



NEWS



News Headlines 08/17/2016

- Blue Cut fire burns 18,000 acres in Cajon Pass, more than 80,000 evacuated
- UPDATE: Bluecut Fire grows to 18,000 acres; more than 82,000 residents evacuated
- UPDATE: Interstate 15 remains closed in Cajon Pass as fire is still out of control; state of emergency is declared
- As new blaze ignites, Pilot Fire team's wind-down is short-lived
- Blue Cut fire in Cajon Pass burns over 30,000 acres, ‘dozens’ of buildings destroyed
- UPDATE: High temps, dry conditions concern for fire officials
- UPDATE: Bluecut Fire scorches 30,000 acres, zero percent contained
- Homes burn, thousands flee as out-of-control brush fire chars 30,000 acres in Cajon Pass
- More than 80,000 warned to evacuate in raging California fire
- Blue Cut Fire Explodes to 30,000 Acres; Burning in “Unprecedented Fashion”
- Blue Cut Fire Burns 30,000 Acres, Forces 82,000 to Evacuate in California
- Blue Cut fire continues to rage, zero percent contained
- Fire Explodes In Cajon Pass; Traffic Diverted Into Morongo Basin
- Cleaning up after the wildfire

Blue Cut fire burns 18,000 acres in Cajon Pass, more than 80,000 evacuated

Beatriz Valenzuela, San Bernardino Sun and Ryan Hagen, The Sun

Posted: August 16, 2016, 11:29 AM



A pair of homes burn during the Blue Cut Fire off of Highway 138 in the Cajon Pass Tuesday. Will Lester — Staff Photographer

CAJON PASS >> A massive wind-driven wildfire devoured 18,000 acres and multiple buildings with “bewildering” speed Tuesday, forcing tens of thousands of people to evacuate and defying firefighters’ efforts to stop its spread.

Sheriff’s officials estimated they evacuated 34,500 homes, which equates to about 82,600 residents, according to the U.S. Forest Service, as the Blue Cut fire raced north.

By evening, nine hours after the fire started, no portion of its perimeter had containment lines to keep the flames from spreading. Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency, and 700 firefighting personnel were battling the blaze.

Images from the fire lines showed homes in flames. A house on a rural road off Highway 138 west of Mormon Rocks appeared to have burned to the ground. The McDonald’s restaurant at the 15 Freeway and 138 caught fire, a U.S. Forest Service spokesman confirmed.

Fire officials couldn’t yet quantify the damage.

“We have had buildings burn,” said U.S. Forest Service spokesman Chon Bribiescas on Tuesday night. But it was hard to count how many amid conditions that made observers feel they were viewing the world through a soda straw. “I was driving through flames.”

A major flareup ripped along both sides of Highway 138 at Hess Road about 6:15 p.m., sending dozens of fire engine crews into full retreat. They didn’t go far, maybe half a mile.

But the incident was emblematic of the fire that was advancing on many fronts, threatening communities as far-flung as Lytle Creek and Summit Valley, some 15 miles apart.

Midday Tuesday, six **San Bernardino County firefighters** defending homes and assisting with evacuations in the Swarthout Canyon area west of Cajon Pass were trapped by the fire, sheltering in a nearby structure. The fire burned an engine.

Two of those firefighters were taken to the hospital, but both were released and returned to the fire line Tuesday afternoon, according to county fire spokeswoman Tracey Martinez.

The Blue Cut fire was startling in its speed, said Char Miller, a professor at Pomona College who researches wildfires.

“It’s bewildering,” Miller said. “The fire is moving very, very quickly, and I think that’s one of the examples of the nature of fire this summer. This is in big measure because we’re in a deep drought. The drought, the weather and the temperature have come together in a way that’s, frankly, pretty scary.”

EVACUATIONS, ROAD CLOSURES

The San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department ordered mandatory evacuations in multiple areas, including areas of Wrightwood, Phelan and Baldy Mesa.

The San Bernardino City Unified School District also evacuated students from Kimbark Elementary to Chavez Middle School, and Snowline Unified School District evacuated students from Wrightwood Elementary School.

Road closures included the 15 between the 215 in Devore and Ranchero Road in Hesperia; Highway 138 from the 15 to Highway 2; Old Cajon Boulevard north of Devore Cutoff; and Lytle Creek at Glen Helen. Other areas faced heavy congestion.

The Red Cross set up evacuation centers at the Jessie Turner Community Center, 15556 Summit Ave., in Fontana, and at Sultana High School, 17311 Sultana St., in Hesperia.

About 30 people evacuated to the Jessie Turner Community Center, including Doris Jimenez, 71.

“I was right in the middle of it,” said Jimenez, who lives on Club View Drive in the Lytle Creek area. “This morning I opened up my drapes, and it was pure black. I’m very worried. I have no insurance.”

The Devore Animal Shelter is accepting large and small animals from evacuated areas, according to the Sheriff’s Department. The shelter is at 19777 Shelter Way, San Bernardino. Large animals may also be taken to the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds at 14800 7th Ave. in Victorville.

BNSF Railway Co. has shut down train operations through the Cajon Pass in both directions, said spokeswoman Lena Kent.

“We do have a train that is close to the fire that is in the process of safely being moved away from the area,” she said.

The Associated Press reported that a freight train was stopped by the fire and its crew had to flee.

FIRE PART OF ‘A NEW NORMAL’

The Blue Cut fire was reported just after 10:30 a.m. near Kenwood Avenue in the Cajon Pass, according to the U.S. Forest Service. The cause is not known.

Weather conditions in the area were ideal for fire: temperatures close to 100, humidity at 5 percent or less for most of the afternoon and wind gusts up to 20 mph.

Within eight hours, the Blue Cut fire had grown larger than the nearby Pilot fire, which started Aug. 7 and topped 8,000 acres five days later. Firefighters began the “mop-up stage” on that fire Sunday and it was declared fully contained Tuesday morning.

This is part of a trend of longer and worse fire seasons, said Miller, the Pomona College professor.

“The pattern suggests we’re in what people are calling a new normal,” Miller said by phone. “This is not simply tied to drought. It’s partly because of climate change. As the season gets longer, that’s again linked to climate change. And that’s having a more dramatic effect because more people live in these areas than was true 20 years ago.”

Smoke led to unhealthy air quality in areas near Devore, the central and west San Bernardino Mountains and parts of the central San Bernardino Valley, according to the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

People in areas affected by the smoke should avoid outdoor activity and run their air conditioners, the district advised.

http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20160816/blue-cut-fire-burns-18000-acres-in-cajon-pass-more-than-80000-evacuated?source=most_viewed

UPDATE: Bluecut Fire grows to 18,000 acres; more than 82,000 residents evacuated

Massive blaze forces evacuation of more than 82,640 residents

Jose Quintero, Victor Valley Daily Press

Posted: August 16, 2016, 11:35 AM



CalFire firefighters begin clearing Highway 138 east of the Interstate 15 on Tuesday afternoon as the Blue Cut Fire burned into Cajon Pass. (James Quigg, Daily Press)

CAJON PASS — The Bluecut Fire stormed up the Cajon Pass on Tuesday, burning an estimated 18,000 acres and forcing the evacuation of more than 34,500 homes and 82,000 Victor Valley residents, authorities said. Gov. Jerry Brown issued a state of emergency Tuesday evening as the massive wildfire showed no signs of slowing. It destroyed at least a dozen structures, **San Bernardino County Fire Department** spokesman Eric Sherwin said, including some homes and the historic Summit Inn near Oak Hill Road off Interstate 15.

Fire officials ordered the evacuation of the entire mountain community of Wrightwood as the blaze raged out of control after starting in the Cajon Pass on Tuesday morning. Fire officials said over 700 firefighters were on scene, with 102 fire engines, 15 crews, 8 helicopters, 8 air tankers and 2 very large air tankers. Night flying helicopters were also called in. The San Bernardino National Service announced close to 750 additional firefighters were en route to combat the blaze, which saw flames as high as 100 feet in some areas.

The fire was at 0 percent containment, according to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, and flames had topped ridges in the San Bernardino Mountains and was closing in on Victor Valley communities late into the night.

The fire spread from five to an estimated 6,500 acres in about four hours, consuming heavy dry brush. Authorities issued mandatory evacuation orders for most of west Oak Hills and Phelan and all of Summit Valley.

According to the Incident Command website, mandatory evacuations were ordered for the area north of Highway 138, east of Sheep Creek Road, south of Phelan Road and west of Caliente Road. Evacuations were also ordered for the area north of Highway 138, south of Ranchero Road, west of Summit Valley Road and all of Summit Valley to Highway 173, authorities said.

Authorities also evacuated the community of Baldy Mesa north of Phelan Road, the area east of Caughlin Road, south of Bear Valley Road and west of Highway 395, and southbound Interstate 15 was closed at Main Street in Hesperia. Authorities also closed Highway 173 to Summit Valley Road, according to California Highway Patrol traffic logs.

According to CHP traffic logs, several big rigs blocked lanes on Highway 138 in Crestline, unable to navigate sharp turns. Motorists were being advised to avoid the Crestline area.

San Bernardino National Forest spokesman David Cruz told the Daily Press he believed the fire was moving toward the Wrightwood area. But the winds could shift at any point and push the fire in any direction, Cruz said.

“We have started laying the retardant line to prevent the fire from continuing to push west,” Cruz said. “We’re also getting bulldozers out there to start the containment lines. We are battling steep terrain and lots of fuel coupled with low humidity and high temperatures. The dry brush fuels we are battling with is what is causing the fire to spread so rapidly.”

According to a Daily Press photographer on the scene, the fire jumped Highway 138 and was burning on the north side of that highway.

According to unconfirmed reports Tuesday afternoon, a train in the Cajon Pass was engulfed in flames, but the Daily Press received verified reports that trains were being threatened by the fire. BNSF Railway spokeswoman Lena Kent confirmed that one of the company's trains was in the area of the fire, but was in the process of being moved. Traffic was halted in both directions, Kent said, and they did not believe there would be any problems moving the train.

The fire caused a closure of roughly six miles of Union Pacific train operations, according to spokesman Justin Jacobs. However, no Union Pacific trains were not rerouted. But Jacobs said the Mojave subdivision would continue to monitor if any rerouting would be necessary.

Authorities said a Red Cross evacuation center was set up at Jessie Turner Community Center, located at 15556 Summit Ave. in Fontana, and a command center was set up at Glen Helen Regional Park. Sultana High School served as an overnight shelter, per authorities, and by 8 p.m. more than 60 people were already gathered there.

The blaze prompted authorities to shut down Interstate 15 in both directions, northbound lanes at Kenwood Avenue at the bottom of the Cajon Pass and southbound lanes at Main Street in Hesperia.

Scanner traffic just after 12:30 p.m. reported ambulances were requested due to smoke inhalation injuries as fire crews became trapped while trying to evacuate residents.

San Bernardino County Fire Department and San Bernardino Forest Service responded to a second alarm vegetation fire in the Cajon Pass at approximately 10:35 a.m. near Cleghorn Road, roughly two miles north of Kenwood Road and approximately a quarter-mile west of Interstate 15.

The blaze quickly scorched five acres in the Cajon Pass and authorities requested a hard closure for northbound traffic at Cajon Blvd and Kenwood Road.

Fire officials just before 11:20 a.m. said the fire was “holding at five acres on the ridge” with 10 mph winds blowing. But the blaze eventually spread in a western direction.

The Forest Service tweeted out that the fire had already burned 300 acres as of 11:46 a.m.

The Bluecut Fire erupted in flames just hours after fire officials announced full containment of the Pilot Fire.

The Pilot Fire began on Aug. 7 and by the end of the night spread to 1,500 acres, prompting a massive firefighting response from local and regional agencies. The Pilot Fire eventually scorched over 8,100 acres in the San Bernardino Mountains and Summit Valley.

Cruz said having a large number of firefighters in the area for the Pilot Fire helped in battling the blaze in the Cajon Pass. However, Cruz admitted there were concerns about firefighter fatigue as well.

“Some of those firefighters are going to be tired after dealing with the Pilot Fire, which we just got full containment on early this morning,” he said. “But these men and women are firefighters. We’re confident in them to battle this fire. This is nothing new to anyone of them.”

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20160816/update-bluecut-fire-grows-to-18000-acres-more-than-82000-residents-evacuated>

UPDATE: Interstate 15 remains closed in Cajon Pass as fire is still out of control; state of emergency is declared

Fontana Herald News

Posted: August 16, 2016, 12:17 PM



A fire burned thousands of acres in the Cajon Pass and forced the closure of Interstate 15 on Aug. 16. (Herald News photo by Alejandro Cano)

Interstate 15 remained closed in the Cajon Pass on Wednesday morning, Aug. 17 because of a fast-moving wildland fire which has burned more than 30,000 acres in the mountains north of Fontana, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**.

A state of emergency was declared by Gov. Jerry Brown. The fire was zero percent contained.

The Blue Cut Fire began burning in the area of Interstate 15 and Kenwood Avenue at about 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, the Fire Department said.

There were 700 fire personnel on scene with 102 engines, 15 crews, eight air tankers, two very large air tankers, and eight helicopters.

There was an imminent threat to public safety, rail traffic and structures in the Cajon Pass, Lytle Creek, Wrightwood, Oak Hills, and surrounding areas, authorities said. An estimated 34,500 homes and 82,640 people were being affected by the evacuation warnings.

The American Red Cross established a care center at the Jessie Turner Center in Fontana.

Air quality was expected to be poor because of the smoke in parts of the Inland Empire on Wednesday.

I-15 was closed from Oak Hills to Devore. Highway 138 was closed from Highway 2 to I-15, Caltrans said. All motorists were urged to avoid the Cajon Pass area.

Six firefighters became entrapped by the fire while defending homes and assisting evacuations in the Swarthout Canyon area west of Cajon Pass, the Fire Department said. The firefighters were able to shelter in place within a nearby structure, but two firefighters sustained minor injuries. Both firefighters were taken to a local hospital, where they were treated and released and are now back on the fire line defending structures. One fire engine sustained moderate fire damage.

Here is updated information from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department as of 9 a.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 17:

• MANDATORY EVACUATION AREAS:

The entire community of Wrightwood
Wrightwood from San Bernardino County Line to Jackson Lake
West of I-15 and west of Highway 395 and west of Summit Valley
South of Bear Valley Road and east of Caughlin Road
East of Sheep Creek, south of Phelan Road and west of Green Road, including the Desert Front Road area.
Lone Pine Canyon
Swarthout Canyon
West Cajon Valley
Lytle Creek Canyon

- Sheriff's personnel: 100 support personnel
- Volunteers: 40 citizen volunteers assigned to command post duties and Posse members assisting with animal evacuations
- Inmate Fire Crew: 10 members of the Inmate Fire Crew are actively cutting fire breaks; additional crew to respond later today
- Ten air tankers are dropping fire retardant and 15 helicopters are water dropping units.

http://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/news/update-interstate-remains-closed-in-cajon-pass-as-fire-is/article_2725c3cc-63e6-11e6-a443-4f55b0e91028.html

As new blaze ignites, Pilot Fire team's wind-down is short-lived

Glen Helen park pegged as command post for Bluecut Fire

Shea Johnson, Victor Valley Daily Press

Posted: August 16, 2016, 3:15 PM



Smoke from the Bluecut Fire in the Cajon Pass, which covered the Victor Valley with a sepia tone Tuesday, is seen from the fairgrounds in Victorville. Shea Johnson, Daily Press

VICTORVILLE — Call it fortuitous timing to an unfortunate event. Southern California Interagency Incident Management Team 3 personnel were meeting at the fairgrounds here Tuesday morning, closing out Pilot Fire operations, when word broke that a blaze had started in the Cajon Pass.

Since Aug. 8, the fairgrounds had been the command post for the Pilot Fire, an 8,110-acre blaze that scorched the San Bernardino National Forest near Silverwood Lake and Hesperia for nine days. It was only officially declared fully contained Tuesday.

Shortly after noon, key management personnel of the incident team were standing by at the fairgrounds, waiting to hear if they'd be asked to also manage operations for what was quickly labeled the Bluecut Fire. Around 1 p.m., it was confirmed they would be.

The 56-member team works on behalf of the U.S. Forest Service and derives from various regional agencies. They're the backbone of behind the scenes, including operations, planning, finance and information, and their sole goal is to assist crews who are on the ground trying to knock down the fire.

Some members had already left for home and would be called back, said San Diego Fire Capt. Dena Sickels, planning section chief for the team. Of the equipment at the command post, including trailers used as offices, what hadn't been already packed up and moved might be reassigned to the operations hub for the Bluecut Fire.

San Bernardino County Fire Capt. Kyle Hauducoeur, a team resource unit leader, said that Glen Helen Regional Park had been pegged as the camp for this fire, which had expanded to thousands of acres within four hours after it was reported.

"The fire's moving fairly quickly right now," Sickels said.

After nine days of grueling work to fully contain the Pilot Fire, the same crews would "most likely" be assigned to fight the latest blaze to scar the region, Hauducoeur said. Crews can work up to 14 straight days — 21, if an extension is necessary.

"You talk about exhaustion? Try being away from home," Hauducoer said. "These are hard things to explain to a three-year old."

For the incident management team, they'll likely transition operational oversight if the Bluecut Fire isn't contained within six days, he added. It's a team that had nearly instantly jumped from the 41,000-acre Sand Fire northwest of the Angeles National Forest that started late last month to the Pilot Fire. Hauducoer revealed that in between, he was only able to fit in a half-day of his regular shift in Fontana.

Asked whether it was difficult to pivot from winding down in the morning to commencing work on a new blaze hours later, Hauducoer offered a simple response.

"I'm going to go to Starbucks," he said.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20160816/as-new-blaze-ignites-pilot-fire-teams-wind-down-is-short-lived>

Blue Cut fire in Cajon Pass burns over 30,000 acres, 'dozens' of buildings destroyed

Beatriz Valenzuela, San Bernardino Sun

Posted: August 17, 2016, 6:20 AM



The Summit Inn at the top of the Cajon Pass was a total loss. The Blue Cut Fire continues to burn out of control off of Hwy 138 and I-15 Wednesday August 17, 2016. There are unconfirmed reports that 50 homes have burned in the area. (Will Lester/Scng-Inland Valley Daily Bulletin)

The 15 Freeway, the main artery in and out of the High Desert, remains closed Wednesday morning as firefighters battled the out-of-control Blue Cut fire in the Cajon Pass overnight.

The massive wind-driven wildfire devoured 30,000 acres and multiple homes and buildings by Wednesday morning, forcing more than 80,000 people to evacuate their homes. No portion of the perimeter has containment lines.

"Dozens" of buildings were destroyed, according to **San Bernardino County Fire** Chief Mark Hartwig.

A day after playing defense because of the erratic and unpredictable path of the flames, crews on the Blue Cut fire are in more of an offensive mode Wednesday, but it's not a full-on attack.

"You know how you eat an elephant? One bite at a time," said the incident commander, Mike Wakoski of the San Bernardino County Fire Department.

Hartwig said fire engines were in place to protect buildings Tuesday until the wind would change direction. He saw what he described as the largest fire whirls — tornadoes of flames — that he had ever seen. They were indicative of unstable winds, Hartwig said.

About 9:30 Wednesday morning, the wind was still.

The west end of the fire, on a ridge between Lone Pine and Lytle Creek, concerned fire officials the most Wednesday. Firefighters hoped to protect a trailer park in the area.

Lytle Creek is staging ambulances, said Eric Sherwin, a spokesman for county fire, as the fire crested into West Cajon Valley and picked up in Phelan.

DRY BRUSH FEEDS FAST MOVING BLAZE

Crews on the Blue Cut fire are contending with extremely dry brush that burns easily.

“We’re seeing fuel moisture so low that it’s (brush) essentially labeled as dead. It looks green and it looks alive,” Hartwig said. Dry brush contributed to the speed at which the fire burned.

The 15 Freeway was shut down shortly after the fire was first spotted around 10:30 a.m. Tuesday, west of the southbound lanes near Kenwood Avenue. The 15 Freeway, along with Highway 138 from Highway 2 to Highway 18 as well as Big Pines Highway at Jackson Lake, remained shut down Wednesday morning, according to the California Highway Patrol.

It’s unclear how many structures have been lost to the fire, said Justin Correll with the U.S. Forest Service.

Out of “due diligence,” Wakoski said, sheriff’s deputies were searching burned homes with cadaver dogs. There were no reports of anyone not making it out of their homes, Hartwig said.

But, he added, “It’s almost unimaginable that with the number of people who refused to leave that we won’t see something.”

At least 238 Blue Cut fire evacuees spent the night at two shelters, according to an American Red Cross spokeswoman.

EVACUATION AREAS GROW OVERNIGHT

The mandatory evacuation area includes Phelan/Piñon Hills, south of Phelan Road from Sheep Creek Road to Green Road, including the Desert Front Road area, the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department said Wednesday morning.

Fire officials say the days of waiting out mandatory evacuations on your living room couch instead of fleeing for safety are over.

The combination of unending drought, low humidity and high amounts of fuels contribute to fast-moving, erratic wildfires that leave little time for evacuation.

“These fires are exploding now,” Cal Fire Capt. Mike Mohler said Wednesday morning at the command post at Glen Helen Regional Park in Devore. “It’s the new normal. The public has to embrace that.”

During the Sand fire, which burned this year in Sand Canyon, a man who ignored a mandatory evacuation order was found burned to death in his car, Wakoski said.

U.S. Forest Service spokesman John Miller has seen that behavior at the Blue Cut fire, and he is concerned.

“This is not one for the public to fool around with,” he said.

Mohler said the evacuations “where you sit at home don’t exist anymore. We don’t want to be that broken record. (But) it’s not a joke anymore.”

EVACUEES SHELTERING

Three Swarthout Canyon Road residents spent Tuesday night in their vehicles outside the Fontana evacuation center after escaping the approaching Blue Cut fire with 13 pets.

Dave Delgado, 65, said he, wife Vi and daughter April Christy, 30, were shocked at how quickly the fire grew, raced up the mountain and leapt over land to get within 30 feet of their house.

“It was so small. We thought it was contained. Then all of a sudden - bam! - it just started going up that mountain,” he said as he sat in a white van with three Chihuahua mix dogs. “Then it jumped roads, railroad tracks, houses -- within minutes there was this wall of flames.”

“It was amazing how that fire must have leap-frogged,” he added.

The trio raced away from their home in the van and truck loaded with nine dogs and four cats. They’re hoping to hear whether they can go back today to see if their house survive, he said.

Jinny Lee, owner of the Mountains Top Cafe in Wrightwood opened up to help feed firefighters, deputies and evacuees.

“They’ve been here all night,” Lee said. “I wanted to help them.”

Lee is handling the restaurant alone.

“I told my employees to stay home,” she said. “Everything is blocked anyway.”

Lee refused to take any money when a firefighter came in asking for a soda. She pushed the bill back into his hand.

A steady stream of customers stopped at Wrightwood Market for gas and supplies, and several residents and West Cajon Valley evacuees gathered Wednesday morning to discuss the fire.

Most are getting gas and a lot of coffee, said Patrick Boyle, the owner.

HUNDREDS OF FIREFIGHTERS HERE TO HELP

Fire crews from across the state contributed to more than 1,300 fire personnel battling the blaze.

In addition, San Bernardino County has 100 sheriff's deputies working with county probation and Los Angeles County deputies in evacuating residents affected by Blue Cut fire.

Deputies are patrolling to check for looters in evacuation areas, said Sheriff John McMahon.

"I don't think it gets much lower than that," McMahon said.

The closure of the 15 Freeway prevented deputies from transporting inmates to High Desert courts, so those court dates will be rescheduled, according to a news release from the Sheriff's Department.

Firefighters were warned in their 6 a.m. briefing "Fires of this nature are very dynamic, even chaotic at this stage."

The forecast Wednesday on the fire lines was for 100 degrees with 7-10 percent humidity, which is low, with southerly winds of 15-20 mph and gusts up to 25 mph before noon.

Officials have divided the fire into two "branches." In one, according to the narrative in the written plan for the day, the fire can be expected to spread up Lone Pine Canyon toward Wrightwood.

In the second branch, most of the flames are headed north and east into lighter brush, which could slow the spread there. The eastern portion, north of Cleghorn Mountain, is in heavier brush. Officials hope roads and developed land in that area will serve as fire breaks.

The goals for Wednesday are to prevent the fire from spreading south of Phelan Road, west of Arrowhead Lake Road, east of Dawson Peak and north of Gem Ranch.

FIRE AFFECTING TRANSPORTATION, SCHOOLS

Victorville Valley Transit Authority Route 20, Route 21 and Route 15 B-V Link between Victorville and San Bernardino are shut down because of the fire, but other routes continue as usual, according to the agency.

The Barstow, Helendale, Silver Valley, Snowline, Hesperia, Oro Grande and Victor Valley school districts are closed Wednesday. Kimbark Elementary and bus services into and out of Devore are also closed, according to San Bernardino City Unified School District police.

Teachers normally assigned to Kimbark Elementary will instead cover for teachers at other schools who live in the High Desert and are expected to have trouble traveling south, said district spokeswoman Maria Garcia.

FIRE DESTROYS LANDMARKS

The devastating fire, which destroyed several structures and homes -- including the historic Summit Inn at the top of the Cajon Pass -- quickly exploded, consuming 30,000 acres, or nearly 47 square miles, in less than 24 hours.

“It’s bewildering,” said Char Miller, a professor at Pomona College who researches wildfires. “The fire is moving very, very quickly, and I think that’s one of the examples of the nature of fire this summer. This is in big measure because we’re in a deep drought. The drought, the weather and the temperature have come together in a way that’s, frankly, pretty scary.”

Red flag conditions remain in effect for San Bernardino County until 9 p.m. Thursday, according to the National Weather Service. Winds are forecast to reach 35 mph, according to Correll, with the Forest Service.

Air quality was unhealthy or unhealthy for sensitive groups in much of the region because of the smoke, according to the Mojave and South Coast air quality management districts. The smoke advisories suggest limiting time spent outdoors and avoiding outdoor exercise when smoke is in the air and using the air conditioner.

<http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20160817/blue-cut-fire-in-cajon-pass-burns-over-30000-acres-dozens-of-buildings-destroyed>

UPDATE: High temps, dry conditions concern for fire officials

Jose Quintero, Victor Valley Daily Press

Posted: August 17, 2016 at 7:13 AM



Staff and regular customers of the Summit Inn attempt to retrieve valuables from the restaurant's safe on Wednesday Morning after the Blue Cut Fire destroyed the historic business on Tuesday. James Quigg, Daily Press

CAJON PASS — Hot and dry conditions are a cause of concern for fire officials as over 1,300 firefighters continue battling the Bluecut Fire on Wednesday.

The raging blaze in the Cajon Pass, which has made way into the High Desert, has scorched 30,000 acres and remains zero percent contained, fire officials said during a news conference held at Glen Helen Regional Park in Devore.

The Interagency Incident Management Team 4 (Opliger) has assumed command of the fire.

Incident Command Mike Wakoski, a **San Bernardino County Fire Department** battalion chief, said there are currently 1,309 firefighters on scene, with 18 crews, 15 helicopters and 10 air tankers battling the raging Bluecut Fire.

Wakoski said fuels in the Cajon Pass terrains are extremely dry and explosive.

“Today is going to be hot and dry just like yesterday,” he said. “Minimum humidities will be below 10 percent, so it will be very dry along the fire line. Temperatures will reach 100-plus on the fire itself. The fuel is extremely dry and explosive this time of year. In my 40 years of fighting fire, I have never seen fire behavior so extreme as it was yesterday. We have rapid rates of spread. We have had spotting up to half a mile ahead of the fire.

“Yesterday’s actions were totally defensive on the inside of the incident. We were doing a lot of structure defense and trying to get ahead of the fire to protect the affected communities.”

San Bernardino County Fire Department Chief Mark Hartwig also spoke during the conference, and said he got a view of the fire from aircraft.

Hartwig described the scene as devastating.

“There were a lot of homes lost yesterday and there will be a lot of families that will come home to nothing,” Hartwig said. “If there is a bright side, a silver lining, there are some homes that were saved thanks to the hard work of the brave men and women firefighters who put themselves in harm's way.”

Structure defense will be a priority on Wednesday, Hartwig said.

“We are going to get engine companies in there and defend structures as best we can with this weather we have expected,” he said. “The fire hit hard. It hit fast. It hit with an intensity that we haven’t seen before.”

While Phelan animal sanctuary, Forever Wild, was rumored on various social media platforms to have burned down on Tuesday, the nonprofit organization released a statement on their Facebook page that their property and animals were safe due to the swift response of firefighters and emergency responders.

Fire crews are expecting another hot and windy day, with a Red Flag warning indicating high fire danger still in effect through Wednesday evening.

"The winds have died down a little bit," said Cal Fire spokeswoman Kathy Mattingly. "Our biggest goal right now is to get some relief for our firefighters on the line. They've been out there since 10:30 a.m. yesterday."

At 5:30 a.m. Wednesday, the temperature in Wrightwood was already 69 degrees, with highs expected in the low- to mid-80s and winds in the 6-10 mph range, according to Accuweather.

Hesperia and Victorville can expect much hotter and windier conditions. According to Accuweather, it was already 70 degrees in Hesperia at 5:30 a.m. on its way to a high of 98, with afternoon winds from the southwest at 20 mph with some 30-mph gusts expected. Victorville was expected to see afternoon highs of 101 degrees, with winds 15-20 mph.

A news conference regarding the fire will be held in Glen Helen at 9 a.m. this morning.

San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department officials announced additional mandatory evacuations Wednesday morning in the Phelan and Piñon Hills area. Residents south of Phelan Road, east of Sheep Creek Rd and west to Green Road are under mandatory evacuations.

The announcement added to the estimated 34,500 homes and 82,000 residents already under evacuation.

Mandatory evacuations remain in place for the area north of Highway 138, east of Sheep Creek Road, south of Phelan Road and west of Caliente Road. Evacuations are also in place for the area north of Highway 138, south of Ranchero Road, west of Summit Valley Road and all of Summit Valley to Highway 173. Residents in Baldy Mesa north of Phelan Road, the area east of Caughlin Road, south of Bear Valley Road and west of Highway 395 also remain under mandatory evacuation orders.

Sultana High School was one the evacuation centers for those who were affected by the fire. Approximately 142 evacuees were seen at the school Wednesday morning, according to a Daily Press reporter on scene.

Road closures remain in effect for areas under mandatory evacuation on Wednesday, including Mariposa Road south of Ranchero Road.

The Bluecut Fire spread from five to an estimated 6,500 acres in about four hours, consuming heavy dry brush.

Gov. Jerry Brown issued a state of emergency Tuesday evening as the massive wildfire showed no signs of slowing.

According to the Incident Command website, there remains “imminent threat to public safety, rail traffic and structures in the Cajon Pass, Lytle Creek, Wrightwood, Oak Hills, and surrounding areas.”

The raging blaze in the Cajon Pass erupted just three hours after fire officials announced 100 percent containment of the Pilot Fire, which scorched 12.6 square miles in the San Bernardino Mountains and Summit Valley. At the Pilot Fire’s height, the blaze posed a threat to as many as 5,300 residences but ultimately no homes were lost.

While the figure remains unknown, San Bernardino County Fire Department spokesman Eric Sherwin said the blaze has claimed at least a dozen structures, including the Summit Inn near Oak Hill Road off Interstate 15.

Authorities immediately shutdown the interstate Tuesday afternoon and it remained closed in both directions Wednesday morning.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20160817/update-high-temps-dry-conditions-concern-for-fire-officials>

UPDATE: Bluecut Fire scorches 30,000 acres, zero percent contained

Jose Quintero, Desert Dispatch

Posted: August 17, 2016, 8:11 AM



A warm shadow is cast upon outer Apple Valley from the smoke produced by the Bluecut Fire on Tuesday. Jose Huerta, Daily Press

CAJON PASS — The Bluecut Fire that raged in the Cajon Pass, eventually making way into the High Desert, has now scorched 30,000 acres and remains zero percent contained, San Bernardino National Forest officials said.

The Interagency Incident Management Team 4 (Opliger) has been ordered to assume command of the fire, according to the Incident Command website, which listed there are over 1,300 firefighters on scene Wednesday morning.

Additional information regarding the fire was not immediately available Wednesday morning.

Fire crews are expecting another hot and windy day, with a Red Flag warning indicating high fire danger still in effect through Wednesday evening.

"The winds have died down a little bit," said Cal Fire spokeswoman Kathy Mattingly. "Our biggest goal right now is to get some relief for our firefighters on the line. They've been out there since 10:30 a.m. yesterday."

At 5:30 a.m. Wednesday, the temperature in Wrightwood was already 69 degrees, with highs expected in the low- to mid-80s and winds in the 6-10 mph range, according to Accuweather.

Hesperia and Victorville can expect much hotter and windier conditions. According to Accuweather, it was already 70 degrees in Hesperia at 5:30 a.m. on its way to a high of 98, with afternoon winds from the southwest at 20 mph with some 30-mph gusts expected. Victorville was expected to see afternoon highs of 101 degrees, with winds 15-20 mph.

A news conference regarding the fire will be held in Glen Helen at 9 a.m. this morning.

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department officials announced additional mandatory evacuations Wednesday morning in the Phelan and Piñon Hills area. Residents south of Phelan Road, east of Sheep Creek Rd and west to Green Road are under mandatory evacuations.

The announcement added to the estimated 34,500 homes and 82,000 residents already under evacuation.

Mandatory evacuations remain in place for the area north of Highway 138, east of Sheep Creek Road, south of Phelan Road and west of Caliente Road. Evacuations are also in place for the area north of Highway 138, south of Ranchero Road, west of Summit Valley Road and all of Summit Valley to Highway 173. Residents in Baldy Mesa north of Phelan Road, the area east of Caughlin Road, south of Bear Valley Road and west of Highway 395 also remain under mandatory evacuation orders.

Sultana High School was one the evacuation centers for those who were affected by the fire. Approximately 142 evacuees were seen at the school Wednesday morning, according to a Daily Press reporter on scene.

The Bluecut Fire spread from five to an estimated 6,500 acres in about four hours, consuming heavy dry brush.

Gov. Jerry Brown issued a state of emergency Tuesday evening as the massive wildfire showed no signs of slowing.

According to the Incident Command website, there remains “imminent threat to public safety, rail traffic and structures in the Cajon Pass, Lytle Creek, Wrightwood, Oak Hills, and surrounding areas.”

San Bernardino County Fire Department Chief Mark Hartwig took to Twitter early Wednesday morning regarding the fire.

“A tough day for many in the county yesterday. Many homes lost and many evacuated. We're hoping for better day today,” Hartwig said.

The raging blaze in the Cajon Pass erupted just three hours after fire officials announced 100 percent containment of the Pilot Fire, which scorched 12.6 square miles in the San Bernardino Mountains and Summit Valley. At the Pilot Fire’s height, the blaze posed a threat to as many as 5,300 residences but ultimately no homes were lost.

While the figure remains unknown, San Bernardino County Fire Department spokesman Eric Sherwin said the blaze has claimed at least a dozen structures, including the Summit Inn near Oak Hill Road off Interstate 15.

Authorities immediately shutdown the interstate Tuesday afternoon and it remained closed in both directions Wednesday morning.

<http://www.desertdispatch.com/news/20160817/update-bluecut-fire-scorches-30000-acres-zero-percent-contained>

Homes burn, thousands flee as out-of-control brush fire chars 30,000 acres in Cajon Pass

Paloma Esquivel, Sarah Parvini, Shane Newell and James Queally, LA Times

Posted: August 17, 2016, 8:45 AM



Gina Ferazzi / Los Angeles Times

Firefighters on Wednesday continued their battle with a brush fire that exploded out of control in the Cajon Pass and has rapidly scorched through 30,000 acres. Walls of flames forced more than 80,000 people to evacuate and destroyed an unknown number of homes in several rural San Bernardino County communities.

Fed by strong winds, bone-dry brush and 100-degree temperatures, the Blue Cut fire, which broke out Tuesday, marched across hills, canyons and flatlands into the night as firefighters struggled to get a handle on a blaze they fear will get worse. Fire officials said there was no containment in sight.

Residents in several communities, including the entire ski resort town of Wrightwood, were forced to flee as the fire spread in several directions. It closed the 15 Freeway and Highway 138 — the two key routes in the area — clogging traffic and making it more difficult for residents to evacuate.

The fire was first reported just after 10:30 a.m. Tuesday near Interstate 15 and jumped to nearly 1,500 acres within two hours.

As the fire continued to surge late Tuesday afternoon, Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency in San Bernardino County.

Homes could be seen burning along Highway 138 and television images showed flames creeping toward a McDonald's and engulfing a large mountaintop cross, setting it ablaze.

"We know that we've lost structures; it's unknown how many at this time," said Tracey Martinez, public information officer for the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**. "This fire is still raging out of control."

Six county firefighters became trapped by walls of flame while defending homes and evacuating residents in Swarthout Canyon, Martinez said. The firefighters were able to take shelter in a nearby structure, but two had to be treated for minor injuries, she said. Both firefighters were released and have resumed battling the wildfire.

In addition to Wrightwood, mandatory evacuations have been ordered for Baldy Mesa, Lytle Creek, Wrightwood, Old Cajon Road, Lone Pine Canyon, West Cajon Valley and Swarthout Canyon, fire officials said.

San Bernardino County sheriff's deputies raced door-to-door, urging residents to evacuate parts of Lytle Creek Canyon on Tuesday afternoon. A visit from a deputy prompted Ellen Pollema, 63, and her husband to flee their home in Happy Jack on Tuesday. The couple quickly packed their cars and fled to a nearby ranger station. An hour later, Pollema sat in a Prius stuffed with pillows, blankets, clothes and a cat nestled in its carrier. Her husband was parked nearby in a sport utility vehicle with the couple's three dogs.

Tuesday was far from the couple's first evacuation. Pollema and her husband have lived in the area for 25 years, and were not surprised by the blaze's rapid growth.

"It's part of living in this canyon," she said. "It went fast. But it's very dry."

Pollema said she has worked with several of her neighbors to ensure that their properties are cleared of brush and anything else that could make their homes more flammable.

"People need to be prepared and just know that that's part of the risk of living in these kinds of areas," she said. "We've got a beautiful community."

Farther up the road, Lytle Creek resident Joe Gonzales was gathering laptops and important papers after deputies asked him to leave. While he was ready to flee, Gonzales said he wanted to wait until deputies checked on an elderly neighbor who might need a ride out of the area.

"I'm a little worried. I don't want to leave here. We love it in the canyon," he said. "But that smoke looks pretty bad."

Others took a wait-and-see approach as they watched a helicopter swoop down to draw water from a lake and fly toward the advancing fire near Lytle Creek Road and Alder Way. Steve Sager, 53, was packed and ready to go Tuesday night, but had decided to keep an eye on the fire before choosing whether or not to flee.

"It's kind of like a mild tailgate party," he said as he sat alongside several neighbors on a stone fence. "As long as they can keep it on that ridge we'll be OK. If it comes over that ridge too far, I'm out of here."

Cheryl Anaya, 67, had chosen to stay behind to try to protect her two-story log cabin in case flying embers descended on the wood frame building. She'd done the same during a previous wildfire in north Fontana several years earlier.

"We're gonna stay and fight," she told one neighbor who was heading for the nearest highway.

But with the Blue Cut fire rapidly growing in size, Anaya accepted that she too might have to race out of the area if the flames got too close.

The blaze is the latest in a series of destructive wildfires to hit California as the state endures its fifth year of drought. The fires this year have claimed hundreds of homes and killed eight people, but officials warn the worst might be still to come because Southern California's traditional fire season doesn't begin until fall, when the hot Santa Ana winds typically arrive.

Officials blame the drought -- which has left brush dangerously dry -- for helping fuel the fires, which have stretched from Lake County in Northern California to the border region in San Diego County. In some areas, the fires have also been fueled by millions of dead or dying trees in forests.

The fires are a sort of "new normal," said Char Miller, an expert on wildfires and national forests at Pomona College.

"We're in the fifth year of drought and we're starting to see the consequences of that," Miller said. "If you put 20 to 30 mile per hour winds in there, those things are going to take off."

Miller said Southern California's dry climate, deep drought and Mediterranean ecosystem make it ripe for ongoing fires.

"We're living where it burns," he said. "If we are looking at prolonged drought or the drying out of Southern California in the next century, then we are going to see more things like this."

The Blue Cut fire is particularly interesting because of its speed, Miller added. The flames spread so quickly because they are in a wind tunnel.

"Those passes are dangerous. Look at it what it disrupted," he said. "It took out the 15 [Freeway] ... the electric grid runs through there and that is where our aviation fuel comes from."

The intense walls of flame engulfing buildings in the area have placed serious limits on what firefighters can do because the weather is at its worst, Miller said. That was especially clear Tuesday, he added.

"There were a lot of water drops. When you see only that taking place, that means they can't get in," Miller said. "Then the retardant and water don't do much. It's like war. Aerial campaigns only do so much, you need boots on the ground."

Wednesday morning at the Sultana High School evacuation center in Hesperia, Osuna Rosa sipped her cup of coffee and retraced the whirlwind that landed her in a cot among dozens of others.

The 53-year-old has relied on Interstate 15 for years for the commute from her home in Banning to the High Desert, where she works as a hospice nurse a few days a week.

She arrived at work around 8 a.m. Tuesday and started noticing smoke around noon. When she tried to take Interstate 15 south to go home, it was closed. Then she tried her favorite alternate route along Summit Valley Road, but it was full of cars.

Rosa tried to get a hotel room, but there weren't any available. Other drivers and locals who fled their homes had claimed the last beds. Rosa sobbed, fearing she was stuck.

"What am I going to do now?" she remembered asking herself.

A motel employee referred her to the shelter, where she managed to get a few hours of sleep on one of the dozens of cots in the dimly lit gymnasium.

"At the moment when I realized I had to spend the night here, it was shocking," she said, still dressed in Tuesday's blue hospital scrubs.

Evacuees at the center began to wake up around 6 a.m. and grabbed refreshments and snacks. Gallons of milk sat in ice buckets near the school's entrance.

Danielle Morgan, a volunteer working as the shelter supervisor, said 143 evacuees had made their way to the school. Most came in around around midnight, requesting blankets, food and water, she said.

Anthony Botello moved to Hesperia four months ago, and though his property is not in the evacuation zone, he said he didn't want to risk being trapped at home if the fire reached it.

Sitting outside the evacuation center, wearing his gold wedding ring, a black T-shirt and gym shorts, the 48-year-old came to the shelter Tuesday night with his wife and mother-in-law.

"You can't worry about your things," he said. "It's your life that you have to value."

He didn't pack much, only a few clothes. He left his new computer behind.

"If it's lost, it's lost," Botello said. "You got your life. It's only physical things."

At 7 a.m., he decided to return home.

Joseph Barberillo, 31, and his wife Rose Canizares were driving back from a trip to the Mojave Desert in the town of Baker when they noticed the smoke and distinctive orange glow from a still-distant fire.

The couple from Spain was trying to make it to Newport Beach but suddenly found themselves trying to look for hotels. Those just off the freeway were full so they spoke to a police officer, who directed them to the Hesperia shelter.

"We were so surprised because we're not used to seeing big fires in Spain," Barberillo said.

After arriving at the shelter about 10:30 p.m. Tuesday they had a dinner of cereal. Later, they joined other evacuees in a meal of pizza and chips before pulling two cots together and turning in to sleep.

At least 1,300 firefighters, 152 engines, 18 fire crews and 10 air tankers were on the scene as of Wednesday morning, according to fire officials. Cathleen Mattingly of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said the fire was burning through "heavy, dry brush."

It was not immediately clear if the fire was surging toward more residential areas or out into the desert. Mattingly said winds were moving northwest on Tuesday afternoon, but warned that could shift quickly.

Authorities shut down the 15 Freeway from Oak Hill Road to Kenwood Avenue, forest officials said. California 138 is closed from California 2 to the 15. The 15 is the major thoroughfare for drivers headed to Las Vegas from Southern California.

The fire destroyed the historic Summit Inn Restaurant in Oak Hills on Tuesday afternoon. TV news video showed the restaurant, which sat near the crest of Interstate 15, engulfed in flames.

"It is with a very heavy heart that I share this picture of the Summit Inn and surrounding buildings," the restaurant posted on Facebook, along with a photo. "It is beyond comprehension how this could possibly happen."

There is little weather relief in sight for firefighters battling the Blue Cut fire, the National Weather Service said.

"At least for the next couple of days, it's going to be very, very dry," said Philip Gonsalves, a meteorologist with the weather service in San Diego. "That's the conditions that will affect the fire more than anything else. It's going to be hot, very dry and windy in the afternoons."

Gonsalves said the weather service has been in touch with the firefighting agencies and other emergency responders in the Cajon Pass region. One major concern, he said, is that there is an abundance of fuel in the area for the fire to consume. The shrubbery hasn't burned in a very long time, he added, making it a breeding ground for wildfires.

The winds should drop off at night, the weather service said, but it will still be dry.

"They won't get much in the sense of humidity recovery in the nighttime hours," Gonsalves said. "If there's a fire in a location where there's good humidity recovery overnight, it helps the firefighters to get a handle on

the fire. That's not the case here. This is important because the fire doesn't lay down at night. They don't gain much of an advantage."

Starting Friday, he said, temperatures will cool slightly and that will help firefighting efforts. A high of 99 is forecast Wednesday, with southwest wind gusts of up to 10 mph expected in the afternoon.

The blaze erupted as crews battled another major fire in Northern California, where the Clayton fire had ripped through 4,000 acres in Lake County, nearly obliterating entire neighborhoods and causing thousands to flee. A 40-year-old man was charged with arson in connection with the blaze late Monday, police said.

<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-blue-cut-fire-20160816-snap-story.html>

More than 80,000 warned to evacuate in raging California fire

Madison Park and Gul Tuysuz, CNN

Posted: August 17, 2016, 1:09 PM ET

(CNN) A Southern California wildfire is burning uncontrollably a day after it ignited, scorching 30,000 acres.

The brush fire is 0% contained as of Wednesday morning, according to the San Bernardino National Forest.

Authorities have warned more than 82,000 residents in San Bernardino County to evacuate from the fast-moving fire that began Tuesday; 34,500 homes are in the evacuation area.

#BlueCutFire acreage updated to 30,000 acres, 0% contained. @SBCOUNTYFIRE @sbcountysheriff @CHPInland @CALFIREBDU @Caltrans8

— San Bernardino NF (@SanBernardinoNF) August 17, 2016

More than 1,300 personnel are on the scene responding to the blaze as well as 152 engines, 18 crews, 10 air tankers and eight helicopters, according to the San Bernardino National Forest.

#BlueCutFire in the Cajon Pass (San Bernardino County) is now 15,000 acres. 15 & 138 closed.
Photo: @crimeshutterbug pic.twitter.com/hDNUGpRuJU

— CAL FIRE PIO Berlant (@CALFIRE_PIO) August 17, 2016

The massive fire, called Blue Cut, prompted Gov. Jerry Brown to declare a state of emergency in the area.

"This is a very quickly growing wildfire," a San Bernardino National Forest statement said, urging residents to follow evacuation instructions.

Fire authorities warn of "imminent threat to public safety, rail traffic and structures" in the affected areas.

The blaze started about 10:30 a.m. Tuesday in Cajon Pass, a mountain pass between the San Bernardino Mountains and San Gabriel Mountains. The size of the fire is roughly 28 square miles.

The area of the fire is about 70 miles east of Los Angeles, affecting Cajon Pass, Lytle Creek, Wrightwood, Oak Hills and surrounding areas.

On Tuesday, six firefighters were trapped by the wildfire but found shelter at a nearby structure, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**. Two suffered minor injuries but later returned to the fire line.

The fire quickly scorched up the dry hills as winds carried the embers. It fed on the thick, parched brush, and engulfed an unknown number of homes and structures, according to fire officials.

One resident told CNN affiliate KABC-TV in Los Angeles about the flames surrounding her house.

"We had to keep the windows up because we couldn't breathe. The smoke was so thick, and as soon as the smoke cleared, we could see that everything was gone," said Crystal Armstrong, who lost her home.

Firefighters implored residents to evacuate, saying that refusing to do so puts lives at risk.

Aerial views showed the mountains covered in plumes of smoke.

#BlueCutFire [update] north of San Bernardino (San Bernardino Co) is now 9,000 acres. <https://t.co/I8T8YeiGpzipic.twitter.com/Wu30TzjRis>

— CAL FIRE (@CAL_FIRE) August 17, 2016

Drought-stricken California has been hit with waves of wildfires this summer, fueled by dry conditions, heat and dead brush.

Before the Blue Cut Fire, 8,000 firefighters had already been battling eight large wildfires across the state.

<http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/16/us/california-wildfire-evacuations/>

Blue Cut Fire Explodes to 30,000 Acres; Burning in “Unprecedented Fashion”

Victor Valley News

Posted: August 17, 2016



(photo by Dallas Dunn, for Victor Valley News)

OAK HILLS, Calif: (VVNG.com)- The Blue Cut Fire has chewed through 46 square miles in less than 24 hours, and erupted to 30,000 acres with 0% containment.

Today's weather will be hot and dry with very low humidity. A Red flag warning remains in effect for the next several days.

Resources committed to the Blue Cut fire include 18 crews, 15 helicopters, 10 air tankers and 1,309 personnel.

During a press conference held Wednesday morning, Incident Commander Mike Wakoski said, “in my 40 years of fighting fire I’ve never seen fire behavior so extreme as it was yesterday.”

“This week we’ve seen three fires in San Bernardino. We’re seeing explosive, dangerous fire behavior,” said John Miller with the US Forrest Service.

“A lot of homes were lost yesterday, there will be a lot of families that come home to nothing,” said **San Bernardino County Fire** Chief Mark Hartwig. “If there is a bright side, a silver lining there are some homes that were saved. The hard brave work of men and women firefighters yesterday put themselves in harm’s way to evacuate and protect structures.”

Nearly 35,000 homes have been evacuated, including 80,000 plus residents. Mandatory evacuations now include Phelan/Piñon Hills so. of Phelan Road from Sheep Creek Road west to Green Road, including Desert Front Road area.

If you are asked to evacuate it’s very important you adhere what law enforcement is telling you to do and leave. “We will continue to do our very best to patrol those neighborhoods that have been evacuated,” said Sheriff John McMahon.

The 15 freeway remains closed northbound at the 15/215 interchange and southbound at Main Street and Highway 138 is also still closed.

“We have a constant assessment of the roadway conditions. There is significant damage done by the fire to guardrails and some of the power lines that are affecting traffic in the center median, said Rich Stewart with

the California Highway Patrol. "We are continuing to reassess that throughout the day and hopefully, we get that open as soon as possible."

<http://www.vvng.com/blue-cut-fire-grows-to-30000-acres-burning-in-unprecedented-fashion/>

Blue Cut Fire Burns 30,000 Acres, Forces 82,000 to Evacuate in California

Alastair Jamieson, NBC News

Posted: August 17, 2016



A firefighter battles the Blue Cut fire near Los Angeles which has led to evacuated orders for 82,000 people. Paul Buck / Epa

A wildfire continued raging through rural communities in California Wednesday, triggering a state of emergency and evacuation orders for more than 82,000 residents in the San Bernardino area.

More than 1,300 firefighters and other emergency workers were battling the Blue Cut fire, which flared early Tuesday some 60 miles east of Los Angeles and spread rapidly along the Cajon Pass. By Wednesday morning, it had burned 30,000 acres, with firefighters unable to contain any of it, officials said.

"It hit hard, it hit fast, with an intensity that we've never seen before," **San Bernardino County Fire Chief Mart Hartwig** told reporters.

He warned that many families will return home "to nothing."

San Bernardino National Forest spokesman John Miller described the conditions as "explosive."

Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency in San Bernardino County, families fled and Interstate 15 was closed as the blaze grew.

"This moved so fast," said Darren Dalton, 51, who along with his wife and son had to get out of his house in the small town of Wrightwood. "It went from 'have you heard there's a fire?' to 'mandatory evacuation' before you could take it all in ... Suddenly it's a ghost town."

Ash fell on motorists from billowing black smoke, while aerial pictures from KNBC captured a roadside 'firenado' in which swirling gusts of wind sent flames twisting high into the air.

The Red Cross set up shelters for residents forced from their homes.

Shannon Anderson of Blue Mountain Farms horse ranch in Phelan had to load up and evacuate 40 horses as the fire approached.

"It's raining ash," Anderson told The Associated Press.

The destruction included a landmark restaurant, the Summit Inn in Hesperia, whose owner posted to Facebook a photo of it on fire.

Two firefighters were hurt and briefly hospitalized when they became trapped while defending homes and assisting evacuations in the Swarthout Canyon area, San Bernardino Fire Department said.

The fire was zero percent contained and covered 28 square miles at 11 p.m. PT (2 a.m. ET) — only 12 hours after it began — according to CalFire.

The National Weather Service issued a red flag warning through Thursday night, saying strong winds, low humidity and warm temperatures meant "critical fire weather conditions" would contribute to "extreme fire behavior."

One the 800 residents in the Lytle Creek area told KNBC she was in the shower when deputies knocked on her door and asked her to evacuate.

The woman, who gave her name as Amber, said she grabbed what she could — including her dogs — and took off.

"There is no escape," she said. "This was the time for me to go."

Another evacuated resident, John Goodfried, told KNBC he watched air tankers flying missions over the blaze.

"If the smoke is heavy and thick and black you know it's burning something," he said.

The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department said a 98-year-old hospice patient was evacuated by helicopter from the Wrightwood area to the north of the wildfire.

Highway 138 to Lone Pine Canyon was closed, while San Bernardino Fire Department said there was no timetable for when Interstate 15 — the main link to Nevada — would reopen.

Nighttime helicopters were assisting efforts to control the blaze, it said, continuing the work of 10 air tankers that doused the area fire retardant earlier in the day.

An 84-year-old local historian who uses a walker and is hard of hearing was saved after family members saw KNBC aerial pictures of his house surrounded in flames.

John Hockaday, who has penned books about the Cajon Pass and Route 66, wrapped his head in wet rags and held a hose with water from an emptying tank as the fire swept over his property, burned several cars and his mother-in-law's home, his cousin Ron Snow said.

Snow said he was watching an NBC4 live stream of the fire as flames surrounded Hockaday's house in Cajon Pass and reached out to the newsroom who contacted dispatch to get rescuers to Hockaday's location in a canyon called Lost Lake.

"He was surrounded by fire," Snow told the station. "Fire crews were dispatched. Now he's safe."

The number of fires in California has grown 20 percent over the last decade, rising from more than 4,800 fires in 2006 to nearly 5,800 fires in 2015, according to data from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, KNBC reported.

<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/western-wildfires/blue-cut-fire-burns-18-000-acres-forces-82-000-n632486>

Blue Cut fire continues to rage, zero percent contained

Judi Bowers, Big Bear Grizzly

Posted: August 17, 2016



Traffic on Highway 18 between Lucerne Valley and Big Bear Valley is stopped due to trucks using the mountain roads as a detour for Interstate 15. The interstate is closed due to the Blue Cut fire that started Aug. 16 near the Cajon Pass. Big rigs are advised not to use the mountain roads as an alternate. Lisa Evans/Big Bear Grizzly

UPDATE: 9:17 a.m., Aug. 17—Incident commanders held a press conference at 9 a.m. to provide updates on the Blue Cut Fire.

The massive blaze is the most explosive and spreading at a rate unheard of by fire officials. The fire behavior is being called explosive and dangerous.

Due to the rate of spread, the evacuations are mandatory. John Miller with the U.S. Forest Service urged all residents to leave the area when asked. The worst thing to happen is those who delay and then call 911 unable to escape, Miller said.

San Bernardino County Sheriff John McMahon reiterated that message. Law enforcement personnel are going door to door asking residents to evacuate, McMahon said.

San Bernardino County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig said there are a lot of families who will not have homes to return to. But there were also a lot of homes saved, Hartwig said. Structure defense is a priority today, he added.

This fire is moving "hard, fast and with an intensity we haven't seen," Hartwig said. He recognized the brave men and women who have put their lives on the line to fight the blaze and affect rescues in the face of danger.

Roads remain closed and the representative from the California Highway Patrol said he recognized the inconvenience the closure of Interstate 15 is causing. Caltrans and the CHP are working together to evaluate the roadways and the damage caused by the Blue Cut fire. The roadways will be reopened as soon as possible. Big rigs are advised to avoid the mountain roads, with some trucks getting stuck on Highway 138.

Reports are coming in that a big rig has gone over the side on Highway 18 at Cushenbury Grade.

UPDATE: 7:47 a.m., Aug. 17—The latest estimates put the Blue Cut fire at 30,000 with zero percent containment.

The raging wildfire continued to burn out of control marching toward the community of Wrightwood, which has been evacuated. Authorities say that 82,000 people in the path of this wildfire have been evacuated since it began Aug 16 near the Cajon Pass.

As of this morning, approximately 1,300 personnel are assigned to the fire. That includes 152 engines, 18 crews, eight air tankers, two Very Large Air Tankers known as VLATS, and eight helicopters including night flying helicopters.

Additional firefighters and equipment have been ordered and a national Type I Incident Management Team has been requested. Close to 35,000 structures remain threatened by the wildfire. It's unknown at this time how many homes and businesses have been lost to the fire.

Interstate 15 remains closed in both directions. Traffic on Highway 18 on the back side toward Lucerne Valley is bumper-bumper with motorists using the route as a detour around the Cajon Pass. Big rigs and other over-sized vehicles are advised not to use the mountain roads. According to those stuck on Highway 18, big trucks are attempting to navigate the narrow curves causing back ups in both directions.

Alternate routes include taking Interstate 10 to Highway 62 north to Highway 247 west to avoid the mountain roads and access the high desert.

The Blue Cut fire doubled in size overnight to 18,000 acres, with new updates expected later this morning.

Reported around 10:30 a.m. Aug. 16 at 5 acres near the Cajon Pass, the wildfire exploded to 1,000 acres in less than an hour. It continued to rage out of control prompting the evacuation of more than 80,000 people caught in its path. As of daybreak, the Blue Cut fire is zero percent contained.

Officials have not provided information on the number of structures lost thus far in the Blue Fire. The Summit Inn at the top of the Cajon Pass, a restaurant popular with travelers on Interstate 15, is one of the casualties. It was an iconic cafe built on Route 66 and is said to have been visited by a number of celebrities since its opening in the early 1950s including Elvis Presley. The Blue Cut fire destroyed the iconic restaurant. Broadcast news helicopters streamed coverage of the fire live throughout the day showing the blaze plow through the vegetation and homes.

Interstate 15 remains closed in both directions, as is Highway 138. Hot, dry conditions are fueling the wildfire. Relative humidity remains in the teens. A red flag warning is in effect in the Blue Cut fire zone, as well as a large portion of the Inland Empire including the San Bernardino Mountains and Big Bear Valley. Temperatures near the fire area are forecast in the mid to upper 90s.

Evacuation orders remain in effect for the entire community of Wrightwood from the San Bernardino County line to Jackson Lake. Baldy Mesa, Swathout Canyon, West Cajon Valley, Lone Pine Canon and Lytle Creek Canyon are also under mandatory evacuation orders. The areas west of Interstate 15 and west of Highway 395 and west of Summit Valley, south of Bear Valley Road and east of Caughlin Road, north of Highway 138, east of Sheep Creek and south of Phelan Road and west of Caliente are also under evacuation orders.

In addition to Interstate 15 and Highway 38 closures, there are a number of other roads closed. Those include the 395 southbound at Joshua, State Route 2 from County Line to Highway 173, Old Cajon Boulevard north of Devore Cutoff, Lytle Creek at Glen Helen, Beekley Road from Phelan Road to the 128, Highway 38 to Lone Pine Canyon.

Interstate 15 is closed in both directions between Ranchero on the southbound side and Interstate 215 on the northbound side.

There are alternate routes with many motorists using Big Bear Valley as a detour to travel from the San Bernardino area to the high desert. Interstate 15 is a major route between the high desert and the Inland Empire and beyond. Travelers to Las Vegas are also affected by the closure.

Caltrans is advising oversize and large vehicles such as buses, RVs and semi trucks not to use Highways 18 and 138 and other mountain roads as an alternate through the San Bernardino Mountains. Traffic is expected to be heavy on those roads.

A number of schools in the area are also closed.

Governor Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency for San Bernardino County in response to the Blue Cut fire. This provides the opportunity for additional resources as well as provides assistance to residence and businesses affected by the Blue Cut fire.

Drift smoke has moved into Big Bear Valley. A smoke advisory has been issued for San Bernardino County. There is no danger to Big Bear from the Blue Cut fire. Fire officials remind residents and visitors to the mountains to be vigilant in preventing forest fires. The ongoing drought means an overly dry forest. Hot and windy conditions are a concern. Use caution and report any smoke or fire immediately.

http://www.bigbeargrizzly.net/news/blue-cut-fire-continues-to-rage-zero-percent-contained/article_7412d268-6479-11e6-995e-db1413a5f0e7.html

Fire Explodes In Cajon Pass; Traffic Diverted Into Morongo Basin

Z107.7 News

Posted: August 17, 2016



The Blue Cut Fire in the Cajon Pass quickly exploded to 15,000 acres in just a few hours Tuesday.

Photo courtesy San Bernardino County Fire



San Bernardino County Fire Battalion Chief John Chamberlin (center) discusses the Blue Cut fire Tuesday.

Photo courtesy San Bernardino County Fire

A wildfire in the Cajon Pass was raging out of control Tuesday, and its effects can be felt in the Morongo Basin. The Blue Cut Fire started about 10:30 Tuesday morning west of Interstate 15 and by midnight had exploded to more than 18,000 acres with zero percent containment. The fire had nearly doubled in size overnight, growing to 30,000 acres by 7 a.m. The fire is advancing in many directions. Six firefighters had to shelter in place when they were trapped by the advancing flames; two firefighters were treated for moderate injuries but are back fighting the wildfire. A smoke advisory has been issued for parts of San Bernardino County, and Governor Jerry Brown has declared a state of emergency for the county. At this time, it's unknown how many structures have been destroyed in the fire, but Sheriff's officials estimate they have ordered mandatory evacuations of more than 80,000 residents from 34,500 homes. Affected areas include the Cajon Pass area, Lytle Creek, Wrightwood, Oak Hills and surrounding areas, and portions of I-15 and Highway 138 have been closed. As long as those roads are closed, traffic is being diverted to Interstate 10 to Highway 62 to State Route 247. Residents are urged to use alternate routes in Yucca Valley, such as Yucca Trail and Sunnyslope.

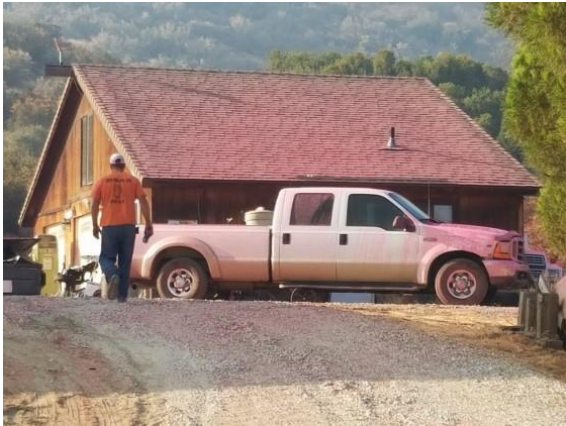
<http://z1077fm.com/fire-explodes-in-cajon-pass-traffic-diverted-into-morongo-basin/>

Cleaning up after the wildfire

When flames die down, residents often spend time cleaning fire retardant off cars, homes and landscaping.

Doug Saunders, Press Enterprise

Posted: August 15, 2016, 5:53 p.m.



Fire retardant covers cars and buildings on Ryan Nuckols' 6-acre property in Summit Valley on Monday, Aug. 8. The property was in danger during the Pilot fire. Beatriz Valenzuela

Firefighters who battled the Pilot fire were busy at work last week in an added effort to help homeowners who left their homes behind under evacuation orders.

But they weren't dousing flames this time. Instead, they were helping residents whose homes were covered in a pink clay-like dust, known as Phos-chek, during the firefighting effort.

Phos-Chek is an aerial and ground applied chemical retardant for control and management of wildland fires, according to the website of its Rancho Cucamonga-based manufacturer, ICL Performance Products LP.

"Our community has come together to support us in many ways," **San Bernardino County Fire** Captain Mike Arvizo said. "This small gesture is a way for us to give back to them."

With a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency label as "practically non-toxic," the red-chemical mixture is mostly harmless to humans and wild mammals, according to documents obtained from several agencies.

But it can cause quite a mess.

In some cases Phos-Chek, if not cleaned off quickly, could stain homes and vehicles.

"We're trying to help homeowners clean the retardant from their homes to minimize any damage," county fire Assistant Chief John Chamberlin said.

There are some concerns about the effects of retardant on trees and chaparral during the drought, which has made scarce the cleansing rains that can wash the chemicals away.

The Phos-Chek is dropped from fixed-wing aircraft with specially fitted holding tanks designed for the pink fire retardant, according to CalFire's aviation website.

Some of the aircraft in the state's aviation fleet can hold more than 10,000 gallons of the fire retardant.

“When we saw those planes dropping so much of that pink stuff and dark plumes of smoke rising we knew the fire was burning out of control and we prayed our home would be saved,” resident Tim McComber said. “Seeing the firefighters cleaning off homes made us respect them that much more. They and the sheriff’s department did an amazing job saving homes, property and all of our lives.”

<http://www.pe.com/articles/homes-810632-fire-retardant.html>