



# NEWS



## News Headlines 08/20-22/2016

- Newest wildfire advances on thousands of California homes
- Raging Blue Cut fire leaves some homes in smoldering ruins, but scope of loss still a mystery
- Blue Cut Fire Updates: Moves to Lytle Creek
- BLUECUT FIRE UPDATE: Crews increase containment to 40 percent; no federal aid for victims
- Some Blue Cut fire victims 'just glad' to be alive as more than 100 homes destroyed
- Bulldozers serve an integral role in fighting Bluecut Fire
- Haze coming as SoCal fire rages, health risks low in Havasu
- Crews turn corner; Wrightwood reopened to residents
- Blue Cut fire in the Cajon Pass destroys 105 homes and 213 other buildings
- Blue Cut fire triggers extra caution for busy fire season
- Residents return to charred homes
- Southern California Wildfire 73% Contained, Firefighters Transition to 'Mop-Up Phase'
- As crews tame wildfire, focus turns to what exactly burned
- Southern California wildfire evacuees allowed to return home
- Emotional homecoming for evacuees

## Newest wildfire advances on thousands of California homes

Christopher Weber and Christine Armario, The Associated Press

Posted: August 17, 2016, 4:37 PM



A firefighter prepares to battle a wildfire in the Cajon Pass in San Bernardino county, Calif., on Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2016. The wildfire that began as a small midmorning patch of flame next to Interstate 15 in the Cajon Pass had by Tuesday's end turned into a 28-square-mile monster that burned an untold number of homes. Stan Lim — The Press-Enterprise via AP

**SAN BERNARDINO >>** California's newest huge wildfire advanced on thousands of homes Wednesday, feeding on drought-stricken vegetation and destroying an untold number of structures as it expanded to nearly 47 square miles.

Authorities could not say how many homes were destroyed in the first furious hours, but they prepared communities for bad news.

"There will be a lot of families that come home to nothing," **San Bernardino County Fire** Chief Mark Hartwig said after a morning flight over a scene he described as "devastating."

"It hit hard. It hit fast. It hit with an intensity that we hadn't seen before," he said.

No deaths were reported but cadaver dogs were used to search ruins to look for anyone who was overrun by the flames.

The blaze 60 miles east of Los Angeles was among eight large wildfires being battled by 10,000 firefighters statewide, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. In a fifth year of low rainfall, much of the area is in "extreme" or "exceptional" drought.

Flames continued to climb the flanks of the San Gabriel Mountains toward the town of Wrightwood, where authorities said that only half of the community's 4,500 residents had complied with evacuation orders covering more than 34,000 homes and some 82,000 people.

"This is not the time to mess around," said Battalion Chief Mark Peebles of the San Bernardino County Fire Department. "If you are asked to evacuate, please evacuate."

At an evacuation shelter, loading dock worker Shawn Brady, 30, was stressed about the home he shares with his mother, sister and dog on the outskirts of Wrightwood. He had heard it burned but hoped for the best.

“I’m trying to remain optimistic,” he said. “It’s the not knowing that’s the worst.”

Less than 24 hours after the blaze began, the fire command assembled a fleet of 10 air tankers, 15 helicopters and an army of 1,300 firefighters, many of them just off the lines of a wildfire that burned for 10 days just to the east.

The fire erupted late Tuesday morning in Cajon Pass, a critical highway and rail corridor through mountain ranges that separate Southern California’s major population centers from the Mojave Desert to the north.

Countless big rigs were parked on both sides of the pass, waiting for Interstate 15 and a web of other roads to reopen. Alternate routes involved significant detours. The pass is a major route for travel from the Los Angeles region to Las Vegas and also carries significant daily commuter traffic for high desert residents.

The speed of the fire’s spread astonished those in its path.

“This moved so fast,” said Darren Dalton, 51, who along with his wife and son had to get out of his house in Wrightwood. “It went from ‘Have you heard there’s a fire?’ to ‘mandatory evacuation’ before you could take it all in.”

Hundreds of cars packed with belongings and animals left the town. The air for miles around the blaze was filled with smoke.

Shannon Anderson of Blue Mountain Farms horse ranch in Phelan had to evacuate 40 horses as the fire approached. “It’s raining ash,” Anderson said, breathing hard.

Devouring ranchlands, the blaze surged west to the Los Angeles County line and north to the Mojave Desert.

Eric Sherwin of the San Bernardino County Fire Department confirmed Tuesday night that the flames had burned at least a dozen buildings, some of them homes. He said he had seen all kinds of things burn, including the Summit Inn, a historic diner near I-15.

“I’m looking up here and I’m seeing buses. I’m seeing outbuildings. I’m seeing houses,” he said.

Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency in the area within hours of the latest fire breaking out, a move that more often comes after a blaze has done several days of destruction.

Six firefighters were briefly trapped by flames at a home where the occupants had refused to leave, forcing the crew to protect the house, fire officials said.

As that fire surged, a major blaze north of San Francisco was fading, and about 4,000 people in the town of Clearlake were allowed to return home.

Their relief was tempered with anger at a man who authorities believe set the blaze that wiped out several blocks of a small town over the weekend along with 16 smaller fires dating back to last summer.

Investigators in Northern California said Tuesday that they had been building a case against the suspected arsonist, 40-year-old construction worker Damin Anthony Pashilk, for more than a year. But they did not have enough evidence to make an arrest until the weekend blaze ripped through Lower Lake.

The fire destroyed 175 homes and other structures in the working-class town of Lower Lake.

“What I’d do to him, you don’t want to know,” said Butch Cancilla, who saw his neighbor’s home catch fire as he fled on Sunday. Cancilla still does not know the fate of his own home.

“A lot of people want to hang him high,” his wife, Jennie, added.

An attorney listed as representing Pashilk did not return a call requesting comment.

<http://www.morningjournal.com/article/MJ/20160817/NEWS/160819556>

---

## **Raging Blue Cut fire leaves some homes in smoldering ruins, but scope of loss still a mystery**

**Brittney Mejia, Angel Jennings, Ruben Vives and Corina Knoll, LA Times**

Posted: August 18, 2016, 6:30PM



A firefighter works to defend structures on Lytle Creek Road on Wednesday night. (Marcus Yam / Los Angeles Times)

The tiny stone home was little more than a blackened shell. The only hint of its former occupants: a metal bed frame, a shattered toilet seat, charred tin cans.

Nestled along Lone Pine Canyon Road, a narrow, twisting thoroughfare, it was a bleak symbol of all that has surrendered to the raging fire that continues to terrorize the Cajon Pass.

But for all the devastation that the Blue Cut fire has wreaked, officials have had difficulty determining the damage left by explosive flames that quickly overtook nearly 36,000 acres.

Damage assessors have been hindered from surveying the destruction because of erratic fire behavior and intense flames that broke through retardants dropped by air crews, Eric Sherwin, an incident-response spokesman with the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**, said Thursday.

Fire swept through numerous remote hillsides and canyons, burning some structures to the ground but sparing others nearby.

Officials continue to say only that “numerous” buildings have been lost but are unable to estimate how many of those are homes. They said among the hardest hit were in West Cajon Valley and Swarthout Canyon, where deputies arrested three people suspected of stealing a vehicle from a residence.

On Thursday, there was a chilling silence in some areas where the fire had marched. The earth around a section of Highway 138 was scorched, power poles blackened, their wood splintered. A gentle wind stirred up ash, sending it swirling along the ruins.

A pinwheel spun in a backyard, near the smoldering carcass of a home. Nearby, in a garden, a sign creaked, swaying gently in the breeze.

*"The kiss of the sun for pardon  
The song of the birds for mirth  
One is nearer God's heart in a garden  
Than any place else on earth"*

Crews are now focused on communities west of the fire, such as Lytle Creek and the mountain resort town of Wrightwood, which is dotted with apartments and small homes and has the highest housing density in the area.

Firefighters have centered efforts on Lone Pine Canyon Road, the back door into Wrightwood, in hopes of preventing the blaze from jumping over the ridge. Still, gusty winds, high temperatures and low humidity persist and could create the same challenges that have haunted crews since the fire broke out Tuesday.

Although the Blue Cut fire calmed slightly overnight and halted its march north and east, it spread more than 4,000 acres Thursday, measuring 35,969 acres. The fire is just 22% contained, and a red flag warning remains in effect.

Some signs of progress were evident Thursday. Mandatory evacuations were lifted in several communities, and Caltrans reopened the 15 Freeway, a key trucking and commuter route that runs from San Diego, through the Inland Empire and across the Mojave Desert into Nevada. Its two-day closure had contributed to massive congestion, creating nightmares for both travelers and those trying to evacuate.

Highway 138, another major roadway in the area, was expected to remain closed until further notice, according to the CHP.

Along Lytle Creek Road on Thursday, sunlight highlighted fire retardant-covered ridges and caution tape fluttered in a light breeze outside evacuated homes.

Resident Maria Hadaway, who chose to stay, likened the deserted stillness to an episode of “SpongeBob SquarePants” in which the eponymous cartoon character wakes up alone in his town.



"That's me. I'm SpongeBob in Bikini Bottom," she said. "I'm hoping they let everyone [back] up here, because I don't like being alone."

Still in her pajamas, the 62-year-old sat in front of her home with a neighbor.

Hadaway said she stayed because of her dogs. She's been feeding neighbors' dogs as well, she said.

When authorities arrived to ask residents to evacuate, Hadaway locked the door, closed the drapes and didn't answer.

Those who evacuated find themselves mired in uncertainty.

"I don't want to be blindsided again," said Sheri Sladwick, 46, who lost a home to fire 13 years ago.

Now she hears conflicting reports about whether fire ran through her neighborhood in Lytle Creek and doesn't know what to believe. She is frustrated that there have been few specifics about the damage.

Fire crews in the Cajon Pass have likely had difficulty determining the number of homes lost because of safety concerns and protocol that grants wildland firefighters the right of way over those damage assessors, according to fire experts.

"Engines have to get to the homes and other areas," said Sam Lanier, a former fire captain who founded a site that offers real-time updates on wildfires throughout the country. "If multiple vehicles are there, it's hard to get out."

The standard guidelines say that life is prioritized first, followed by property conservation and environmental protection, Lanier said. When it comes to protecting specific areas, crews look at what will help mitigate the fire, never at what is considered the most valuable.

"There is no pre-made map to say we're going to protect this area first. Firefighters are blind to the cost. The job is to go and save as much as possible."

The California wildfire season, once confined to autumn, has found itself stretched earlier and later, with hundreds of homes and eight people killed in wildfires already this year.

Fire agencies have been overworked, some of its firefighters working with no sleep while thrown into battles fueled by triple-digit temperatures, wind and desiccated tinder.

There is no pre-made map to say we're going to protect this area first. Firefighters are blind to the cost. The job is to go and save as much as possible.— Sam Lanier, expert on wildfires

James Bailey, who has lived near the Cajon Pass for about 40 years, drove up to an area community center Thursday. He was relieved to find it still standing, although its surroundings had been singed.

"Everything around it is just like a moonscape," he later informed his wife.

The couple had stayed put in their trailer park mobile home having faith in its metal frame and concrete base, although took care to douse the property with water.

A day earlier, Bailey had marveled at the flames, smoke and fire coming from behind Mountain Lakes Resort.

“When it came over the hill, it had to have been 100 feet tall,” Bailey said. “I can’t believe how big the flames were. The whole mountain was red.”

The activity taking place around them for the last two days has been unsettling.

Water drops from air tankers, sirens from fire engines, blades rotating on helicopters — all sounded eerily, they said, like war.

<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-blue-cut-fire-20160818-snap-story.html>

---

## **Blue Cut Fire Updates: Moves to Lytle Creek**

*Blue Cut Fire in San Bernardino now 4 percent contained, at 31,000 acres; thousands of residents displaced . Mandatory evacuations in some areas have been lifted and some roads have been reopened.*

**Lee Mijares, Christian Post**

Posted: August 18, 2016, 9:36 pm



Trees burn on a hillside during the Blue Cut fire near Wrightwood, California, August 17, 2016. (Photo: Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

The unstoppable Blue Cut Fire which has destroyed more than 35,969 acres of land, displaced thousands of residents and devastated homes has ravaged yet another town: Lytle Creek, California.

This small town along Lone Pine Canyon Road has also surrendered to the fire, which has turned into a terrifying blaze in just a few days. Officials still do not have the exact number of casualties and damages as it was too dangerous to do an actual assessment. Fire in the area is erratic. Some regions were even resistant to water and fire retardant showered by planes and helicopters. This was reported by Eric Sherwin, spokesperson for the Incident-Response Team of the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**.

Where is the fire headed?

One of the most important things to consider is where the Blue Cut Fire is actually headed. Reports say that this could be very hard to determine, since it could depend on wind conditions, which seem to shift and change in the area.

All that is known is that firefighting crew are now focused on the area west of the fire such as the scenic town of Wrightwood and Lytle Creek. Wrightwood is densely populated, with small homes to housing projects dotting the resort town.

The ground crew are concentrating on Lone Pine Canyon Road, one of the roads leading to Wrightwood, to prevent the fire from moving towards the ridge. The area continues to have terribly high temperatures, low humidity, and gusty winds. These conditions have posed a great challenge to firefighters since Tuesday, when the fire initially broke out.

The fire is said to move north and east. It has slowed overnight and is just 4 percent contained. National Weather Service and Cal Fire have maintained red flag warnings across the area.

Some good news: evacuations lifted and some roads reopened  
Mandatory evacuations were removed in some areas Thursday.

Some roads were reopened. Caltrans has allowed motorists to pass 15 Freeway, which is a major route for trucks, commuters, and motorists moving from San Diego through Inland Empire to Nevada across the Mojave Desert. Highway 138 will continue to remain closed.

Images of destruction

As the fire ceased in some areas, depressing images of destruction can be seen—photos of what remained of a family home, a charred car, bed railings, and tin cans. Fire officials say that some residents will be literally returning to nothing once the evacuations have been totally lifted.

The wildfire season in California is the busiest, with numerous wildfires burning in many areas of the state. Thousands have been affected as damages are unbelievable.

Firefighters work day and night and are now getting exhausted. Some work despite not sleeping for days, even in areas with hellish conditions.

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/blue-cut-fire-updates-moves-to-lytle-creek-images-of-devastation-fire-direction-map-168200/>

---



## **BLUECUT FIRE UPDATE: Crews increase containment to 40 percent; no federal aid for victims**

*37,020-acre blaze now 40% contained; 96 homes, 213 outbuildings destroyed*

**Victor Valley Daily Press**

Posted: August 19, 2016, 6:57 AM



A member of the San Bernardino County Fire Department's Damage Assessment Team looks for hot spots Friday in a home destroyed by the Bluecut Fire. The blaze destroyed 96 homes and 213 outbuildings. James Quigg, Daily Press

**CAJON PASS** — Firefighters increased containment of the Bluecut Fire from 22 to 40 percent on Friday, protecting the vulnerable communities of Wrightwood and Phelan while also assessing the damage wrought by the 37,020-acre blaze, authorities said. Meanwhile, San Bernardino County officials said Friday night that federal aid will not be available to help victims rebuild their homes. And the U.S. Forest Service asked for the public's assistance to determine the fire's cause.

Three assessment teams made their way through devastated burn areas, logging the number of burned homes and other structures and using cadaver dogs to try to determine if anyone perished in the flames. According to fire officials, at least 96 homes and 213 outbuildings were destroyed and that count is expected to rise.

"A lot of heat that we've been holding is up in Lone Pine Canyon (and) has been identified on Gobbler's Hill," **San Bernardino County Fire Department** spokesman Eric Sherwin told the Daily Press. "Even though we (don't) have smoke or active flames right now we know how hot that ground is up there. If we get those upcanyon winds returning, that could carry any part of the heat into a receptive fuel bed. That is what continues to threaten the community of Wrightwood.

"We are going to continue extending and protecting existing containment lines with the priority of removing the heat on the westside of the fire where it is still threatening communities, specifically Lytle Creek and Wrightwood."

The Bluecut Fire already ranks as one of San Bernardino's most costly disasters, county spokesman David Wert said in a news release. But only states can ask for a federal disaster declaration.

San Bernardino County declared a local emergency on Tuesday, the fire's first day. Gov. Jerry Brown then declared a state emergency and requested a federal declaration, which would have cleared the way for federal

help for victims. But the fire did not meet the threshold for a federal disaster, and the request was denied. Wert said the state countered by combining the Bluecut Fire with two other recent fires in a request for federal consideration. But the federal government also denied that request.

Much of the blaze's destruction occurred in the Swarthout Valley and West Cajon Valley, with Oak Hills and south Phelan also being affected, San Bernardino County Fire Department Chief Mark Hartwig said. "We're dealing with a fire that moves with an intensity that many veteran firefighters have never seen," said Hartwig, who said although there have been no human deaths, there's been "a heavy loss of life for animals" and many vehicles destroyed.

Officials announced that mandatory evacuation orders for all residents living south of Phelan Road and west of Green Road to Snowline Road were lifted at 5:30 p.m. In addition, Johnson, Sheep Creek and Beekley roads south of Phelan Road were all re-opened. By Friday night, only 3,198 homes and about 7,000 residents remained under the mandatory evacuation order.

Hartwig, touring the fire lines near Highway 138 with 1st District Supervisor Robert A. Lovingood on Friday afternoon, sang the praises of a strike team from Beverly Hills.

"I just let the supervisor know that this team stayed engaged in conditions that firefighters with less wildland fire experience than we have are here in dealing with piñon, juniper and chaparral," Hartwig said.

"But they stayed engaged and no doubt saved many of the structures in this community because of their hard work, bravery and courage. I got to say thank you to the strike team leader yesterday but didn't get a chance to thank the others on the team individually."

Earlier Friday, officials announced that mandatory evacuation orders for residents west of Baldy Mesa Road to Wilson Ranch Road and south of Phelan Road to Mission Street were lifted at 1 p.m. In addition, Baldy Mesa Road south of Phelan Road reopened, as did eastbound Highway 138 from Interstate 15 to Crestline.

According to the California Interagency Incident Management Team 4, the same one that responded to Hurricane Katrina and the Space Shuttle disaster, there are 2,684 firefighters on scene with 47 hand crews, 275 engines, 32 bulldozers, 26 water tenders and 14 helicopters.

Sherwin said some there may be some delay in getting evacuees back into their homes because of downed power lines.

"We know we have houses where firefighters did amazing work and were able to save, they are good to come into, we just need to restore the utilities," he said. "There are places we know we lost power lines. Your power lines may be intact but as soon as Edison restores the power, other lines that are down become live and that becomes a threat to other residents."

"We have been so fortunate to make it through this fire without a loss of life that it would be irresponsible and reckless of us to allow people to return into their homes until we can return them to a safe neighborhood."

The Bluecut Fire began Tuesday morning and has since raged through the Cajon Pass and into the southern end of the Victor Valley. High temperatures, low humidity and winds gusting up to 30 mph have complicated the fight for firefighters, authorities said. National Weather service spokesman Chris Outler said elevated fire danger could persist in the area into Saturday.

“As of now the Red Flag warning is in effect until 9 p.m. today, but it is possible that things could remain the same into tomorrow,” Outler said.

Mandatory evacuations for the west Oak Hills area were lifted Thursday night as authorities were allowing residents west of Interstate 15 to Baldy Mesa Road and south of Phelan Road to Whitehaven Street and Praire Trail to return home. Orders for the Baldy Mesa area have been lifted as well, according to the Incident Command website.

Hartwig said multiple agencies are working on the Bluecut Fire, including the U.S. Forest Service, San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department and Cal Fire.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/article/20160819/NEWS/160819732/0/SEARCH>

---

## **Some Blue Cut fire victims ‘just glad’ to be alive as more than 100 homes destroyed**

**Southern California News Group**

Posted: August 19, 2016, 6:25 AM



An outbuilding on the burned Clyde Ranch off Lone Pine Canyon Road. The Blue Cut Fire had burned 37,020 acres, 96 homes, 213 outbuildings and is 40 percent contained as of Friday evening. Will Lester — Staff Photographer

**SAN BERNARDINO MOUNTAINS >>** The lifting of evacuation orders and the reopening of a stretch of highway heralded more progress against the Blue Cut fire Friday.

And a favorable overnight weather forecast — from decreased winds to lower temperatures — was expected to help firefighters overnight.

But for families returning to burned-out ruins instead of homes, the massive wildfire’s destructive wake was nothing to celebrate.

And officials are asking for the public’s help in finding the fire’s cause.

The conflagration in the San Bernardino Mountains had consumed 37,020 acres as of Friday evening with 40 percent containment, up from 22 percent going into Friday. Fifty-seven square miles — the city of Ontario takes up about 50 — have been burned.

At least 105 single-family homes and 216 outbuildings were lost as of Friday, **San Bernardino County Fire** Chief Mark Hartwig said at a news conference. The count could rise in the days ahead.

Numerous animals also died in the blaze, although no human deaths have been reported.

Ronnie Moore's home was among those lost.

"I tried to run back in to save some things," said Moore, who is married with four children. "But the smoke and flames were so hot I couldn't make it."

Moore said he didn't have insurance on the property.

"We knew when we bought the home that the previous homeowner didn't pull permits when they built, so we couldn't get insurance," he said.

Because he lacks insurance and all his receipts burned in the fire, Moore said San Bernardino County can't help him. But he's determined to rebuild.

"If they let me back on my property tomorrow, I'm going to start working on clearing debris," Moore said. "I'm just glad we're all alive, because you can't rebuild the worst case scenario."

Late Friday night, officials put out a call for the public's help in finding what caused the blaze.

Investigators are asking for photos or video of the area either the southbound Interstate 15 between Cleghorn and Kenwood roads or along Old Cajon Boulevard in the same area on Tuesday between the hours of 10 and 11 a.m.

Those with information are asked to call 800-78-CRIME or go to [www.wetip.com](http://www.wetip.com). All calls are confidential.

More than 2,600 firefighters continue to battle the fire, which started around 10:30 a.m. Tuesday and grew to 18,000 acres by the first night as it moved with a pace and fury shocking even to veteran firefighters.

The 15 Freeway, which shut down at the fire's onset, is now reopen in the Cajon Pass in both directions, although on- and off-ramps through the pass remain closed.

Eastbound Highway 138 from the 15 to Highway 173 reopened Friday. Westbound 138 from the 15 to the Los Angeles County line remained closed as of Friday evening.

Mandatory evacuations for portions of Phelan were lifted Friday afternoon.

Residents west of Baldy Mesa Road to Wilson Ranch Road and south of Phelan Road to Mission Street were allowed to return home. Later, the order was lifted for residents living south of Phelan Road and west of Green Road to Snowline Road.

Lytle Creek, West Cajon Valley and Wrightwood will remain shut down until it's safe, said San Bernardino County Sheriff John McMahon.

Firefighters repeated their plea for people to comply with evacuation orders, something 50 percent of people had refused to do, according to officials.

"One of the biggest risks to firefighters and first responders is people waiting to evacuate," said Rocky Oplinger of California Federal National Team 4. "We saw what happened in Australia in 2009 — Black Sunday — where 179 people died because they waited too long."

A favorable weather report between 6 p.m. Friday and 6 a.m. Saturday bodes well for fighting the Blue Cut fire, a fire official said.

Winds at ridge tops, on slopes and down canyons are forecasted to die down, said Lt. John Cambra, of Elfrida Fire Department of Arizona and a Blue Cut fire spokesperson.

A red flag warning indicating high wind activity was set to be lifted 9 p.m. Friday, and winds are expected to subside after that, he said.

Temperatures are on a slight decrease as well, he said, yet it's a set of other numbers that are looking good.

Live fuel moisture — or plantlife that can still burn — is at 48 percent, he said, below the critical level of 60 percent.

At elevations below 3,500 feet, he said there is less than a 20 percent chance of fuels to ignite, while above 3,500 feet the chance is 20 percent to 30 percent.

Taken together, Friday night's weather forecast ought to decrease fire action substantially, he said.

## STILL DANGEROUS

Jody Noiron of the U.S. Forest Service warned firefighters at a Friday morning briefing that dangers remain.

"Just because you don't see a lot of smoke out there, the hazards are all still there," Noiron said.

Hand crews from Navajo Scouts, a Bureau of Indian Affairs team from Wind Rock, Arizona, spent Friday looking for hot spots, a practice called "cold trailing," along Lytle Creek Road north of the town, said crew boss Terry Tso. They also sought "green islands" of unburned fuel.

They used hand tools and chainsaws to make sure nothing was left to flare up into another fire.

"We're still finding heat," said Tso.

The containment line runs along the fire's southeast flank between Hesperia and Cajon.

"Lytle Creek and Wrightwood are still our highest priority," Oplinger said, adding firefighters are also focusing on the west side of Hesperia and Baldy Mesa.



## RELIEF CENTER

San Bernardino County officials opened a fire relief center at the county fairgrounds on 7th Street in Victorville on Friday. Through the Inland Empire United Way, county officials also established a relief fund for affected residents.

“We’ve been struck by one of the worst disasters of fires back to back,” San Bernardino County Supervisor Robert Lovingood said. “First there was the Pilot fire and now the Blue Cut fire.”

County services include helping homeowners file insurance claims and apply for disaster assistance. Buildings with at least \$10,000 in damage are eligible, San Bernardino County Assessor-Recorder-County Clerk Bob Dutton said in a news release.

“We are reaching out to potentially affected parties with information on how to file a claim, in addition to services to replace vital records such as birth, death and marriage certificates,” Dutton said, adding it’s important to file a claim as soon as possible.

“Even without a claim form filed, our staff will be reducing (property) values and notifying owners of any reductions made to their assessed valuation,” Dutton said.

For more information, call the Hesperia assessor district office at 760-995-8030 or the Hesperia recorder division at 855-732-2575.

While devastating, the fire does not meet the threshold to qualify for federal disaster relief funds, county spokesman David Wert said.

## CAMPING OUT

Since evacuating Lytle Creek on Tuesday afternoon, Laurie and Kenny DeClue and their dogs have been camping out in their 33-foot recreational vehicle. The RV is parked near the roadblock standing between them and home.

“We’ve been watching the road, waiting for it to open,” said Kenny DeClue.

The couple joked about their fire adventure, but Laurie DeClue said it had been a difficult week.

“It’s been hot, different and out of our place,” she said.

In the rush to get out Tuesday, they forgot to fill the water tank of their home-on-wheels. They’ve been spending more money than usual not only on water, but also ice and food.

Making matters worse, they couldn’t get their generator to work until Thursday, and they run it sporadically so it doesn’t overheat and ignite nearby dry grasses.

Without power, the DeClues rely on smartphone apps and conversations with family for news. As the couple sat beneath their RV awning, they laughed about how long they’ve gone without a shower.

“We found out how much we love each other,” quipped Laurie DeClue.



As Friday wore on, the DeClues wished they had ignored the evacuation order, like some of their neighbors. But Laurie DeClue said when the fire came up, “It was looking really big and close.”

“I just thought, ‘Get us out of there,’” she said. “I got spooked.”

But “now I want back in.”

## ON STANDBY

A new Riverside Fire Department rescue crew had to turn down a call to help on the Blue Cut fire because they’re on an urban search-and-rescue team on deck to respond to a large-scale West Coast disaster.

Like other fire departments in Riverside County, Riverside’s agency has also already sent firefighters to help battle fire. There was also a request for help from Riverside’s Rapid Extraction Module Support, a search-and-rescue team that uses rope systems to help sick or injured wildland firefighters, especially in steep terrain.

But members of that team are part of California Task Force 6, one of 28 national urban search-and-rescue teams in the nation that can be called out by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

This month, that task force tops the roster to respond to a disaster anywhere on the West Coast, said Steve McKinster, Riverside Fire Department’s urban search-and-rescue division chief and program manager for California Task Force 6.

“It’s really like having a perfect storm to have a big fire like what we have and also needing to be number one nationally to deploy a task force if needed,” he said.

<http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20160819/some-blue-cut-fire-victims-just-glad-to-be-alive-as-more-than-100-homes-destroyed>

---

## Bulldozers serve an integral role in fighting Bluecut Fire

Jose Quintero, Victor Valley Daily Press

Posted: August 19, 2016, 3:10 PM



Paul Blaine, from left, Robert Wilson and Justin Cecil stand in front of a bulldozer near the area of Phelan where the crew was assigned to work containment lines for the Bluecut Fire. Cecil owns Lake Arrowhead-based Cecil Logging and was contracted to work on the Bluecut Fire earlier this week. Jose Quintero, Daily Press

**PHELAN** — As news broke of the mandatory evacuations being lifted in a small portion of Phelan Friday afternoon, one can attribute that to great work from the firefighters.

But other men and women who are not uniformed firefighters also helped contribute to the fight against the 37,000-plus-acre Bluecut Fire.

**San Bernardino County Fire** Chief Mark Hartwig said at one point during the ongoing four-day battle with the blaze there were over 70 total bulldozers working the fire.

"The dozer operators do immense work on the lines. They are invaluable to fighting fires," Hartwig said.

Justin Cecil and his team of three worked the containment lines of the northern portion of the fire, just off Tumbleweed Road.

Cecil owns Lake Arrowhead-based Cecil Logging and said he received a call Tuesday night that his service was needed to combat the blaze, which started Tuesday morning in the Cajon Pass.

Cecil and his crew responded early Wednesday morning and were assigned to the Phelan area as the fire made its way northwest, burning at least one home in the area. An official count of damaged homes in Phelan was not available on Friday.

Robert Wilson, one of Cecil's crew members, operates the bulldozer and had just one word to sum up his experience battling the blaze.

"Hot," Wilson said. "Especially when you're up right against the fire trying to create a line to keep it from spreading. That's really intense."

Cecil said a bulldozer can get through just about any kind of terrain, except steep slopes and heavy rock areas. That is when hand crews and oftentimes, depending on the circumstances, air support will be used to create lines in those type of terrains.

Cecil said he wouldn't be sticking around Phelan much longer, but his crew would be. Cecil was called and requested to respond to the Cedar Fire, which has consumed over 9,000 acres just north of Lake Isabella.

"These guys will stay working on containment lines and I will head up there. Duty calls," he said. "When the fire agencies get tapped out of resources they turn to small contractors like us. That's something a lot of people don't know. They will see us driving around in Dodge pickup trucks and say to themselves this guy isn't a firefighter. Where is the fire truck? Oftentimes we're doing just as much as the firefighters.

"My business usually does small tree removal projects. But we work closely with the San Bernardino Forest Service and Cal Fire, but also with private homeowners as well. For what we do, we have to take fire safety courses but most of all you have to be proficient in what we do. In order to do this work, it's all about repetition and seat time. You have to be used to the machine and you just have to keep doing it over and over again to really help contain these fires."

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/article/20160819/NEWS/160819721/0/SEARCH>

---

## **Haze coming as SoCal fire rages, health risks low in Havasu**

Brandon Messick, Today's News-Herald

Posted: August 19, 2016

The Golden State is reeling from seven active wildfires this week, and ash is once more expected to loom on Havasu's horizon.

The Blue Cut Fire in neighboring San Bernardino County has consumed more than 30,000 since it began Aug. 16. The U.S. Forest Service is coordinating with California's Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, along with the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** and multiple other agencies to control the blaze, which was only four percent contained as of Thursday.

National Weather Service meteorologist Chris Outler says that northward winds will keep the majority of smoke and debris in California, but a layer of haze is likely to shroud Havasu's skyline within the next several days.

"If you're going to be traveling west, where the concentration of smoke is denser, you should limit your exposure to the outdoors, especially if you have a respiratory condition. Air quality in Havasu, however, shouldn't be much different than what's usual for the area."

Outler said that as the week progresses, wind throughout the area is expected to weaken, mitigating the potential threat of smoke or debris being carried into Arizona.

As of Thursday afternoon, approximately 82,000 people had been urged to evacuate the area of Southern California, abandoning more than 34,000 homes. Approximately 1,500 personnel are at the scene, with 178 fire engines, 26 crews, 10 air tankers and 17 helicopters, according to the National Wildfire Coordinating Group on Thursday.

According to NWCG, the fire is expected to move north, spreading east and west towards the communities of Oak Hills, Cajon Pass, Wrightwood, Victor Valley, Phelan, Baldy Mesa and South Hesperia, before eventually reaching the Lytle Creek. Officials say that structures in the region have been damaged and destroyed, but the extent of the damage remains to be seen, due to the fire's rapid growth and unpredictable behavior.

[http://www.havasunews.com/news/haze-coming-as-socal-fire-rages-health-risks-low-in/article\\_d1a282ee-65db-11e6-9b87-c74e14d51842.html](http://www.havasunews.com/news/haze-coming-as-socal-fire-rages-health-risks-low-in/article_d1a282ee-65db-11e6-9b87-c74e14d51842.html)

---

## Crews turn corner; Wrightwood reopened to residents

*Wrightwood residents allowed to return home; Firefighters increase containment of blaze to 73%*

Monica Solano and Steve Hunt, Victor Valley Daily Press

Posted: August 20, 2016, 7:09 AM



The Bluecut Fire destroyed these two structures along Icenbrook Road in a remote area near Keenbrook. Firefighters began mop-up phase on Saturday, increasing containment to 73 percent. David Pardo, Daily Press

Firefighters appear to have turned the corner in their bid to encircle the enormous Bluecut Fire, increasing containment to 73 percent on Saturday as most of the evacuees returned to their homes. Residents of Wrightwood received permission to return at noon Saturday, though no one else can gain entry into the mountain community at this time.

In a less than 48 hours, firefighters have increased containment of the 37,020-acre blaze by 69 percent, essentially entering mop-up phase and allowing authorities to lift evacuation orders for all but about 2,500 residents of Lytle Creek Canyon and West Cajon Valley. When the blaze broke out on Tuesday, authorities issued mandatory evacuation orders for nearly 83,000 residents and 34,500 homes throughout the High Desert and mountain communities.

“While the Bluecut Fire has had some devastating effects on residents, there were many courageous actions taken by the firefighters that saved homes across the path of this fire,” **San Bernardino County Fire** spokesperson Eric Sherwin told the Daily Press.

The mandatory evacuation orders for Wrightwood were reduced to voluntary at noon Saturday, authorities said. Only Wrightwood residents were allowed past the road closure at Highway 138 and Highway 2 by providing verification of residency.

Fire officials asked residents returning to the evacuation zone to exercise caution. Firefighters, engines and heavy equipment continue to operate in the area and the San Bernardino County Sheriff will continue enhanced patrols through these areas.

Nearly 2,700 firefighters and 275 engines have been involved in the effort to fully contain the blaze, which has consumed an estimated 60 square miles in the Cajon Pass and southern Victor Valley. There have been at least 105 homes destroyed, as well as 213 outbuildings and more than 200 vehicles, authorities said. Assessment teams began logging additional damage on Friday and Saturday and cadaver dogs were brought in to see if there were any victims in the rubble. So far, no deaths have been reported.

After encountering Red Flag conditions of high temperatures, low humidity and 20-30 mph wind gusts most of the week, firefighters enjoyed cooler temperatures, higher humidity and less wind on Saturday.

There are still several road and ramp closures, authorities said. The Cleghorn Road and Kenwood Avenue on- and off-ramps off of Interstate 15 are closed, as is Highway 138 from Interstate 15 to State Route 2 near Wrightwood. Other road closures include: State Route 2 from the Los Angeles County line to the 138; Old Cajon Boulevard of Devore; Lytle Creek Road at Glen Helen Parkway; Lone Pine Canyon Road from East Canyon Drive through Highway 138 and Swarthout Canyon Road to Cajon Boulevard.

“We understand the inconvenience not being able to get where you're going or for the drive to take longer than usual, but the roads have to stay closed in order to maintain the safety of all those in the field working on fighting this fire,” Sherwin said.

While crews are slowly moving into mop-up phase, Sherwin advised residents to continue to stay clear of the remaining evacuated areas for safety reasons as firefighters are continuing to scope out and repair any remaining damage.

“We’re continuing to cooperate and keep in contact with Incident Command, evaluating when we can complete all three phases of hazard reduction. These phases being fire suppression, suppression repair, and infrastructure restoration,” Sherwin said.

“It does us no help to allow people back into their homes if there are power lines down, electrical damage or any other sort of hazard still around that could be dangerous. We want to make sure these people have running water, electricity and that they are not just returning to a roof over their heads but that they are coming home safe and sound.”

The cause of the fire remains under investigation. The National Forest Service on Friday night asked for the public's help. People who may have information or tips are urged to call 1-800-47-ARSON or visit [wetip.com](http://wetip.com). Photos or videos that might assist investigators are especially welcome, the Forest Service said.

Evacuees who had been sheltered at Sultana High School in Hesperia have been moved to the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds, where the county set up a camp with various resources on Friday. Although federal aid will not be forthcoming to the residents who lost homes in the fire, the county assessor has staff at the



fairgrounds to help victims gain tax relief. Food, clothing and other aid also is available from the American Red Cross and other organizations.

Also Saturday, VCA Animal Shelters announced that select VCA hospitals in the region will provide free boarding of dogs, cats, birds and pocket pets of fire victims. Participating hospitals include the VCA facilities at 11696 Hesperia Road, Hesperia (760-244-8022); 14643 Palmdale Road, Victorville (760-245-0109); 42160 N. Shore Drive, Big Bear (909-866-2021) and 1821 E. Route 66, Glendora (626-963-1674).

“Our thoughts are with the many families who are being impacted by these devastating wildfires,” said Art Antin, Chief Operating Officer of VCA Animal Hospitals. “We are extending free boarding for family pets that have been displaced by the fires so families can be assured their pets are safe and be able to focus on their priorities during this critical time.”

Boarding assistance at participating Southern California VCA hospitals is based on space availability, the company said. Pets should be current on vaccinations, but in case they are not, VCA veterinarians will update vaccinations free of charge. VCA Hospitals also will offer a free health assessment exam for pets that have been evacuated or displaced as a result of the fires.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/article/20160820/NEWS/160829997/0/SEARCH>

---

## **Blue Cut fire in the Cajon Pass destroys 105 homes and 213 other buildings**

**Sarah Parvini, Ruben Vives and Frank Shyong, LA Times**

Posted: August 20, 2016, 11:10AM



The tally for California’s harsh fire season ascended to even grimmer terrain Saturday as officials announced that the Blue Cut fire in the Cajon Pass has destroyed 105 homes and 213 other structures.

The toll in San Bernardino County caps a week of extensive losses across California, including 300 structures destroyed in Lake County in Northern California when a wildfire raced through the town of Lower Lake, hammering its downtown area.

In both cases, officials said, the fires ravaged rural communities on the edges of vast open spaces so quickly that there was little firefighters could do. They blamed California’s five-year drought, which has left brush bone-dry, as well as hot, windy weather conditions.



“They are just moving as fast as the wind can push them, and that’s leading to what we’re seeing in terms of devastation,” said Char Miller, a Pomona College professor who’s an expert in wildfires. “Let’s call it an imperfect storm of conditions: the drought, the heat, the low humidity. And let’s be honest, this is not really big winds.”

Miller and other experts said the Blue Cut fire, which erupted Tuesday, is the latest harbinger of what could be a difficult fall when fierce Santa Ana winds traditionally cause many Southern California wildfires to pick up.

“If this came with Santa Ana, oh, my God, this would have been double or triple damage,” Miller added.

The blaze has covered more than 37,000 acres and was 68% contained as of Saturday morning, prompting officials to lift some evacuation orders and allowing residents to return to their homes. At the peak of the fire, more than 80,000 people were ordered to evacuate.

More than 2,600 firefighters are battling the blaze, officials said. They are being assisted by 12 air tankers and 14 water-dropping helicopters.

The property losses were scattered over a wild swath of the Cajon Pass.

The last time Mabel Ramos saw her peach-colored home was through the rear-view mirror of her car as she was pulling out of her driveway soon after the Blue Cut fire started. She saw flames as high as a utility pole surrounding her property.

“I was thinking, ‘Our Lord, dear father, his son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, please, when I leave this gate, take care of my house,’ ” she said.

Ramos returned to her home late Thursday afternoon. When she got to the gate, she found the charred Jaguar that she and her husband drove off in after getting married. Then she saw the guest house that she and her husband had built together, now a pile of rubble.

“I cried,” she said. “It was terrible.”

On Friday, she stood in what was once the living room of the guest house. The singed metal frame of a coffee table stood nearby. Other parts of the house survived, including a cast-iron wood stove.

The guest house was special, Ramos said. Her grandmother from El Salvador and family in Canada would stay there whenever they visited. Her son, who lives in Los Angeles, used it as second home.

The shed where she kept her animals also burned. She lost 135 of her livestock.

“I didn’t have time to even open the door,” she said, stifling tears.

Though the fire is slowly being contained, those whose homes were burned are just beginning to come to terms with the loss.

“We know that there are going to be people who are going to come home to nothing in a fire like this that seemed to burn at will and jump literally a half-mile ahead of itself,” **San Bernardino County Fire Chief**

Mark Hartwig said. “There are also going to be homes that are saved. You scratch your head and wonder why those survived and those that seemed to be positioned better did not.”

The Blue Cut fire came just one week after another major blaze nearby, the Pilot fire.

“It’s been a tough couple weeks for the people of San Bernardino County,” Hartwig said. “It seems like much more than two weeks.”

San Bernardino has seen much more destructive fires in its history. In 2003, the deadly Old fire burned more than 90,000 acres and destroyed nearly 1,000 structures. That fire burned during the heart of the Santa Ana winds season at the same time as several other destructive blazes that have come to be known as the 2003 fire storm.

So far this year, there have been more wildfires in California, but they have consumed fewer acres compared with last year. Some 3,640 fires erupted between Jan. 1 and Aug. 13 of 2015 and charred 144,645 acres, according to data from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. This year, 3,874 fires have burned 112,950 acres through Aug. 13. Seven people have died.

The Blue Cut fire continued to be most active in the Gobbler’s Peak area, just south of Wrightwood. Gusty winds, high temperatures and low humidity are expected to persist and could create the same challenges that have hampered crews since the blaze erupted.

Although the fire calmed slightly overnight and halted its march north and east, a red-flag warning remains in effect.

On Friday afternoon, some signs of progress were evident.

Mandatory evacuations were lifted in several communities, and Caltrans reopened the 15 Freeway on Thursday. The route connects Los Angeles and Las Vegas and is a key trucking and commuter route that runs from San Diego, through the Inland Empire and across the Mojave Desert into Nevada.

Its two-day closure had contributed to massive congestion, creating nightmares for travelers and those trying to evacuate.

A portion of Highway 138, another major roadway in the area, also reopened, according to the California Highway Patrol. And with both sides of the 15 Freeway reopened, truckers like Kevin Holladay were able to return to their usual commute.

Holladay prayed the flames would calm down, he said — not because of the drive but because of the destruction. His thoughts drifted to residents whose homes and animals were threatened by the wildfire.

Driving through the area, he caught a glimpse of some of the damage left behind.

“I was shocked,” he said. “Stuff you’ve seen for years is gone.”

Down a narrow dirt road off Highway 138 in Phelan, a popular Korean church’s retreat center sat in ruins.

About 10 buildings belonging to the Thanksgiving Korean Church were left in large piles of rubble. Rows of scorched metal chairs remained standing in some buildings. Damaged sinks, stoves and washers in others suggest they may have been used as living quarters.

Jinny Lee, owner of a cafe off Highway 138, walked past one incinerated building after another, trying to remember the one where the actual church services took place.

She looked at the charred furniture before her.

“Maybe it’s this building,” she said.

<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-blue-cut-fire-20160819-snap-story.html>

---

## Blue Cut fire triggers extra caution for busy fire season

Joe Nelson, Press Enterprise

Posted:: Aug. 20, 2016, 11:23PM



David Bauman , David Bauman, File Photo

As firefighters battle the Blue Cut fire in San Bernardino County, fire officials across the state are bracing for what is expected to be a busy fire season.

As they do every summer as fire season nears, fire agencies have been monitoring fire-prone areas, mainly the foothill and mountain regions, and working with property owners to get brush and dead or dying trees removed and to open up defensible space around properties.

And although it has been nearly 13 years since prolonged drought and a massive bark beetle infestation fueled the California fire siege of 2003, drought and bark beetles remain among the biggest threats.

The spate of 14 wildfires in 2003 included the Old fire, which burned across the San Bernardino Mountains for a week, scorching 91,281 acres, destroying more than 1,000 homes and other structures and killing six people.

“We still have a bark beetle issue. It’s not as bad as in 2003 when the Old fire hit, but there’s still a problem, and it’s continuing to grow due to the drought and overgrowth in the mountains,” said Tracey Martinez, spokeswoman for the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**.

## Tree mortality

Although more than a million dead or diseased pine trees have been cleared in the San Bernardino Mountains since 2002, it has not been enough to hold back the onslaught of bark beetles, insects the size of a grain of rice capable of taking out stands of towering pines.

“Our mountain communities are dense with numerous trees. Our trees are fighting for the water, and when the trees do not have enough water, it allows bark beetles to bore into the center of the tree, and that’s what kills it,” Martinez said.

Statewide, drought and bark beetles kill 66 million pine trees, said Stephanie Gomes, spokeswoman for the U.S. Forest Service’s regional office in Vallejo.

In the Sierra Nevada, bark beetles killed 16.8 million pine trees from October 2015 through May, and in the past five years they have killed 32.7 million pine trees, Gomes said, adding that the infestation epicenter is the Sierra, Sequoia and Stanislaus national forests.

“We’ve been working really hard to mitigate the tree mortality in areas near residents and campgrounds, as well as creating and maintaining fuel breaks,” Gomes said.

Also, Forest Service crews have been clearing trees along roads, power lines and trailheads – any areas where fire poses the biggest danger to life and infrastructure, Gomes said.

“We can’t take every tree down, so what we’re doing is a triage approach,” Gomes said.

## Preventive measures

The San Bernardino County Fire Department has been working with county code enforcement and weed abatement to create fuel breaks and clear brush along evacuation routes in the San Bernardino Mountains, Martinez said.

But though firefighters are focusing mainly on the mountain and foothill communities of Southern California in their prevention efforts, the desert regions, as the Blue Cut fire in San Bernardino County illustrates, also are raising alarm.

“The foothills and mountain communities are our No. 1 priority because they are more vulnerable, but as you can see, we can’t leave our deserts out,” Martinez said.

In Los Angeles County, firefighters have been monitoring the Palmdale and Lancaster areas in the Antelope Valley in addition to the foothill areas vulnerable to fire, said Richard Licon, a fire department inspector.

<http://www.pe.com/articles/fire-811211-trees-areas.html>

---

## Residents return to charred homes

Associated Press via Boston Globe

Posted: August 20, 2016

SAN BERNARDINO — Officials said Saturday at least 105 homes and 213 outbuildings have been destroyed in the massive fire that burned ferociously through Southern California mountain communities this past week and was still smoldering Saturday. Those numbers could rise as damage assessment teams pore through the aftermath of the blaze about 60 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, Fire Marshal Mike Horton of the San Bernardino County Fire Department said. Drought conditions in California have left plenty of fuel for wildfires. The fire sparked Tuesday was 68 percent contained and firefighters were finally transitioning to mop-up phase, officials said.

More residents were returning to the hardest-hit town, Wrightwood.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2016/08/20/nyc-eliminates-english-test-for-yellow-cab-drivers/g5Nu6RxdwifOGKTAdFhaWM/story.html>

---

## Southern California Wildfire 73% Contained, Firefighters Transition to 'Mop-Up Phase'

David Caplan, ABC News

Posted: August 21, 2016, 3:25 AM ET



A San Bernardino Fire Department firefighter works with a cadaver dog searching the ruins for anyone who may have been overrun by the flames of a wildfire along State Route 138, in Phelan, Calif. No deaths have been reported in the fire east of Los Angeles and the cause of the fire was under investigation. Crews continued to sift through burned regions to tally the damage. The information collected by damage assessment teams is useful for the fire's incident command, local offices of emergency services, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and insurance companies. Louis Penna/San Bernardino County Fire Department via AP

Firefighters battling the Blue Cut wildfire 60 miles east of Los Angeles in San Bernardino County continue to make significant progress containing the blaze: It was 73 percent contained, with firefighters finally transitioning to the "mop-up phase," officials announced Saturday night.

Most evacuation orders were lifted Friday, when firefighters made huge gains against the Blue Cut blaze, but some orders remain in place. "Things are extremely positive," said Brad Pitassi, a spokesman for the multi-agency fire command, adding that officials expects more residents to return home Sunday.



At the height of the fire, some 82,000 people were under evacuation orders.

The 58-square-mile wildfire has so far left behind a devastating trail: At least 105 residences and 213 other buildings have been destroyed in the fire, which began last Tuesday morning. **San Bernardino County Fire Department** marshal Mike Horton said those figures may increase as damage assessment teams continue to tour the area.

Horton -- who operates from a mobile command center just south of the blaze -- leads a team of 15 investigators, technicians, hazardous materials experts and others responsible for determining the extent and nature of the damage.

"We come in right on the heels of the fire," he told The AP. "Once it's cool enough, we go parcel-by-parcel."

Before residents return home, they may view damage assessment reports available online, via phone recordings and on postings at evacuation centers. Maps are color-coded with red areas signifying "complete damage," orange describing damage between 40 and 75 percent, yellow showing damage of less than 40 percent and green meaning no damage.

"Green, you're in good shape," Horton said. "Any other color and you should be concerned."

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/southern-california-wildfire-73-contained-firefighters-transition-mop/story?id=41551517>

---



## As crews tame wildfire, focus turns to what exactly burned

Christopher Weber and Christine Armario, Associated Press

Posted: August 21, 2016, 5:39AM



Smoke billows from a wildfire near Lake Nacimiento in San Luis Obispo County, Calif., Saturday, Aug. 20, 2016. California Department Of Forestry And Fire Protection Via Ap

**SAN BERNARDINO, Calif.** — In the aftermath of a wildfire, somebody has to figure out exactly what burned. It's painstaking and important work that helps evacuated residents know if they lost everything or have something waiting for them when they return home.

Officials estimate that at least 105 residences and 213 outbuildings have been destroyed in the massive fire that burned ferociously through Southern California mountain communities last week and was still smoldering Saturday.

Those numbers could rise as damage assessment teams pore through the aftermath of the blaze about 60 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, said Fire Marshal Mike Horton of the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**. Drought conditions in California have left plenty of fuel for wildfires.

The fire sparked Tuesday was 73 percent contained and firefighters who were on the offensive for days were finally transitioning to mop-up phase, officials said.

Operating from a mobile command center just south of the 58-square-mile blaze, Horton leads a team of 15 investigators, technicians, hazardous materials experts and others responsible for determining the extent and nature of the damages.

"We come in right on the heels of the fire," Horton said. "Once it's cool enough, we go parcel-by-parcel."

Often properties are so decimated that it's difficult to know if a smoking ash heap was a home, a trailer or a water tank, he said. Technicians consult mobile computer applications that can download geographic data and county assessors' information to learn what might have been there before flames swept through. Numerous photos are taken and each "gets its own narrative" of what the team saw, Horton said.

Some evacuations remained in place but the majority of those ordered out were allowed to return Friday, when crews made huge gains against the blaze, fire spokesman Brad Pitassi said.

"Things are extremely positive," said Pitassi, adding that officials expect more progress and more residents returning home throughout the weekend. At the height of the fire, some 82,000 people were under evacuation orders.

Even before they go back, anxious residents can sometimes get a sense of what awaits them thanks to reports filed swiftly by the damage assessment team. The goal is to compile the data even before the fire is fully extinguished and make them available online, via phone recordings and on postings at evacuation centers.

Maps are color-coded with red areas signifying "complete damage," orange describing damage between 40 and 75 percent, yellow showing damage of less than 40 percent and green meaning no damage.

"Green, you're in good shape," Horton said Friday. "Any other color and you should be concerned."

Johanna Santore was among those left homeless. She was running an errand Tuesday when the fire charged through her neighborhood. She tried to rush home to rescue the family's four dogs, six cats and hamster but was blocked by closed roads.

A group of animal rescue volunteers found the house in smoldering ruins — with no signs of the pets.

"I'm actually feeling numb," said Santore, who fled with her husband and granddaughter to an evacuation center. "It's like a nightmare."

A prolonged drought has transformed swaths of California into tinderboxes, ready to ignite. Six other wildfires were burning in the state, including one in San Luis Obispo County that forced the closure of the historic Hearst Castle on Saturday.

Fire officials say the wind-driven fire, which destroyed 48 structures and burned 31 square miles since it began August 13, is about 3 miles from the hilltop estate overlooking the Central Coast. The castle, a popular tourist attraction that houses a large art collection belonging to media magnate William Randolph Hearst, canceled tours and closed the grounds to visitors, said California State Parks spokeswoman Gloria Sandoval.

In rural Santa Barbara County, a 15-square-mile wildfire forced the evacuation of two campgrounds.

In the southern Sierra Nevada, another blaze feeding on dense timber in Sequoia National Forest forced the evacuation of several tiny hamlets.

In mountains north of San Francisco, a 6-square-mile blaze was 80 percent contained after destroying 300 structures, including 189 homes and eight businesses, in the working-class community of Lower Lake. All evacuation orders have been canceled.

<https://lasvegassun.com/news/2016/aug/21/as-crews-tame-wildfire-focus-turns-to-what-exactly/>

---

## Southern California wildfire evacuees allowed to return home

Christopher Weber and Christine Armario, Associated Press

Posted: August 22, 2016



In this Friday, Aug. 19, 2016, photo, Fire Marshal Mike Horton of the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** accounts the damage assessment team operations at the Glen Helen Regional Park in San Bernardino, Calif. In the aftermath of a wildfire, somebody has to figure out exactly what burned. It's painstaking and important work that helps evacuated residents know if they lost everything or have something waiting for them when they return home. Officials estimate that at least 105 residences and 213 outbuildings have been destroyed in the massive fire that burned ferociously through Southern California mountain communities this week and was still smoldering Saturday. (AP Photo/Christopher Weber)

**SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. (AP)** — Five days after an explosive wildfire in Southern California sent thousands fleeing for their lives, authorities lifted all evacuation orders on Sunday to allow residents to return home.

About 82,000 people were ordered to leave their properties Tuesday when the fire broke out 60 miles east of Los Angeles.

Most of those residents are returning to find their homes intact, though not all. A preliminary damage assessment found 105 homes and 216 outbuildings destroyed across the rural, mountainous terrain where large swaths of open terrain have been turned black.

"This fire did not go through a dense community, like some fires do," fire spokesman Costa Dillon said Sunday. "Almost all of this area is sparsely populated."

The once-fast moving and erratic blaze that burned nearly 58 square miles was 83 percent contained Sunday morning, up from 73 percent the evening before. Firefighters were going property-to-property in the areas most heavily hit to quell any lingering flames and hot spots.

"You don't want somebody to come back to a neighborhood where a fire could suddenly flare up on the property next door from something still smoldering," Dillon said.

Fire officials briefed residents at an evacuation center Sunday morning at the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds where about 15 residents remained.

Johanna Santore, 63, her husband and their 10-year-old granddaughter were among those who learned Sunday they are still not being permitted to return home.

The family's home and nearly all their belongings were destroyed in the blaze.

Santore said the family was "holding up," but that Saturday evening when everyone was asleep she'd gone outside and cried thinking of the family's lost pets and mementoes. The Santores were out running an errand when the fire broke out and were unable to return to save anything.

Four dogs, six cats and a hamster left behind are missing.

"I'm hoping someone is stuck around hiding someplace," Santore said. "And if I start calling, they might recognize our voices."

In the meantime she has begun looking into how to replace birth certificates, their housing deed and other important documents they are unlikely to recover.

A prolonged drought has transformed swaths of California into tinderboxes, ready to ignite. Six other wildfires were burning in the state, including one in San Luis Obispo County that forced the closure of the historic Hearst Castle on Saturday. It remained closed Sunday.

That fire grew to nearly 38 square miles overnight into Sunday morning and remained 35 percent contained. Fire spokeswoman Jaime Garrett said the fire was growing in the opposite direction of the Hearst Castle. The castle is a popular tourist attraction and houses a large art collection that belonged to media magnate William Randolph Hearst.

In rural Santa Barbara County, a 15-square-mile wildfire forced the evacuation of two campgrounds.

In the southern Sierra Nevada, another blaze feeding on dense timber in Sequoia National Forest forced the evacuation of several tiny hamlets.

In Northern California, fire crews were gaining control Sunday on an arson fire that destroyed 189 homes. Officials said the 6-square-mile fire in Lower Lake was 95 percent contained.

A nearly monthlong blaze burning near California's scenic Big Sur is not expected to be fully contained until the end of September. Cal Fire said the fire has destroyed 57 homes and charred 133 square miles. It is 60 percent contained.

[http://www.bdtonline.com/news/as-crews-tame-wildfire-focus-turns-to-what-exactly-burned/article\\_14a09c7a-a14e-595e-958b-9b9e084e4947.html](http://www.bdtonline.com/news/as-crews-tame-wildfire-focus-turns-to-what-exactly-burned/article_14a09c7a-a14e-595e-958b-9b9e084e4947.html)

---

## Emotional homecoming for evacuees

*All remaining people ordered to leave are allowed to return. For many, there is nothing left but rubble.*

John M. Blodgett and Beau Yarbrough, Press Enterprise

Posted: August 22, 2016



Tina Nims shows a handful of coins that her family found Sunday among the rubble of their home in the West Cajon Valley. Sarah Alvarado, Contributing Photographer

Size: 37,020 acres Containment: 85 percent Cause: Unknown Destroyed: An estimated 105 homes, 216 other buildings Evacuations: All have been lifted Evacuation centers: Still open at San Bernardino County Fairgrounds in Victorville (people and pets), Jessie Turner Community Center Shelter in Fontana (just people). Schools: All will be in session today Roads open to residents only: › Highway 138 from Highway 2 to Stone Basin Road Roads closed: › Highway 138 from Stone Basin to I-15 › Lone Pine Canyon Road from Swarthout Canyon Road to Highway 138 › U.S. Forest Road 3N31 at Lone Pine Canyon Road › The dirt road portion of Lytle Creek from the gun range into the national forest For help: Victims may visit the Local Assistance Center at the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds, 14800 Seventh Street, Victorville. To help: Donate at [IEUW.org/help](http://IEUW.org/help) or text the word RELIEF to 40403

Saying that the 37,020-acre Blue Cut fire “no longer poses a threat to communities,” authorities on Sunday lifted all remaining evacuation orders, allowing many residents to return to their homes – and some to return to just rubble.

The Nims family was among the first people to return to the West Cajon Valley on Sunday afternoon. Though their house was leveled, parents Lee and Tina and 16-year-old Cody were remarkably calm.

“You keep memories forever,” Cody said. Everything else was just possessions.

“It’s better to lose stuff than people we care about the most,” he said.

Farther south in Lytle Creek, which came through the fire mostly unscathed, Angie Baker was grateful her house in the Tally’s neighborhood survived.



“I’m not usually a tearful person,” Baker said. “But when I pulled into Tally’s, I got a little choked up, because on Wednesday we thought all this was going to be gone.”

Firefighters’ progress was apparent Sunday. The fire, which burned almost 58 square miles, hasn’t grown since Friday, and it is now 85 percent contained. Evacuation orders were lifted in the morning for Lytle Creek, and in the late afternoon for West Cajon Valley.

To get past barricades, residents will need proof of residency, San Bernardino County sheriff’s officials said. Some roads in the area remain closed, and officials advised returning residents to be cautious as fire engines and heavy equipment continue operating.

Also Sunday, Southern California Edison crews continued their work repairing and replacing damaged power lines.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District warned Sunday that unhealthy air quality is possible in the Blue Cut fire areas through this morning. Southwest winds are predicted to push smoke toward the north and west ends of the San Bernardino Mountains and the High Desert.

## THE FIREFIGHTING PLAN

Sunday’s firefighting efforts went “very much according to plan,” according to Anne Grandy of the U.S. Forest Service, and today’s plan is more of the same: strengthening the containment lines and continuing to monitor and patrol active areas.

There still are a few areas without containment lines, she said, including around Wildhorse Canyon near Highways 138 and 2. “It’s part of the reason roads are still closed,” she said.

There are also still some active areas at the top end of Lytle Creek, she said.

Grandy said they received some 911 calls about smoke being sighted Sunday. She said these were mostly cases of trees or other fuels continuing to burn.

“The fire hasn’t gained,” she said. “Fuel is continuing to burn within the fire line.”

State lawmakers from the region got an early morning tour from fire officials to see the devastation for themselves.

During an initial briefing, U.S. Forest Service called the fire unprecedented in its growth early on. The effects of this fire will be felt for the next three to five years, they said.

“The recovery will be especially difficult for the ... folks who lost everything,” **San Bernardino County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig** told the lawmakers.

The Fire Department worked with the county assessor’s office to warn residents whose homes were lost in the fire, Hartwig said.

The fire destroyed an estimated 105 homes and 213 other buildings.



## HOUSE GONE, BUT FAMILY STRONG

“Dad, where’s the safe?”

“Mom, your watering can.”

Cody Nims was walking through the remains of his family’s home, pointing out bits and pieces that survived.

“There’s the saw. That means the beds are over there.”

The saw belongs to his father, Lee, a carpenter and cabinet maker. He’d lived here along Highway 138 near Hess Road with his wife, Tina, since 1999, before Cody and daughter Darby, 14, were born. It wasn’t a large house – one bedroom and a few other rooms, Tina said – but it had been home.

Darby was still with the Piñon Hills friends they’d stayed with during the week, so it was the three of them gingerly making their way through their home.

“The ground’s still hot,” Cody said. “Wait, is that a mug?”

Lee dug out a coffee mug with “Mom” stenciled on it. He handed it to Tina.

Cody found the burned remains of his desktop computer’s CPU. He also lost a beloved stuffed bear to the fire.

“I’d had him since 2008,” he said. “He was my friend when no one else wanted to be my friend.”

The Nimses managed to laugh and smile at the memories that rose from the ashes.

“I want to yell, but it’s already done,” Tina said. “We can’t blame anyone. Thanks to God we are still alive.”

A friend had told Lee on Wednesday that all was lost. He saw it on news footage and Twitter, too.

“Don’t think we didn’t cry,” Lee said.

His next steps? “Getting my family settled,” he said.

Which he’s already done. After another couple of weeks staying with friends, he has a home lined up for his family near Phelan.

## ‘ TERRIFYING AND HELPLESS ’

Angie Baker’s homecoming Sunday smelled like rotten food and ant spray.

But at least the Lytle Creek home she shares with her boyfriend, Chris Austin, still stands.

“The smell was overwhelming,” Baker said. The contents of their refrigerator –Austin estimated about \$1,000 worth of food – had thawed and leaked all over the floor, attracting hordes of ants.

“I think I’m going to want to wait until after fire season to restock the fridge,” Austin joked before leaving to stock up at Trader Joe’s.

Baker and Austin had stayed at the Dynasty Suites in Redlands since Tuesday. When a reservation agent found out they were evacuees, Baker said they were given the best rate possible – opposite the price gouging some other evacuees reported that first night.

Their two small dogs – Duende the Chiweenie and Daisy the Toy Maltese “mixed with Ewok” – had a “really rough time” staying in a hotel, Baker said. They barked at anything that walked by.

Baker and Austin were among many Lytle Creek residents who reported hearing conflicting reports and rumors, especially during the early days of the Blue Cut fire, about how much of their community had burned down. In reality, while flames did threaten Lytle Creek, an aggressive firefighting attack saved almost all the buildings.

The rumors were hard for Baker to stomach. The house, which she bought about six years ago, is her retirement plan.

“I put a whole lot of heart and soul and art into this house,” she said. “It was the most terrifying and helpless feeling ever.”

The week away from home, trying to maintain some sense of normalcy, “was a constant rolling crisis,” Baker said, filled not only with news or rumors about what had come of Lytle Creek but also unrelated items.

“Life and all its associated tragedies keeps on going, even when you’re evacuated with your own emergency,” she said.

Baker said she didn’t even consider staying when the evacuation order came.

“My dad has ALS in North Carolina and would never forgive me,” she said. “I figured I would be more useful off the hill.”

## CLOSE-KNIT GROUP STAYED BEHIND

Laura Bryant, who stayed when others evacuated, kept an eye on things for Baker and her other neighbors. It had been a sleepless week, she said. When Red Cross volunteers drove through the neighborhood Sunday afternoon, distributing snacks and other basic necessities, she came out for human contact as much as water.

Bryant and her husband moved their fifth-wheel trailer down-canyon Wednesday to what she called a safe zone near some water tanks, but they returned home later when some neighbors, retired firefighters, said they thought it would be safe to do so.

“The ones that stayed really banded together,” she said. “If somebody had this and somebody didn’t, we’d help.”

Bryant also pressed herself into service for those who couldn’t come home. She photographed homes to show anxious owners they were safe, and she checked in on animals that couldn’t be evacuated in time and took their photos as well.

“I’m just so blessed to be able to see everybody again,” she said. “Hopefully, I can sleep tonight.”

## TOURING THE DEVASTATION

As firefighting efforts continued Sunday, Forest Service and fire officials took Inland officials on a tour through Glen Helen, Interstate 15, Lone Pine Canyon and a few other areas to show the devastation that affected the people they represent.

Forest Service officials said Sunday that containing and putting out the fire are just the first steps in what will be a long road for the area that has burned.

“Our cycle is fire, rain, flood, debris flows,” Forest Supervisor Jody Noiron said.

Assemblyman Marc Steinorth, R-Rancho Cucamonga, was appreciative to have seen the firefighters’ efforts.

“This fire spread within one day and they were able to mobilize in such a short time that they were able to contain this fire,” he said.

The tour made a stop at the Summit Inn, a historic diner near the Cajon Pass. Once the smoke had cleared, the building was blackened. Only the structure’s skeleton remained on some parts.

“By the time we got back here, the Summit Inn was fully involved,” said Shane Littlefield of Cal Fire. “We didn’t even have a chance to save it.”

The fire ignited at 10:36 a.m. Tuesday in the Cajon Pass above Devore. Officials still aren’t sure what caused the fire, but ask anyone with information – including photos or video from that area around that time – to call 800-782-7463 or go to [wetip.com](http://wetip.com) to submit an online tip.

[\(Print Edition Only\)](#)