little more favorable."

Air district asks ag, construction businesses to hold off dusty operations

By John Cox

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Sept. 9, 2020

Until the wind settles down or the smoke clears up, local air-quality officials are asking local agricultural and construction companies to pitch in for better air quality by minimizing operations that can kick up dust.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said it initiated outreach to employers in the two industries when it saw windy conditions had the potential to exacerbate the already poor air quality from the Creek Fire and other wildfires burning around the state.

The district reports getting positive responses from construction companies, such as those using earth-moving equipment, and said it often receives cooperation from ag operations, many of whom are in the middle of the almond or pistachio harvests. Both annual events are known to raise a considerable amount of dust this time of year.

On Wednesday morning the Kern County Farm Bureau sent out a mass email advising its members of the air district's request.

The district's deputy air pollution control officer, Ryan Hayashi, said there is no list of specific activities it wants ag workers to refrain from promoting. At the same time, "there's measures that they can take with the way that they operate specific equipment to limit," he said.

"The more people that receive the message, the more likelihood people will take steps and actions to limit dust-generating activities," Hayashi said.

District spokeswoman Heather Heinks said the overarching strategy during the high winds has been to increase communication with local players who might be able to alter their behavior during a two-day period, Tuesday and Wednesday.

"We're not talking about suspending operations but more just communication so we can share that message," she said.

The district has also called on local residents to stay indoors to the extent possible and do what they can to avoid exposing themselves to elevated levels of particulate matter measuring 2.5 micros and smaller.

Such pollution, it said, can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis and raise the risk of heart attack and stroke. It added that cloth and paper masks commonly worn during the COVID-19 pandemic "may not protect them from wildfire smoke."

[Note: The following clip in Spanish mentions the Air District's Health Caution](#)

Emiten alerta por mala calidad del aire para todos los condados del Valle Central
Las condiciones climatológicas pronosticadas indican que el humo del incendio Creek continuará desplazándose directamente hacia las comunidades del Valle Central.

Telemundo Fresno, Tuesday, September 8, 2020

El Incendio Creek, aunado a otros incendios forestales que arden en todo el estado, están causando que la calidad del aire de todos los condados del Valle Central se vea impactada negativamente, por lo que se ha renovado la advertencia de mala calidad del aire y permanecerá vigente hasta que todos los incendios del área logren ser sofocados.

Autoridades anticipan que la calidad del aire no saludable afectará varias partes del Valle Central durante los próximos días, por lo que recomiendan a los residentes a permanecer en casa y limitar las actividades al aire libre.

El incendio Creek, ubicado en las regiones montañosas y al pie de las colinas de los condados de Fresno y Madera, está produciendo grandes cantidades de humo que se está infiltrando a lo largo del Valle de San Joaquín, provocando que el aire se torne dañino.

Las condiciones climatológicas pronosticadas indican que el humo del incendio Creek continuará desplazándose directamente hacia las comunidades del Valle, causando un aumento de la contaminación por partículas y el potencial de altos niveles de ozono.

La contaminación por partículas puede desencadenar ataques de asma, agravar la bronquitis crónica y aumentar el riesgo de ataque cardíaco y accidente cerebrovascular. Las personas con enfermedades cardíacas o pulmonares deben seguir los consejos de sus médicos para lidiar con episodios de exposición a PM.

Las personas con afecciones respiratorias existentes, incluidos el COVID-19, niños pequeños y ancianos, son especialmente susceptibles a los efectos en la salud de esta forma de contaminación.

Cualquier persona que experimente una mala calidad del aire debido al humo de los incendios forestales debe trasladarse al interior, a un ambiente con aire acondicionado y filtrado.

Es posible que las máscaras de tela y papel comunes que usan las personas debido a preocupaciones de COVID-19 no las protejan del humo de los incendios forestales.

Si necesitas más información puedes consultar la página de incendios forestales en www.valleyair.org/wildfires

Para obtener más información, visite www.valleyair.org o llame a una oficina del distrito en Fresno (559-230-6000), Modesto (209-557-6400) o Bakersfield (661-392-5500).