

Don't expect better breathing conditions in Fresno area before Thursday, air district warns

By Jim Guy

Fresno Bee, Monday, Oct. 4, 2021

Poor air quality caused by wildfires in and near Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks will continue to plague the San Joaquin Valley through Thursday, officials from the local air pollution control district warned Monday afternoon.

And they continued to caution residents to stay indoors as much as possible.

The air quality alert, originally issued early Monday, set an alert through 11 a.m. for the day, but it was extended to 11 a.m. Thursday as smoke continued to pour into the Valley. The alert impacts the region ranging from Stockton to Bakersfield as the Windy Fire and KNP Complex Fire continued to rage.

Most concerning for residents are high levels of fine particles of particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in width, which can cause serious health problems and aggravate lung disease.

The National Weather Service in Hanford predicted no immediate relief from the toxic air in its Monday forecast, offering only the possibility of a low pressure front moving into the southern area of the region with light showers beginning Tuesday.

Air district officials urged residents to try and stay in filtered, air-conditioned environments with windows closed, and also warned that common cloth and paper masks used as a precaution against COVID-19 infections might not be sufficient against wildfire smoke. Those who needed to be outside would likely need N95-quality masks.

Smoke from Windy and KNP Complex fires prompt air quality alert

The Bakersfield, Oct. 1, 2021

Smoke from the Windy and KNP Complex fires, combined with high pressure and poor dispersion, prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue an Air Quality Alert that will continue through Monday.

That's when officials foresee the smoke might dissipate. Vulnerable residents should remain inside to reduce exposure to PM emissions, the air district said.

KNP Complex fire spurs new evacuations as it forms massive pyrocumulus cloud

By Haley Smith, Los Angeles Times

In the Fresno Bee, Monday, Oct. 4, 2021

LOS ANGELES — The KNP Complex fire burning in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks spurred new evacuations Monday as it formed a massive pyrocumulus cloud and made a leap toward dozens of historic cabins near the southern edge.

The Tulare County Sheriff's Office issued evacuation orders for Mineral King Road from Highway 198 to the Oak Grove Bridge, and Mineral King Drive up to the Sequoia National Park boundary, directing residents to leave immediately.

The evacuations came just days after similar prompts on the fire's northern and western perimeters, including orders and warnings spanning from Wilsonia to portions of Fresno.

Fire officials said a ridge of high pressure was trapping heat and smoke over the 67,708-acre blaze, which was 11% contained Monday as it continued to feed on drought-dried terrain and arid air.

"It's just incredibly dry, incredibly dry," said incident spokesman Daniel Patterson. "Definitely the factors are in place for a very active fire day today."

Patterson said downslope winds sent embers flying over containment lines overnight, creating new threats for residents and homes along the fire's southern border and prompting the latest evacuation orders.

By Monday morning, the fire was about four miles from the edge of Mineral King Road, he said, where about 65 historic cabins in Mineral King, Cabin Cove and Silver City were in the potential path of flames.

For weeks, fire crews have been clearing vegetation, running sprinklers and wrapping some of the century-old structures in protective foil. Many of the cabins are made of wood and are highly flammable.

"It's a historic location that we'd like to preserve, not only for ourselves, but for posterity, for the public," Mineral King District Association President John Crowe said recently.

Officials with the association said in a tweet Sunday that they were "hoping for the best."

But firefighters were facing challenging conditions as thick smoke limited visibility and kept some aerial operations grounded. A large pyrocumulus cloud was seen rising over the fire zone Monday.

"There is an active (cloud) right now," said Dan Harty, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford. "It looks like it's producing a pretty good column that pretty much produces its own weather."

The clouds, which can form over hot, smoky fires, have been known to generate fire whirls and lightning, which can spark additional blazes.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District extended its air quality alert through Tuesday, warning residents in at least nine surrounding counties of the potential for hazardous particulate matter from the KNP Complex and the nearby Windy fire.

Residents who can see or smell smoke are advised to stay indoors with windows and doors shut, use air purifiers when possible and wear masks if needed, officials said.

And while the southern edge of the KNP Complex was a top priority Monday, the blaze remained active on nearly every front, Patterson said.

Most of the beloved sequoia trees in the Giant Forest remained largely unscathed.

Meanwhile, crews were making progress on two other California wildfires, including the 94,746-acre Windy fire in Sequoia National Forest, which was 68% contained Monday.

Evacuation orders in the nearby California Hot Springs and Pine Flat communities will be reduced to warnings Monday afternoon, according to incident spokesman Jim Mackensen.

"We're turning a corner on this one," he said.

Mackensen said 14 residences, 10 outbuildings and two commercial properties have been destroyed by the fire.

The fire also seared several groves of giant sequoias and killed at least 30 trees, botanists said Friday. A complete assessment of tree damage remains ongoing.

Another warm, dry and breezy day was in the forecast Monday, Mackensen said, but the potential for precipitation later in the week was providing some hope.

The Fawn fire in Shasta County — which grew to nearly 8,600 acres and destroyed 185 structures during its 10-day run — was 100% contained, officials said.

Sequoia wildfires grow, forcing evacuations and air quality alerts. Here's the latest

By Tim Sheehan

Fresno Bee, Monday, Oct. 4, 2021

The KNP Complex Fire burning for almost four weeks in the Sierra Nevada range of eastern Tulare County grew by about 5,000 acres overnight, expanding to nearly 68,000 acres by Monday morning.

The U.S. Forest Service's InciWeb incident information system reported that the fire encompassed 67,708 acres within Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park and Sequoia National Forest, with containment estimated at about 11%.

That's a change from Sunday's situation report of 62,761 acres and 20% containment.

New evacuation orders were issued late Sunday for residents in the Mineral King area, Gateway, to the Park Entrance, including Sycamore Drive.

As the fire which was sparked by lightning on Sept. 10 continues to burn, the KNP Complex – along with the Windy Fire burning farther south in Tulare County – are pumping smoke into the air over the San Joaquin Valley. The volume of smoke, fine soot and ash drifting westward from the fire turned the skies over Fresno and the region a muddy orange-gray and prompted a continuing air quality warning for Valley residents.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District forecast that air quality would be “unhealthy” in the Valley from Merced County southward to Kern County.

Incident commander Dave Bales, who heads the Southwest Area Type 1 incident team battling the fire, said winds on Sunday night caused a spot fire south of Mineral King Road, prompting the latest evacuation orders from Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux.

As of Monday, at least 1,500 firefighters were engaged against the fire, including 61 fire engines, 40 water tenders, 21 dozers and 12 helicopters. The fire behavior has included extreme uphill runs and short-range spot fires. Weather is also a concern for firefighters, as high pressure continued to hold smoke in place over the area. Very low humidity also means that fuels feeding the fire – timber, chaparral and short grass in the forest – is continuing to dry out, contributing to the active spread of the blaze.

Over the next 24 hours, fire crews expect to see active to extreme fire behavior because of the low humidity. The fire is expected to continue to move north up the Redwood drainage and into the Pierce Creek drainage. On the east side, the fire is likely to continue spreading eastward, south of the Kaweah River's Middle Fork, and backing toward Mineral King Road.

WINDY FIRE STILL GROWING

Farther south, in the Sequoia National Forest, the Windy Fire is now estimated at almost 95,000 acres, with containment lines now encircling 68% of the fire's perimeter. The Windy Fire ignited on Sept. 9, and was caused by lightning like the KNP Complex to the north.

The wildfire's growth was reported at about 2,300 acres over the previous 24 hours.

The fire also is burning in the Tule River Reservation as well as the Sequoia National Forest, including the Giant Sequoia National Monument. To date, it has burned 14 homes, 14 outbuildings and two commercial buildings. Four people have been injured by the fire.

About 2,000 other homes and 100 commercial buildings remain threatened by the Windy Fire.

Evacuation orders were being downgraded Monday afternoon to warnings in California Hot Springs and Pine Flat, but orders remain in place at the White River Summer Home tract, Sugarloaf Saw Mill and Sugarloaf Mountain Park.

Almost 2,300 firefighters are working the Windy Fire, including 57 hand crews, 112 engines, 17 helicopters, 14 bulldozers and 13 water tender trucks.

The National Interagency Coordination Center reports that together, the KNP Complex and Windy fires have cost more than \$86 million to fight.

Update: Poor air quality prompts youth sports cancellations; California Classic goes on

By Yesenia Amari

Fresno Bee, Sunday, Oct. 3, 2021

Two wildfires burning in the Sierra Nevada southeast of Fresno continue to billow smoke into the San Joaquin Valley air basin – delivering an unpleasant pea soup atmosphere and prompting continued poor air quality warnings.

The Windy Fire had grown to 92,473 acres as of Sunday morning, with an increase of 510 acres from Saturday evening, but containment had reached 56%, according to the latest update.

As of Saturday evening, containment for the Windy fire stood at 52%.

Meanwhile, the KNP Complex fire had burned through 62,761 acres as of Sunday morning, according to the latest update. Containment was at 20%. (One update by National Park officials incorrectly stated the acreage as 67,761).

“Poor overnight recovery allowed for an early start to the burn day,” National Park officials said in the update. “Very active to extreme fire behavior was observed around the fire.”

There was movement to the north, east and south of the KNP Complex fire.

“High pressure continues to hold smoke in place across the fire,” the update says.

Firefighters remain in the communities of Three Rivers and Ash Mountain, National Park officials said.

“Additional federal, state, and local resources are arriving, supporting firefighting efforts and being placed where needed,” officials said. “Aviation assets are available to support ground personnel as smoke and visibility permits.”

With both fires burning, the air quality in Fresno County, and in the Central Valley, remained unchanged and unhealthy on Sunday morning. The air quality forecast for Fresno County on Sunday was at the red level, which is considered unhealthy.

The PurpleAir air quality network showed readings exceeding 200 AQI in north Fresno and southern Madera County.

Residents are advised to avoid outdoor exercise, close their windows to avoid outdoor air, run an air purifier, and wear a mask when going outdoors.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on Sept. 30 issued an air quality alert due to wildfire smoke affecting the central San Joaquin Valley. The alert remains in place and it’s expected to be lifted on Monday.

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

“Literally no amount of exposure is safe,” Marshall Burke, an associate professor of earth system science for Stanford University, told The Bee on Friday. “There’s no magic threshold under which we’re OK and beyond which we’re in trouble. The lesson is that any amount is bad. And the more you get the worse it is.”

YOUTH SOCCER CANCELED; CALIFORNIA CLASSIC A GO

Mckay Kozielski, one of the directors with CenCal Cosmos Soccer Club, a youth soccer organization in Fresno, said CenCal Cosmos canceled anywhere from 16 to 24 home soccer games Saturday and Sunday due to the unhealthy air quality.

Kozielski said he and other directors use a real-time tool to assess the air quality. He said it was “clearly not safe for young children” to take part in outdoor activities.

The Sanger Youth Soccer League also announced to parents on Facebook that it was canceling games this weekend due to the bad air quality.

But other events carried on during the weekend, including on Sunday, despite the unhealthy air quality due to the wildfire smoke, according to Kevin Hall, a longtime air quality activist.

Hall said events organized by California Classic Weekend ignored the air quality alert, with a series of outdoor events on Saturday and Sunday in Fresno. The events included a 13-mile race through downtown early Sunday.

Hall said he went to downtown before the race began and tried to talk to one of the directors involved in the events, but he wasn't interested in talking. He said hundreds of people were taking part in the race.

"There was a large degree of ignorance," Hall said on Sunday. "It's just so unbelievably horrific. It's unconscionable."

Hall said the actions of the events carrying on despite the air quality alert is a failure of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District for not having the authority to cancel events. He also described it as a "failed message" by the district and Fresno County Public Health for failing to inform residents about the dangers of bad air.

He also placed blame on the event organizers.

"The event organizer has a responsibility," he said. "They failed to inform people."

A phone number listed on the California Classic Weekend Facebook page said it wasn't taking calls at this time.

CHANGES EXPECTED TUESDAY

Dan Harty, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford, said there's a high pressure system that leads to light wind flow, causing the wildfire smoke to linger as there's "no strong wind to push it out."

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's air quality alert is expected to remain in place through 11 a.m. Monday.

Harty said he "wouldn't be surprised" if the air quality alert gets extended.

Though, he said, some relief is on the way.

"By Tuesday we start to see a system move through to give us a little bit of improvement," he said Sunday morning.

With that, temperatures will begin to cool down.

A high of 92 degrees is forecast for Sunday, about 7 degrees above normal, Harty said. A high of 91 is expected for Monday.

"We will see a cooling trend during the week," he said. "Maybe by the end of the week."

Temperatures could be in the upper 60s by the end of the week, if the area sees some precipitation, Harty said. But it won't be too cold overnight, with temperatures reaching about 50 degrees by Friday night.

Smoke From Two Fires Impacting Valley Air Quality

Oakdale Leader, Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued an Air Quality Alert for San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Tulare, and the Valley portion of Kern counties, due to smoke impacts from the KNP Complex and Windy Fire burning in Tulare County. The Mariposa County Air Pollution Control District also issued an Air Quality Alert for Mariposa County, due to smoke impacts from those same fires. Currently, the alert is in effect until 11 a.m. Monday, Oct. 4.

Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections. Residents are advised to use caution as conditions warrant. People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctor's advice for

dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion, as conditions dictate.

For additional information, call your local San Joaquin Valley Air District office. The Modesto office can be reached at 209-557-6400; Fresno 559-230-6000; Bakersfield 661-392-5500. Residents can also follow air quality conditions by downloading the free Valley Air app, available in the Apple store or Google Play.

New KNP Complex Fire evacuation orders issued near Sequoia National Park entrance

By Jim Guy,

Sacramento Bee and Merced Sun-star, Saturday, Oct. 4, 2021

The Tulare County Sheriff's Office late Sunday night issued new evacuation orders related to the KNP Complex Fire burning in Sequoia National Park.

The orders were for residences in the Mineral King area, Gateway, to the Park Entrance, including Sycamore Drive

The area includes Mineral King Drive up to the Sequoia National Park Boundary including associated structures along both sides of Highway 198 to the Park Boundary, including Oak Grove Bridge down to Highway 198, including Sierra King Drive, Crest Lane, Hammond Drive, Oak Grove Drive, but not including Dinely Drive.

Windy Fire incinerates dozens of giant sequoia as firefighters scramble to save big trees

By Joshua Yeager

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, Oct. 4, 2021

The Windy Fire is tearing through the Sierra Nevada and California's famed sequoia country, with early surveys showing that the wildfire has killed 44 of the long-lived monarchs.

The fire has burned more than 150 square miles in the Sequoia National Forest, racing through nearly a dozen groves, including the world-famous Trail of 100 Giants. It's 56% contained as of Sunday morning, according to fire officials.

Garrett Dickman, a botanist with Yosemite National Park, has teamed up with firefighters in a "Hail Mary" effort to save the towering trees, which can live for thousands of years. Decades of poor forest management and climate-change-driven drought are now threatening the big trees and the face of California's Sierra Nevada.

Crews are scaling the 200-foot-tall giants and spraying the flaming crowns of nearby trees with water, wrapping their massive trunks in fire-resistant wrap, and dropping high-tech gel from above. That's in addition to more traditional techniques such as laying sprinklers and clearing the groves of duff and other heavy fuels.

Despite those extraordinary efforts, the team has only been able to save a handful of trees in the hardest-hit groves, some of which haven't experienced fire in more than a century. While sequoias need fire to reproduce and thrive, high-intensity blazes can spread to their crowns and incinerate them.

"Five years ago we weren't doing this because we didn't need to. There's no playbook for saving giant sequoia from these massive, high-intensity fires," Dickman said. "Not to diminish the heroism of the firefighters, but it's only a couple of individual trees that we're saving when we need to be thinking of the whole population."

The best way to do that, Dickman says, is through active forest management and prescribed fire — highly controlled burns carried out and overseen by professionals. In actively managed groves, the destruction caused by Windy Fire has been minimal, he said.

In Sequoia National Park to the north, firefighters have credited decades of prescribed burning for saving the Giant Forest Grove and General Sherman, the world's largest tree by volume, from the KNP Complex. Lightning caused both the KNP and Windy fires to ignite on Sept. 9.

"We thought we had more time to make these Hail Mary measures, but [the Windy Fire] is moving so fast and burning so hot," he said. Though it's now October and the beginning of Fall, Windy Fire incident commander Mark Morales said "conditions in the forest are more like what you would observe in August: very dry with high temperatures and low humidity."

Now, firefighters are doing damage control, going into the burned groves and raking the burning duff off of the sequoias' sensitive roots, which grow close to the ground. At the same time, Dickman is keeping a "body count" of the likely dead sequoia: those that have toppled over completely or had more than 95% of their crowns burned.

It's been a harrowing decade for the world's giant sequoia population. The 2020 Castle Fire, which burned in the same area as the Windy Fire, killed between 10% and 14% of the world's sequoias — up to 10,600 trees.

Before 2015, there have only been two recorded instances of mass sequoia die-offs. The trees have extremely thick bark and crowns that tower hundreds of feet above the forest floor, making them one of the world's most fire-adapted species.

But even the regal sequoias are having trouble withstanding the west's record mega-blazes. Forests across the Sierra are overgrown with trees, millions of them dead and desiccated due to a climate-change-driven drought now strangling the Golden State.

In Dickman's Yosemite, for example, some parts of the forest contain 125 tons of dead wood per acre. That's roughly the equivalent of a Boeing 747 in lumber, he said.

"This is a fire-resistant species. If anything can take the punch, it's giant sequoias. But this punch is way too big and it's hitting way too hard," Dickman said. "Sequoias wouldn't be on the landscape if fires were like [the Windy Fire] in the past. You couldn't have 2,000- or 3,000-year-old trees. It just isn't possible."

To protect the remaining sequoia, land managers have formed the Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition. The group is advocating for more prescribed burning and fuels reduction projects across the Sierra Nevada, the trees' only natural habitat.

Dickman believes the big trees are worth saving.

"Giant sequoias are one of those things that represents a place and a people; they help make California California," he said. "You look up at those trees, and you see America. They're big, their scars are beautiful, and they live a really long time."

Smoky air from fires persists in Valley, Sierra. Here's how bad it is this weekend

By Carmen Kohlruss

Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee and other papers, Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021

Unhealthy to hazardous air quality readings dominated the charts Saturday in the central San Joaquin Valley and neighboring foothills and the Sierra Nevada.

Smoke from area wildfires, including the KNP Complex burning in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, will continue to "plague" the Valley for the next few days, said the Interagency Wildland Fire Air Quality Response Program in a Saturday morning update.

"The thickest smoke plumes are from Fresno to Porterville," the update states, "but effects are noticeable well to the north and south. Visalia and Fresno will reach unhealthy concentrations of smoke. Foothill and mountain areas near the wildfires will reach 'Very Unhealthy' and 'Hazardous' categories."

Air monitors showed hazardous air conditions in Oakhurst, North Fork, Auberry, Shaver Lake, Hume, Three Rivers, Porterville, Lemon Cove, and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

Very unhealthy locations included Visalia, Squaw Valley, Prather and Tollhouse.

Almost all other readings from the Fresno to Visalia areas were listed as unhealthy.

“Locations on the Tule River Indian Reservation are registering some of the worst air quality in the nation,” fire officials said Saturday about the Windy Fire burning in that area. “Individuals with existing respiratory, lung or heart conditions should limit their exposure by staying indoors.”

Smoke from the Windy and KNP Complex fires in Tulare County, combined with high pressure and poor dispersion, prompted Valley air quality officials to issue an air quality alert through Monday. Particulate matter in the air can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Some tips from officials to stay safe:

- Keep doors and windows closed.
- Use central air and/or a portable air cleaner. Do not add to indoor pollution.
- When air quality improves, even temporarily, air out your home.
- Outdoors: Take it easier during smoky times, avoid strenuous activities.
- Do not rely on dust masks or bandannas for protection from smoke. If you must be out in smoky conditions, an N95 respirator can protect you, if it fits snugly to your face and is worn properly.

Air quality can be checked at fire.airnow.gov, valleyair.org/wildfires, and myRAAN.com.

Evacuation orders issued for Big Meadows, Grant Grove communities due to KNP Complex

By Sheyanne N Roero

Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, Oct. 1, 2020

Smoke from the Windy and KNP Complex fires prompted San Joaquin Valley air quality officials to issue an air quality alert. Smoke is expected to impact the San Joaquin Valley through Monday.

Tulare County's air quality is listed as "Unhealthy." Visalia's Air Quality Index (AQI) was 181 around 9:30 a.m. The higher the AQI the greater the level of air pollution.

The AQI closer to Three Rivers and the fires is 400, extremely dangerous.

District officials warned residents impacted by smoke to remain indoors to reduce their exposure to harmful particulate matter.

KNP Complex

After several days of favorable weather and minimal fire growth, warmer temperatures wreaked havoc for firefighters assigned to the KNP Complex.

The fire is now 51,596 acres and 20% contained. On Thursday, fire officials reported "very active fire behavior" around much of the incident.

Crews responded to a roughly 600-acre spot fire that has crossed the north fork of the Kaweah River, approximately three miles southeast of Eshom Point.

The spot fire promoted an evacuation order for the communities of Eshom and Hartland Camp, including Eshom Valley Drive, from Fresno County Line, south to Tarbell Pocket on Eshom Valley Drive, and North Mountain Road, 468 North to the county line.

The evacuation order includes all structures, side roads, associated roads, and forest service roads. To evacuate, residents are asked to use Eshom Valley to Stage Coach, to Highway 245 or Dry Creek.

A road closure is in effect at Eshom Valley Road and Stage Coach.

An evacuation order was also issued for the communities of Big Meadows, Weston Meadows, and Quail Flat in the Giant Sequoia National Monument. The National Park Service issued evacuation order for all residents, employees, and cooperators in the Grant Grove, Wilsonia, and Cedar Grove communities of Kings Canyon National Park.

All non-fire related persons are required to leave those areas by 2 p.m. Friday. Evacuees need to use Highway 180 westbound to evacuate the area.

While the northern most portion of the blaze forced evacuations, other areas received good news.

Evacuation orders were downgraded to a warning for residences in the Mineral King area: Mineral King Road from Highway 198 to the Oak Grove Bridge, including Crest, Sierra King, Hammond, and Oak Grove. Orders were also downgraded for residents along Sierra Drive from Mineral King Road, north to the entrance to Sequoia National Park, including the homes on Sycamore Drive.

These homes were not impacted by fire.

There will be a road closure at the Horse Corrals on Mineral King Road, approximately 2.25 miles east of Highway 198. Fire crews continue to travel on Mineral King Road.

Because of the narrow roadways, Mineral King Road will be closed to the public during the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. The Tulare County Sheriff's Department will be enforcing these closures and urges residents to plan accordingly.

Additionally, identification and proof of residency will be needed to access these areas. Proper documentation must include the person's name and address within the impacted area. Examples include a driver's license, utility bill or address documentation from the U.S. Post Office for people who use a post office box.

Windy Fire

Containment continues to grow and reached 40% on Friday. The Windy Fire has burned through 89,804 acres, a 1,736-acre increase from Thursday morning's estimate.

Low humidity and warmer temperatures meant that there was increased fire spread in grass and brush on Thursday.

On Friday, northeasterly winds are expected over the ridges before veering westerly by afternoon. Peak gusts up to 15 mph are expected with locally higher speeds along the Kern River. From Saturday to Monday, warm and very dry conditions will continue.

"There are 2,500 people assigned to the fire, the majority of whom are in the field, day and night, working hard to protect natural values and structures around the entire fire perimeter and attempting to suppress the fire as quickly and safely as possible," fire officials stated on a daily briefing.

Wildfires have worsened Fresno's bad air quality. Here's what the experts say to do

By Thaddeus Miller

Merced Sun-Star and Sacramento Bee, Friday, Oct. 1, 2021

Air quality in Fresno and the San Joaquin Valley is expected to be especially poor through the weekend because of the fires burning in the Sequoia National Forest, according to experts.

The Windy Fire in the forest and Tulare County was approaching 90,000 acres Friday, and the KNP Complex to its north nears 52,000 acres, according to the latest from the National Forest Service.

In response to the air quality, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued an air quality alert on Thursday. People in the Valley should take measures to avoid contact with the particulate matter that comes from the smoke and ash in the air, the district said.

Parts of Fresno and the Valley on Friday morning showed a particulate level in the purple range, the worst rating on the district's meter. When the matter reaches the purple range, officials say everyone should avoid being outdoors.

Staying in a filtered, air-conditioned place with the windows closed is recommended for all residents in the Valley.

The smoke is exacerbated by a warmer system of weather hanging around the region until at least Tuesday, according to meteorologist David Spector with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

Cooler weather is expected to shift up Tuesday through the Valley from Southern California. “We’re going to see cooler temperatures and it’s going to open the door for a new pattern change next week,” Spector said.

By the end of next week, the Valley high temperatures will be in the high 60s and lows in high 40s, he said.

Particulate matter can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Those with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors’ advice for dealing with particulate matter, the district says.

“Literally no amount of exposure is safe,” said Marshall Burke, an associate professor of earth system science for Stanford University. “There’s no magic threshold under which we’re OK and beyond which we’re in trouble. The lesson is that any amount is bad. And the more you get the worse it is.”

NATIONAL EFFECTS

Smoke from wildfires, which have burned millions of acres in California alone, is choking vast swaths of the country, an analysis of federal satellite imagery by National Public Radio’s California Newsroom and Stanford University’s Environmental Change and Human Outcomes Lab found.

The monthslong analysis, based on more than 10 years of data collected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and analyzed down to the ZIP code level, reveals a startling increase in the number of days residents are breathing smoke across California and the Pacific Northwest, to Denver and Salt Lake City in the Rocky Mountains and rural Kentucky and West Virginia in Appalachia.

When looking at major U.S. cities, the analysis found the starkest increase in San Jose, where smoke days were up more than 400%. San Jose residents breathed smoke 45 days a year on average between 2016 and 2020. In Los Angeles and San Diego, the number of days with wildfire smoke increased 230% to 32 days a year in Los Angeles and 23 days in San Diego.

Parts of Fresno saw 60 days a year with wildfire smoke between 2016 and 2020, an increase of 225%, the report says.

Even the East Coast was not immune as prevailing winds carried smoke plumes from the western United States and Canada thousands of miles away. In Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., the study found the number of days residents breathed wildfire smoke increased approximately 40% to over 20 days of smoke on average in a year.

“This is no longer just a West Coast story. This is a U.S.-wide story,” Burke said.

The Valley district’s wildfire information page is valleyair.org/wildfires. Real-time air quality by ZIP code is also available at myRAAN.com.

Hot, dry weather challenges crews fighting California wildfires

By Alex Wigglesworth – Los Angeles Times

In the Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021

Crews faced challenging conditions as they worked to contain wildfires in the southern Sierra amid unusually warm temperatures and historic drought.

The KNP Complex fire in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park had burned 58,283 acres and was 20% contained as of early Saturday, when it sparked new evacuation warnings in Fresno County. Those in Sequoia Lake, Cedarbrook, Etheda Springs and Pinehurst were told to be prepared to leave.

A thick layer of smoke that had settled over the fire reduced visibility, limiting the use of aircraft, said Cassie Adams, public information officer on the incident. Crews were keeping a close eye on the weather in case the inversion lifted later in the day, which would allow the use of more aircraft but could also cause fire activity to pick up and create dangerous conditions for firefighters, she said. They were also using drones equipped with infrared cameras to conduct reconnaissance that might ordinarily be done by planes, she said.

While the smoke was mostly concentrated over the fire, some of it was draining into the San Joaquin Valley, producing poor air quality along the east side, said David Spector, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford. Temperatures in the area were five to eight degrees above normal and were expected to remain elevated through Monday, he said.

The fire was active overnight, particularly along the northwestern end where it spotted over the North Fork Kaweah River on Thursday, Adams said. It also grew to the east, near Castle Creek Grove. About 1,345 personnel were assigned to the incident.

Crews were working to keep flames from moving further north and west, toward communities in the Hartland area, using miles of dozer line that had been put in earlier as a contingency, Adams said. Firefighters were preparing structures in those communities by clearing debris and installing sprinklers and hose lays, but the line was holding as of Saturday morning, she said.

Crews also conducted back burning operations along the northern perimeter farther to the east, in the Dorst Creek area, Adams said.

"If we feel like based on the weather and fire behavior, that we have the ability to control fuels in a given area and we can safely ignite a small fire to create a thick black line that would inhibit the uncontrolled fire from crossing it, then that's what we will do," she said.

The fire had forced 659 people from their homes, with evacuation orders issued Friday for the communities of Big Meadows, Weston Meadows and Quail Flat in the Giant Sequoia National Monument, as well as Grant Grove, Wilsonia and Cedar Grove in Kings Canyon National Park, Adams said.

Along the southern edge of the fire, authorities on Friday downgraded to a warning an evacuation order for residents along the Mineral King Road entrance of the park.

The fire started during a Sept. 9 lightning storm and has been difficult to control as it burns through dry forests crowded with trees competing for limited moisture that has been made more scarce by climate change and drought, experts say.

California and several other Western states endured the hottest summer on record. And preliminary data indicate that the water year, which ended Sept. 30, was the driest on record for multiple areas in Northern California, including Redding, Red Bluff and Sacramento, the National Weather Service said Saturday.

Farther south in the Hanford forecast area, the picture looked less dire, but there were still areas that ranked in the top 10 for driest water years, Spector said.

"The fuels themselves are very, very, very dry," Adams said. "And there's not a lot of humidity recovery in the evening hours, when usually we're able to go in and be a little more direct with fire suppression efforts. We're not really getting that relief as far as humidity goes that allows fuels to retain more moisture."

The KNP Complex fire, as well as the Windy fire burning in the Sequoia National Forest about 25 miles south, have also drawn concern for the many giant sequoia trees in those areas.

The western slopes of the Sierra Nevada are the only places these ancient trees grow naturally. Although they are considered one of the longest-living and most fire-adapted species on Earth, last year's Castle fire burned at such a high intensity that it wiped out an estimated 10% to 14% of the population. Park officials, firefighters and conservationists have been working to avoid a repeat of the devastation.

As of Saturday morning, the KNP Complex fire had burned through at least 11 sequoia groves, toppling one giant that fell across Generals Highway last week.

The Windy fire had seared several groves of giant sequoias, killing at least 30 trees, Garrett Dickman, a botanist assigned to the fire, said Friday.

Officials said Saturday that it will take some time for the extent of the tree mortality to become clear, as teams were continuing to visit the groves and assess the damage. Some of them were in areas too remote to access safely while the fire was still active.

The Windy fire was 91,237 acres and 52% contained as of Saturday morning. About 2,342 personnel were assigned to the fire, which had destroyed 14 homes and two commercial buildings and was

threatening about 2,100 more buildings. The homes that burned were in the Sugarloaf area, said Sue Exline, public information officer with the U.S. Forest Service.

As containment improved, authorities on Saturday afternoon downgraded evacuation orders for parts of Sugarloaf Village, as well as Panorama Heights, Poso Park, Idlewild, Pleasant View, Balance Rock, Posey and Vincent Ranch. Evacuation warnings for those areas remained in place. Other areas were still under evacuation orders that covered an estimated 200 people in Tulare County.

Firefighters were mostly focused on shoring up containment lines and dousing hotspots deep in the interior of the fire, Exline said.

“The fire’s kind of laid down around the perimeter, but we can’t let our guard down,” she said.

Four firefighters have been injured since the lightning-sparked fire started Sept. 9. Most of the injuries were minor, with the exception of one firefighter who suffered second-degree burns Thursday and was taken to Community Regional Medical Center in Fresno in good condition, Exline said.

Crews were being similarly challenged by warm, dry conditions because of a dome of high pressure sitting over the area, she said.

“We are having conditions out in the forest that you might see in August, with very, very low humidity and very warm temperatures,” she said. “So the fire is still burning very actively at night.”

Some relief could be on the way this week, with temperatures forecast to drop four to eight degrees Tuesday followed by a sharp cooling trend Wednesday that will bring temperatures to below normal by Thursday, Spector said.

There is also a slight chance of rain Thursday night into Friday, as well as next weekend, but neither system seems likely to drop enough precipitation to be considered wetting, Spector said.

“It was looking more promising a couple of days ago, but with a blocking pattern in the eastern U.S., it’s going to be tough,” he said.

The possibility of improved conditions was welcome news to beleaguered fire crews across the state. So far this year in California, 7,769 wildfires have burned just shy of 2.5 million acres, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. The total area burned is second only to last year, when 9,917 fires burned nearly 4.3 million acres.

Still, there have been some encouraging signs. Earlier this week, the National Interagency Fire Center downgraded the national preparedness level to 3, saying that a decrease in wildfires across the U.S. meant that more firefighting resources had become available. Before that, the nation spent a record-setting 99 days at preparedness level 4 or 5, with 5 denoting the highest level of wildfire activity, the NIFC said.

Authorities are still urging people to remain vigilant, particularly in fire-prone wilderness areas, as the season is far from over.

“Anybody going to visit their national forest or public lands right now needs to be really very careful,” Exline said. “The forests are still very, very dry.”

Parts of Kern County experience bad air quality Sunday

By: Kristin Vartan, 23ABC

23 ABC News, Sunday, Oct. 3, 2021

Kern County continued to experience unhealthy weather conditions Sunday due to ongoing wildfires throughout the state.

“A lot of these fires are in the Sierra Nevada or the adjacent foothills, so when you have the easterly wind, it pushes the smoke right back into the valley and you have that bathtub bowl effect, where it all just sinks into the valley and the particulates don’t have anywhere to go,” said Andrew Bollenbacher Meteorologist, National Weather Service In Hanford.

That interaction of the weather and the elements Bollenbacher mentioned, caused a smokey haze over much of the San Joaquin Valley here in Kern County. Earlier this week, the smoke got trapped in the Kern River Valley from the Windy Fire blazing North of Kern County.

On Saturday, an official of the Kern Valley Healthcare District told 23ABC how smoke from nearby wildfires has affected their residents over the past week. writing in part: "We have seen an uptick of ER visits due to the fire. During the last two fires we have seen patients with eye irritations, headaches and breathing problems. We treat them in our ER with a breathing treatment and they are good to go. People are also experiencing depression because of the smoke. Kern Valley Hospital does not have an ICU. For anyone requiring a higher level of care we stabilize the patient so they can be safely transported."

According to IQAir, the air quality has since improved in the Kern River Valley, but now, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution control district--those conditions worsening in Bakersfield Sunday with an AQI of 157, or unhealthy for the average person.

The good news: Kern County should start seeing an active weather pattern mid-week this coming week or early the week after, according to Bollenbacher.

"We may see an opportunity for the winds to start coming out of the southwest, so maybe we get a reprieve from the smoke, but I don't want to jinx the forecast," Bollenbacher said.

Sequoia wildfires growing as one passes 90,000 acres. More evacuations ordered

By Thaddeus Miller

Merced Sun-Star and Sacramento Bee, Friday, Oct. 1, 2021

The Windy Fire on the Tule River Indian Reservation was approaching 90,000 acres Friday and remained less than half contained, according to Sequoia National Forest officials.

The lightning-sparked blaze grew by more than 1,500 acres from the previous day to 89,804 acres, forest officials said. It is 40% contained.

The fire slowly expanded to the east into landscape adjacent to Baker Peak, officials said. Residual heat south of the Tule River Indian Reservation continues to be a concern of risk to cultural and infrastructure assets within the reservation.

Fire crews are focused on defending structures in Fair View, Sugarloaf, Hot Springs, Pine Flat, White River Summer Homestead and others in the area. At the same time, according to officials, crews are building lines to further contain the flames.

Tulare County officials have lifted mandatory evacuations in a number of communities. The latest information is available at the Sheriff's Office's website, tularecounty.ca.gov, or on its Facebook page.

LATEST EVACUATIONS

Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks on Friday issued mandatory evacuation orders for the Grant Grove, Wilsonia and Cedar Grove communities

All non-fire related people are required to leave those areas by noon Friday, officials said in a news release. Residents should use Highway 180 westbound to evacuate the area.

National Park Service residents should meet at 3 p.m. Friday at the Bear Mountain Library, 30733 E. Kings Canyon Road, 93675. Specific information on lodging arrangements for displaced residents will be available at the library, officials said.

To the Windy's north is the KNP Complex Fire, which was at 51,596 acres Friday, according to forest officials. That's more than 2,200 acres larger than the day before.

The blaze in both Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks is 20% contained, and originally started as two separate fires set off by lightning.

New evacuation orders were issued Thursday night for the communities of Eshom and Hartland Camp, including Eshom Valley Drive from the Fresno County line, south to Tarbell Pocket on Eshom Valley Drive, and North Mountain Road, 468 North to the county line.

The Tulare County Sheriff's Office warned residents to evacuate using Eshom Valley to Stage Coach, to Highway 245 or Dry Creek.

An evacuation order means an immediate threat to life, safety, and property and all residents and visitors must leave now before the fire reaches the community.

New evacuation warnings were issued for the community of Badger to the north Tulare County boundary, including Whittaker Forest Road, Hogback Road, CA 245, Dry Creek, Sierra Glenn, all the way to Wild Hog Canyon; then south to Deep trail, Shadley Jeep Trail; then east to Eshom Valley Road and north to the Tulare County boundary.

FRESNO COUNTY EVACUATIONS

The Fresno County Sheriff's Office announced an evacuation warning for the Miramonte and Pinehurst area.

A temporary evacuation point is at the Woodlake Community Center at 145 N. Magnolia St. Individuals with RVs/trailers may find information about where they can park at the college, or you may go to the International Agri-Center 4500 S. Laspina St. in Tulare, Gate D, where you may dry camp.

Earlier in the day, some evacuations had been downgraded, among them for those in the areas of Mineral King Road from Highway 198 to the Oak Grove Bridge, including Crest, Sierra King, Hammond and Oak Grove.

There will be a road closure at the Horse Corrals on Mineral King Road, about 2.25 miles east of Highway 198.

Law enforcement continues to warn residents, even as evacuations ease, to be on the lookout for remaining fire personnel and equipment.

Because of the narrow roadways, Mineral King Road will be closed to the public from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. to allow personnel to move through the area without delay.

Residents are asked to present proof of residence to law enforcement officers; the proof must include the person's name and address within the impacted area.

KNP update: Kings Canyon evacuates due to spot fire near park entrance. Grant Grove under watch

By Bethany Clough

Sacramento Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Friday, Oct. 1, 2021

A new spot fire has prompted a mandatory evacuation order for some well-known spots within Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks: the communities of Grant Grove, Wilsonia and Cedar Grove.

The parks have been closed to tourists for several days.

The evacuations apply to residents, employees and anyone else who might be doing business in those areas. They are asked to leave by noon Friday, exiting via westbound Highway 180.

A spot fire popped up as part of the KNP Complex Fire on Thursday afternoon, first prompting evacuation orders for communities of Eshom and Hartland Camp.

Flames had crossed the north fork of the Kaweah River, about two or three miles southeast of Eshom Point, and burned about 500 to 600 acres.

Fire officials say the wildfire is now burning about six miles or from the Big Stump area, which is near the Highway 180 entrance to the parks. Grant Grove, one of the park's most popular spots where tourists flock to see some of the biggest giant sequoias in the world, is just north of Big Stump.

Crews have been tackling the spot fire since Thursday, using air tankers and helicopters.

"They detected it right away and were able to get air resources on it as well as (bull)dozers and crews working through the night," said Susie Heisey, a public information officer working on the KNP Complex Fire.

“It is really high elevation, steep terrain,” she said.

They are hoping to get to the fire on the ground, possibly near Cherry Flat, and create a line around it, she said.

ARE THE GIANT SEQUOIAS SAFE?

Fire has moved through other giant sequoia groves in the KNP Complex fire without doing major damage.

Crews are prepared if the fire reaches the Grant Grove or Big Stump area, Heisey said.

“It really depends on what previous fuels treatments have been done in those areas and how intensely the fire moves through those area,” she said.

In the past year or so, crews have used equipment to remove material that could burn intensely in the Big Stump area, she said.

Crews have also been preparing the Grant Grove area in case the fire reaches it, including protecting buildings and trees, she said.

“They have had some success with different practices on this fire to allow for the movement across these groves and hopefully there won’t be any long-term impact.”

EVACUATED EMPLOYEES, RESIDENTS

Residents from the evacuated communities in Kings Canyon National Park are asked to meet at 3 p.m. Friday at the Bear Mountain Library at 30733 East Kings Canyon Road in Squaw Valley. Information about lodging options will be available there.

Employees are asked to call their supervisors about work assignments. Those with urgent concerns can call the park’s dispatch center at [559-565-3195](tel:559-565-3195).

Eldorado National Forest partially reopens as crews continue to rein in Caldor Fire

By Michael McGough

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, Sept. 30, 2021

U.S. Forest Service officials have reopened part of Eldorado National Forest to the public for day use only, ending a six-week full closure brought on by the Caldor Fire.

The forest remains closed to the public for most areas south of Highway 50 and north of Highway 88, under a new order that took effect starting Thursday. That order replaces a full closure that had been in place since Aug. 17.

The closure extends a few miles north of Highway 50 near the summit. Northern and northeastern portions of the forest are open, including near Union Valley Reservoir. Mormon Emigrant Trail, Silver Fork Road, Wrights Lake Road and parts of the Pacific Crest Trail remain closed, the Forest Service noted.

Bans on overnight camping and on all forms of open flame remain in place, the Forest Service said in a news release.

The new closure order is set to expire March 31, 2022, “but could be lifted sooner or modified if conditions warrant,” officials wrote.

The large, once-destructive Caldor Fire is not yet fully contained, but activity has slowed significantly. Evacuation orders for thousands of residents, including the entire city of South Lake Tahoe and surrounding areas, were lifted about three weeks ago.

The Forest Service and Cal Fire reported the Caldor Fire at 221,775 acres (347 square miles) with 83% containment.

It has grown minimally in the past couple of weeks — just a single acre burned in the past 24 hours, authorities wrote Thursday morning — but the Forest Service advises that fire activity including spot fires remain possible, and that the area commonly sees wind events in October.

“The Caldor Fire threat is not over yet,” Eldorado National Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais said in a prepared statement. “We are still engaged in fire suppression and there are many hazards in the burned area.”

DIXIE FIRE

Lassen Volcanic National Park also announced Thursday that areas of the park not being impacted by the Dixie Fire will reopen to the public next Monday.

That includes the southwest and Manzanita Lake areas of the park, park superintendent Jim Richardson said in a news release.

The eastern portion, including Summit Lake, Butte Lake, Warner Valley and Juniper Lake, remain closed.

The Caldor Fire ignited Aug. 14 south of Pollock Pines, and largely destroyed the town of Grizzly Flats in its earliest days. It is the 15th-largest and 16th-most destructive wildfire in California’s recorded history.

The Dixie Fire, reported Thursday at 963,309 acres (1,505) with 94% containment, is the state’s second-biggest fire ever and its 14th-most destructive.

Stanislaus firefighter burned in Caldor Fire gets huge welcome home from hospital

By Erin Tracy

The Modesto Bee, Friday, Oct. 1, 2021

A West Stanislaus firefighter was welcomed home by about 200 people after spending more than a month in the hospital due to severe burns he suffered while battling the Caldor Fire. Richard Gerety III of Patterson was on a strike team with three other firefighters from West Stanislaus Fire that was assigned to the fire in El Dorado County in August. The team had been there 10 days when on Aug. 28 Gerety fell, suffering third-degree burns on his arms and hands and second-degree burns to his legs. Gerety, who began volunteering for West Stanislaus Fire in 2017, underwent skin grafting surgery at UC Davis Medical Center and spent the last month there recovering.

When he returned to his Patterson home Wednesday, fire trucks and engines lined the streets near his house and neighbors held up signs welcoming him home. Jeff Gregory, fire chief for Patterson and West Stanislaus Fire, said apart from their agencies, firefighters from Newman, Westley, Burbank Paradise, Woodland Avenue, Mountain View, Denair, Turlock Rural Hughson, Cal Fire, Stanislaus County Fire Warden, Stanislaus County OES, Stanislaus County Fire Prevention and Pioneer Fire department from Amador County attended the homecoming.

Gregory said Gerety is happy to be home, holding his 2-year-old son again and eating home-cooked meals. “He has more recovery ahead, including physical therapy,” Gregory said. “The goal for him as well as the department is to get him back to work. We just want to be sure we don’t rush things.” Gerety is one of five people, civilians and fire personnel, injured by the Caldor Fire. The fire, which started Aug. 14, has burned 221,775 acres in three counties and destroyed more than 1,000 structures. It is 91 percent contained, with full containment expected later this month.

Update: Evacuation orders issued Eshom, Hartland Camp; warnings for Badger

By Joshua Yeager

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, Sept. 29, 2021

Updated story 5:50 p.m. Thursday: Tulare County Sheriff Boudreaux has issued evacuation orders for the communities of Eshom and Hartland Camp, including Eshom Valley Drive, from Fresno County Line, South to Tarbell Pocket on Eshom Valley Drive, and North Mountain Road, 468 North to the County line. The evacuation order includes all structures, side roads, associated roads, and forest service roads, due to the KNP Complex Fire.

To evacuate, please use Eshom Valley to Stage Coach, to Highway 245 or Dry Creek.

Windy Fire evacuee: 'You could hear the rumble from the fire'

By Lauren Jennings

Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, Oct. 1, 2021

California Hot Springs resident, Ms. Campbell, couldn't manage to fall asleep last Thursday.

Somewhere nearby were flames from the Windy Fire, this she knew — along with the rest of her neighbors — and before Friday's sunrise, they began to gather outside.

"You could hear the rumble from the fire," Campbell said, sitting on a cot provided by the American Red Cross. "We couldn't see flames, but we could hear it."

The Portville College gymnasium floor is temporarily covered with protective black mats and lined with cots, blankets and pillows — ready for potential Windy Fire evacuees.

Campbell and her neighbor, Celina Couture, evacuated their California Hot Springs homes one week ago.

There, they left behind many of their belongings before arriving at a temporary evacuation point at Porterville College in search of support and guidance.

"It is hard because you are with a lot of people you don't know," Couture said about her evacuation experience so far. "When you want to change clothes or go take a shower, there are always people who need to do the same thing."

Simply put, Couture misses her privacy.

Campbell didn't deny some of the lows that come with having to evacuate, but she noted the experience is temporary.

"I had the opposite opinion. I thought it has been quite easy," Campbell said.

The two traveled down the mountain together, but not before marking their doors to let fire officials know they had already evacuated their homes.

"I am watching the community come together," Campbell continued. "That is really encouraging... it makes me proud to be an American."

Despite differing perspectives, both were incredibly thankful for the firefighters and incident teams, American Red Cross staff, as well as the mental and health services Tulare County offered them and other evacuees.

A registered nurse is always at the evacuation point, ensuring those who take daily medications receive them while they are away from their homes, among other things.

Some evacuees, for example, use CPAP machines at night (a therapy used for managing sleep apnea), so the Red Cross makes certain accommodations like ensuring their cot is stationed near a wall outlet.

Around 13 evacuees have used the resources offered at the Porterville location so far.

Neither Couture nor Campbell has experienced an evacuation prior to last week; however, other evacuees staying at the Portville spot have been through the process before.

Moto, an older, much-loved cat among Red Cross volunteers, as well as his owner, also evacuated their home.

The black-haired, green-eyed cat is familiar with evacuations — more than most. Moto's owner has been evacuated three times due to wildfires over the last two years.

She even joked with Red Cross employees as she left the shelter to return home Thursday. "See you same time next year," she said. Moto also said his goodbyes to Red Cross staff, and evacuees he had become friendly with.

Suzu Shimonishi, a volunteer with the Central California Animal Disaster Team, and other volunteers with the nonprofit are looking over the animals during the duration of their stay.

The veteran and dog owner said she is no stranger to fires. Shimonishi detailed some of her experiences, which ranged from volunteering at food banks to traveling throughout evacuation areas, feeding and taking care of livestock.

This time around, she is safely tucked away in the Pirate's men's locker room, feeding the shelter's few remaining animals.

Taylor Poisall, American Red Cross regional communications director, said the nonprofit is used to seeing familiar faces such as Moto. However, the pandemic has made the occurrence far less often.

Last year, the Red Cross housed evacuees in hotels, whereas this year, the Red Cross is back to its usual disaster response, with some added COVID-19 protections.

By reverting to the normal disaster response, the Red Cross has been able to keep resources available at one location, rather than sending individuals from city to city.

Another positive, Poisall said, is watching neighbors meet and interact with each other for the first time. She said talks about future barbecues happen quite often.

The Windy Fire has scorched nearly 90,000 acres across the Sequoia National Forest and Tule River Indian Reservation as of Thursday night.

For neighbors Campbell and Couture, both want to be home, but not before it's deemed safe by fire officials. Ponderosa, Quaking Aspen, Camp Nelson and surrounding communities, Johnsondale, California Hot Springs, and Pine Flat remain under evacuation orders or warnings.

"I want to go home, but I want to wait," Couture said. "It is not ready for us yet. In some places, they have no electricity, no water."

The duo urged residents and community members to listen to evacuation warnings and orders.

"Get your life out of there," Campbell said. "Firefighters shouldn't have to worry about your life, they have a job to do. Get out of their way so they can fight the fire."

Parts of Fresno County now receive evacuation warning due to growing KNP Complex Fire

By Larry Valenzuela

Fresno Bee, Thursday, Sept. 30, 2021

The KNP Complex Fire now has triggered evacuation warnings in parts of Fresno County.

The Fresno County Sheriff's Office issued an evacuation warning for residents in the Miramonte and Pinehurst area, specifically in zone K159.

The eastern and southern boundaries of this zone are the county line on both sides. The northern boundary includes the south portion of the Giant Sequoia National Monument.

The KNP fire was started by a lightning strike near where the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks meet about four weeks ago. The fire is 20% contained. It was at 49,496 acres as of a Thursday night update.

As of Thursday night, new evacuation orders were issued in Tulare County for the communities of Eshom and Hartland Camp, including Eshom Valley Drive from the Fresno County line, south to Tarbell Pocket on Eshom Valley Drive, and North Mountain Road, 468 North to the county line.

The Tulare County Sheriff's Office warned residents to evacuate using Eshom Valley to Stage Coach, to Highway 245 or Dry Creek.

An evacuation order means an immediate threat to life, safety, and property and all residents and visitors must leave now before the fire reaches the community.

New evacuation warnings were issued for the community of Badger to the north Tulare County boundary, including Whittaker Forest Road, Hogback Road, CA 245, Dry Creek, Sierra Glenn, all the way to Wild

Hog Canyon; then south to Deep trail, Shadley Jeep Trail; then east to Eshom Valley Road and north to the Tulare County boundary.

CREWS BATTLE SPOT FIRE

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks officials announced Thursday night that ground and air crews were responding to a new spot fire.

Flames had crossed the north fork of the Kaweah River, about two or three miles southeast of Eshom Point, and burned about 500 to 600 acres.

EVACUATION POINTS, OTHER WARNINGS

A temporary evacuation point is at the Woodlake Community Center at 145 N. Magnolia St.

Individuals with RVs/trailers may find information about where they can park at the college, or they may go to the International Agri-Center 4500 S. Laspina St. in Tulare, Gate D, to dry camp.

Earlier in the day, some evacuations had been downgraded, among them the areas of Mineral King Road from Highway 198 to the Oak Grove Bridge, including Crest, Sierra King, Hammond and Oak Grove.

There will be a road closure at the Horse Corrals on Mineral King Road, about 2.25 miles east of Highway 198.

Law enforcement continues to warn residents, even as evacuations ease, to be on the lookout for remaining fire personnel and equipment.

Because of the narrow roadways, Mineral King Road will be closed to the public from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. to allow personnel to move through the area without delay.

Residents returning as the evacuation alerts are eased are asked to present proof of residence to law enforcement officers.

Proof must include the person's name and address within the impacted area. A driver's license, utility bill or address documentation from the U.S. Post Office for those who use a P.O. box are acceptable.

Smoky skies continue to plague the Valley floor and on Thursday triggered another pollution alert by air-quality officials.

"Smoke infiltration from the Windy and KNP Complex fires in Tulare County combined with high pressure and poor dispersion have prompted air quality officials in the San Joaquin Valley to issue an air quality alert," according to a release from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "Smoke is expected to continue to impact the San Joaquin Valley through Monday, October 4, when a low-pressure system moving over the Valley is forecast to improve dispersion."

People being impacted by smoke are urged to remain indoors to reduce their exposure to particulate matter emissions, which can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Almond Update: Ag Burning Alternatives Funding to Help Producers

By Brian German

AgNet West, Thursday, Sept. 30, 2021

Industry members have an opportunity to apply for funding for ag burning alternatives to help comply with air quality regulations. The practice of burning woody biomass in the San Joaquin Valley will no longer be permitted by 2025. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has allocated more than \$178 million to help producers implement alternatives to agricultural burning. Alternatives include whole orchard recycling, chipping, and shredding. Principal Analyst for the Almond Board of California, Jesse Roseman said that the increased funding allocation is for new and existing incentive programs to help growers adapt to the regulation.

"There's new funding available for fleet expansion. This is to add to the existing fleet of chipping equipment," said Roseman. "This is really because, especially some of the smaller operations have had a

hard time scheduling or getting that equipment into their orchards. So, this is really to expand that fleet and hopefully just make it an easier process for orchard removals.”

Whole orchard recycling is the most common practice under the orchard removal program. Incentives are available to almond growers within the Valley Air District to chip or shred materials from orchard removals. “For an almond orchard, it covers around \$600 per acre if it’s incorporated into the soil and \$300 if it’s taken offsite for another beneficial use like mulching or composting. If you’re an operation of less than 100 acres, there is an additional \$100 per acre for either of those practices,” Roseman noted.

The ag burning alternatives funding is distributed on a first-come first-served basis. If funding for the incentive programs is exhausted, those who qualify will be added to a waiting list. Applications for the incentive programs are [available online](#). “This is a significant amount of money that’s coming into the District and we really encourage growers and equipment operators to go ahead and apply,” said Roseman.

Sequoia forest fires see some containment. Some residents can return, officials say

By Thaddeus Miller

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, September 30, 2021

The Windy Fire has burned about 88,068 acres, but some residents are being allowed to return to evacuated areas, fire officials said Thursday.

The blaze saw no change in its estimated burn scar during the night in the Sequoia National Forest. It is 35% contained, according to Cal Fire. Lightning sparked the wildfire on the Tule River Indian Reservation.

The Windy Fire’s behavior on Wednesday showed “a moderate resistance to control,” officials said, but the humidity limited its spread in grass and brush until late afternoon. Winds later in the day gave the fire the potential to grow towards the Kern River and south towards Panorama Heights.

Officials have downgraded some mandatory evacuations as of noon Thursday in Tulare County, including Alpine Village, Camp Nelson, Cedar Slope, Coy Flat, Pierpoint, Quaking Aspen, Ponderosa and Sequoia Crest.

Nearby Mountain Aire and Rogers Camp will remain closed under evacuation, officials said. All other prior evacuation orders and warnings remain in effect.

The Highway 190 corridor will also open at noon Thursday and the roadblock will be pushed back to Aspen and M107, according to a news release.

Evacuation orders for Mineral King Drive between Highway 198 and Oak Grove Bridge including Crest, Sierra King, Hammond and Oak Grove were downgraded to warning level Thursday afternoon.

A road closure is in effect at the Horse Corrals on Mineral King Road, approximately 2.25 miles east of Highway 198.

Officials advise those residents who choose to return to their homes to be ready to leave again, saying fire conditions can change without warning.

Residents living in these areas may return to their homes after showing proof of residence to law enforcement officers. That could be a driver’s license, utility bill or other address documentation.

KNP COMPLEX

The KNP Complex Fire has not reached the size of the blaze to its south, the Windy Fire, but is only 11% contained. It’s at 49,349 acres as of the latest Thursday update.

The KNP fire was also started by a lightning strike near where the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks meet.

Cal Fire looks to use indirect tactics with both firefighters on foot and heavy equipment to strengthen lines along the Cal Fire protection areas and outside the western park boundary . The aim is to improve

structure protection and minimize impacts to areas at risk in Three Rivers, Silver City, Hartland and surrounding communities, according to a news release.

New evacuation orders were issued Thursday night for the communities of Eshom and Hartland Camp, including Eshom Valley Drive from the Fresno County line, south to Tarbell Pocket on Eshom Valley Drive, and North Mountain Road, 468 North to the county line.

The Tulare County Sheriff's Office warned residents to evacuate using Eshom Valley to Stage Coach, to Highway 245 or Dry Creek.

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There will be a road closure at the Horse Corrals on Mineral King Road, about 2.25 miles east of Highway 198.

Law enforcement continues to warn residents, even as evacuations ease, to be on the lookout for remaining fire personnel and equipment.

Because of the narrow roadways, Mineral King Road will be closed to the public from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. to allow personnel to move through the area without delay.

Residents are asked to present proof of residence to law enforcement officers; the proof must include the person's name and address within the impacted area. A driver's license, utility bill or address documentation from the U.S. Post Office for those who use a P.O. box are acceptable.

Escondido Union High School District adds electric buses to fleet

by Tigist Layne

The Coast News, Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2021

ESCONDIDO — Escondido Union High School District recently added six new electric buses to the district's fleet, replacing six diesel-powered buses that were previously in use.

The district announced the change Wednesday, Sept. 22, at a news conference, noting that the new buses now make up 30% of its fleet.

According to the American School Bus Council, electric buses reduce emissions by up to 100%, save up to 60% in fuel costs compared to diesel, reduce maintenance costs by 50% and reduce noise pollution.

The new electric buses travel up to 160 miles on one charge. Construction on a new charging station for the district will break ground in October. In the meantime, the buses are using temporary chargers.

Director of Transportation Linda Rendon told The Coast News that three of the buses are at Escondido High School, Orange Glen High School and San Pasqual Academy. The other three buses will be up and running by December.

“We’re super excited about this and about reducing our carbon footprint,” Rendon said. “These electric buses are going to improve the air quality for our community by reducing diesel admission, and that’s going to be beneficial to the environment as well as to the health of our students.”

The initiative is the first step by the district to follow the state mandate that 60% of school bus fleets must be energy efficient by 2040.

The mandate is part of a wider regulation by the California Air Resources Board (CARB), approved in 2018, that sets a statewide goal for public transit agencies to gradually transition to 100% zero-emission bus fleets by 2040.

“A zero-emission public bus fleet means cleaner air for all of us. It dramatically reduces tailpipe pollution from buses in low-income communities and provides multiple benefits especially for transit-dependent riders,” CARB Chair Mary D. Nichols said. “Putting more zero-emission buses on our roads will also reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gases, and provides cost savings for transit agencies in the long run.”

According to the district, two of the buses were funded by the California Energy Commission’s School Bus Replacement Program, which is helping schools throughout the state transition from diesel school buses to zero- or low-emissions vehicles. The remaining four buses were funded through a San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District grant.

Fresno received millions for past planning sins. So, why does it keep repeating them?

By Marek Warszawski

Fresno Bee, Sunday, Oct. 3, 2021

Students at Orange Center Elementary School are “strongly discouraged” from walking or biking to school.

The person doing the discouraging? Terry Hirschfield, principal and superintendent of the one-school district located inside the so-called “industrial triangle” between Highways 41 and 99 where Fresno’s southern border blends into Fresno County.

“We don’t have any kids that walk or ride their bikes. It’s just not safe,” Hirschfield said. “They either get bused or their parents drop them off.”

Pay a visit to the Orange Center campus and you’ll immediately see why. While Cherry Avenue itself maintains a rural feel, at least for now, neighboring streets have been transformed into Fresno’s hub for large warehouses and distribution centers with the requisite stream of semi-trucks.

For the school’s 311 students (as well as their families), there is literally no escape from the truck traffic, noise and air pollution. Even when they go out to play at recess. Loading docks belonging to the 38-acre Ulta facility at Central and East avenues sit just beyond the playground and are plainly visible.

Hirschfield became Orange Center’s principal and superintendent in 2016, the year before Fresno city officials made the deal with Ulta and two before it opened. Not once during that time, she says, did anyone from the city meet with her to discuss the impacts or offer any kind of mitigation.

“The city does whatever it wants, and the people out here don’t matter,” Hirschfield said. “They don’t care at all about our quality of life. It’s like we don’t exist.”

Even though Orange Center technically lies within Fresno County — the city limits are a stone’s throw or two away and the school district’s boundaries overlap county and city — city planners still include that segment of Cherry Avenue in the South Central Specific Plan.

On proposed land use maps, Orange Center appears as a blue square in a sea of light purple, indicating parcels zoned for a business park. Meaning if city officials get their way, the school would be surrounded on all sides by industrial warehouses and distribution centers without having to undergo any public process.

A FRESNO POVERTY CYCLE THAT PAYS OFF

Now's the time to ask yourself a few questions. Starting with this: Would Fresno planners surround a school on the north side of town with warehouses and distribution centers? Of course not.

So why is it OK in south Fresno? But even larger than that, why do city officials continue playing this paradox? On one hand, they gladly accept millions in state and federal dollars for development sins of the past. On the other, they perpetuate the problems those sins created by making the same types of policy decisions.

Helping continue a poverty cycle of a different sort. One that pays off.

A prime example is the \$66.5 million given to Fresno by the Strategic Growth Council through the Transformative Climate Communities initiative. The city received that state aid, which is helping fund 24 projects ranging from the Fresno City College West Campus to community gardens and orchards, because southwest Fresno and Chinatown have some of California's poorest census tracts combined with its highest pollution levels.

Some might call that cashing in on decades of neglect.

Roughly half of Fresno's brownfield toxic land sites are located in southwest Fresno, and over the last decade the city has received roughly \$2 million in federal grants from the Environmental Protection Agency to address the problem. Has it been? By all indications, no.

And then there's the Southwest Specific Plan, a planning document hailed as "historic" when it passed in 2017 following a two-year process involving hundreds of community members. The city paid \$789,000 in consulting fees, most of which came from Community Development Block Grants awarded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Now, with the ink on the Southwest Specific Plan barely dry, officials want to begin chipping away at core provisions by reversing the elimination of new industrial zoning along 92 acres of Elm Avenue. And they want to do it with nowhere near the same level of public engagement.

It's the same pattern over and over.

STATE: REZONE "WOULD UNDERMINE" AIR POLLUTION GOAL

Louise Bedworth, former executive director of the Strategic Growth Council, the state agency that awarded Fresno the \$66.5 million in cap-and-trade funds, took note of that in an April letter she wrote to city planner Rob Holt in opposition to the Elm Avenue rezone.

Bedworth noted that the proposed rezone enables higher polluting industries to remain in areas right next to several TCC-funded bike paths and pedestrian improvements, as well as a planned affordable housing complex serving seniors.

"We believe this action would deter from critical investments made thus far and would undermine the shared goal to reduce air pollution sources in close proximity to one of the most disadvantaged communities in Fresno," Bedworth wrote.

What did Fresno do with the letter? (The city received a similar missive from the California Air Resources Board.) Probably stuck it in a file, never to be seen again.

I get that many of these development decisions are made with the greater economy in mind. More \$15 per hour warehouse jobs are generally a good thing, even though studies show wages have dropped since Amazon and Ulta opened.

But why must the same people, whether they live in southwest Fresno or county residents whose kids attend Orange Center Elementary, get saddled with all the downsides?

Unless, of course, inequitable planning that pays off decades later in the form of state and federal grants has been the plan all along.