



# NEWS



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## **Blue Cut Fire: More than 30,000 acres burned; about a dozen homes destroyed; northbound I-15 reopened**

Beatriz Valenzuela, OC Register

Posted: August 16, 2016



Cal Fire Capt. Gretchen Gonzales keeps an eye on the Blue Cut Fire along Lytle Creek Rd. Wednesday night. Kevin Sullivan, Staff Photographer

For the third day, firefighters continued to battle back the flames of the enormous Blue Cut fire, which has ravaged more than 30,000 acres and destroying about a dozen homes since Tuesday.

The latest numbers released Thursday morning have the fire at 31,600 acres and 4 percent containment, according to the San Bernardino National Forest Service. More than 1,500 firefighters are working to get the wildfire under control.

The northbound lanes of the 15 Freeway were reopened late Wednesday night, after being shut down for more than a day because of the devastating Blue Cut fire.

Stranded motorists trying to get to the High Desert and beyond were able to get back on the road. However, highways 138 and 2 remain closed.

The fire did not damage I-15 itself, but it did damage guardrails that need to be repaired, said Caltrans spokeswoman Terri Kasinga. Throughout the evening, flatbed trucks delivered concrete K-rails, which were being set up as barricades in areas where the guardrails had been burned.

As firefighting efforts continued into Thursday, the mountain communities of Lytle Creek and Wrightwood remained threatened amid a forecast of gusty winds and low humidity. The fire was expected to continue to burn aggressively through the night, said San Bernardino National Forest spokesman John Miller.

Northbound I-15, and the 215/15 northbound connector, reopened about 10:15 p.m., but the California Highway Patrol said the southbound 15 would remain closed.

The freeway shut down shortly after the fire was first spotted Tuesday west of the southbound lanes near Kenwood Avenue. Highway 138 between highways 2 and 18 and Big Pines Highway at Jackson Lake were still closed as of Wednesday night, according to CHP.

The fire did not damage I-15 itself, but it did damage guardrails that need to be repaired, said Caltrans spokeswoman Terri Kasinga. Throughout the evening, flatbed trucks delivered concrete K-rails, which were being set up as barricades in areas where the guardrails had been burned.

Officials briefly reported the fire's size Wednesday afternoon as more than 65,000 acres -- 101 square miles -- but minutes afterward said that was an error due to a software glitch.

"Dozens" of buildings have been destroyed, according to **San Bernardino County Fire** Chief Mark Hartwig. Exactly how many, and in what locations, remain unknown.

The fire destroyed the historic Summit Inn at the top of the Cajon Pass as it consumed almost 47 square miles in less than 24 hours.

As the fire burned Wednesday, firefighters grew more concerned it may jump I-15 from the east to the west side.

If that were to happen, the fire could quickly spread even more, Miller said.

"If it jumped the 15 freeway below the Cleghorn exit, then we would have a whole other fire front," Miller said Wednesday evening. "It just adds another level of complexity, a new piece of fire to fight."

Another major concern is the fire's spread toward Lytle Creek and Wrightwood. On Wednesday, the fire destroyed at least two structures in the same area where buildings burned Tuesday, Miller said.

"The fire continues to be very active, just like it was (Tuesday)," he added.

#### 'ONE BITE AT A TIME'

Almost 1,600 firefighters were assigned to the blaze, a few of whom sustained minor injuries, authorities said.

A day after playing defense due to the fire's erratic and unpredictable path, fire crews tried to go on offense Wednesday, but it wasn't 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.

Most of Wednesday's daytime firefighting efforts were spent protecting structures around Lytle Creek and Wrightwood, as well as the fire's northwest flank in the Cajon Valley, Miller said.

Unfortunately, firefighters weren't able to save every home.

"There was a lot of good firefighting in the upper left Cajon Valley," Miller said. "You win some of those battles and you lose some."

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 the U.S. Forest Service.

Thursday's National Weather Service forecast for the fire area calls for winds from the south increasing to 25 mph after 11 a.m. with local gusts of up to 35 mph near the Cajon Pass. Humidity levels are expected to be 5 to 10 percent.

The fire burned Wednesday along two branches -- one spreading north and west up Lone Pine Canyon toward Wrightwood and the other heading north and east into lighter brush, which could slow the spread.

The eastern portion, north of Cleghorn Mountain, is in heavier brush. Officials hoped roads and developed land in that area would serve as fire breaks.

The fire's west end, on a ridge between Lone Pine and Lytle Creek, concerned fire officials. A trailer park in the area was threatened.

Lytle Creek staged ambulances, said Eric Sherwin, a San Bernardino County Fire Department spokesman, as the fire crested into west Cajon Valley and picked up in Phelan.

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

About 7 p.m. Wednesday, Cal Fire Capt. Gretchen Gonzales stood watch where Sheep Canyon and Lytle Creek roads meet. Earlier firefighters had successfully protected the nearby community center from the flames, and now crews were standing ready to protect additional structures to the north.

Gonzales, who came to fight the fire with her Thousand Palms crew, knew of no structures harmed from the roadblock at Glen Helen Parkway to a mile or two down the road from where she waited with her engine crew.

The roads have been wonderful fire breaks she said, "but winds have been awful. (Wednesday's) air attacks have been vital."

An hour or so later, her crew and others had moved north down Lytle Creek Road, where flames came down the hillside and periodically roared as they consumed trees in their paths. In one part, the fire was allowed to burn so as to create its own vacuum, which would prevent it from advancing.

‘MY HOUSE IS GONE’

Fire crews 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 fire's speed.

Wrightwood evacuee Shawn Brady said he thinks there's nothing left of his house on Wildhorse Canyon Road after a friend who fled Wednesday morning captured a photo of a fire tornado at least 100 feet tall and wind-driven flames heading toward their homes.

"My house is behind that," he said, holding his cellphone showing the photo posted on Instagram as he stood outside the Fontana evacuation center late Wednesday afternoon.

"My house is gone," he said.

Brady, 30, works as a Mountain High ski slope groomer in the winter. He planned to spend a second night at the center after he was unable to return home from his summer job as a dockworker in Fontana.

He asked firefighter buddies to let him know if they come across his house. He held out hope that somehow, it survived.

"A lot of stuff up there is irreplaceable," he said.

On Wrightwood's outskirts, flames chewed through brush and trees at an alarming rate.

"It all depends on the wind," said seven-year-resident Ed Estes. "It's twirling right now. We just don't want it to blow this way."

Then it did. He and his wife, Nancy, watched flames crest a ridgeline less than a mile away. But even though the flames were getting scarily close, they were loathe to evacuate.

Andrea and John Bender of Happy Jack, a cluster of homes north of Lytle Creek, ignored evacuation orders to help firefighters protect their home as well as others in the enclave, which he said is too tight to easily get fire engines down into.

As evening came, their gas-powered pump sucked water from a nearby creek and was "keeping wet" Engine 3 from Lakeside Fire Protection District whose crew was keeping watch on flames coming down a hill opposite Happy Jack.

"We've been told to get out 110 times," John Bender said. "I know where to draw the line when it comes to the safety of my family."

It helps that he once was a volunteer firefighter in Riverside County.

"I'm not just a resident knucklehead staying in the way," he said, wearing a set of yellow turn out gear and helping to keep an eye on Engine 3's pump.

Authorities warned against people defying evacuation orders, as fast as this fire has been moving.

Out of "due diligence," Wakoski said, sheriff's deputies were searching burned homes with cadaver dogs with a volunteer search and rescue team.

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."

## TAKING SHELTER

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

By Wednesday afternoon, more than 270 people had registered for services or to stay Wednesday night, and that number was growing as the evening went on. The shelters can each sleep 500 people.

"I honestly didn't think it would make it down here," 72-year-old Henry Armstrong said tearfully. "Once the air turned black we knew it was time to leave."

Armstrong gathered what valuables he could, grabbed his two Lhasa Apsos, Mickey and Minnie, and made his way to safety not knowing if his home of 17 years would be there when he returned.

Jinny Lee, owner of the Mountain 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 owner Patrick Boyle.

#### STATEWIDE HELP

Fire crews from across California fought the blaze. San Bernardino County has 100 sheriff's deputies working with county probation and Los Angeles County deputies in evacuating residents affected by the fire.

Deputies were on the lookout for looters in evacuation areas, said Sheriff John McMahon.

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

The I-15's closure prevented deputies from transporting inmates to High Desert courts, so those court dates will be rescheduled, according to a sheriff's news release.

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

#### BAD AIR

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.

Three of the four railway lines that run through the Cajon Pass were opened back up about 3 p.m. Wednesday.

Those lines belong to BNSF, which stationed flaggers and extra officers to make sure trains ran smoothly, Miller said.

The fourth line, which belongs to Union Pacific Railroad, sustained substantial damage to a bridge and remains closed, Miller said. He was told that the damage caused a backup all the way to Kansas.

<http://www.ocregister.com/articles/brush-725936-tuesday-freeway.html>

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## **Blue Cut Fire Rages Through Homes, Businesses In San Bernardino County**

Leanne Suter and ABC7.com staff

Posted: August 17, 2016, 12:23AM



DEVORE, Calif. (KABC) --

What started as a small brush fire Tuesday morning above Devore turned into a state of emergency dubbed the Blue Cut Fire, as the blaze scorched at least 18,000 acres and forced 82,000 people to evacuate their homes in San Bernardino County.

Dry brush and wind gusts quickly spread the flames, which officials said were sparked just after 10:30 a.m. in the Cajon Pass near Kenwood Avenue, west of Interstate 15.

The blaze spread over bone-dry hillsides and toward the San Bernardino National Forest, destroying homes, businesses, a historic diner and at least one church. An exact tally of the structure damage was not

immediately available.

Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency in San Bernardino County due to the fire. The proclamation provides more state resources to firefighting efforts and grants certain benefits to affected residents, such as waiver of fees for destroyed documents and faster unemployment benefits.

"There was a clearing there, and we sat there with flames all around us. 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," Crystal Armstrong, who lost her home in the fire, said.

Fire officials said more than 700 personnel were at the scene and stated more have been requested.

The fast-moving blaze forced several evacuations, including the entire community of Wrightwood, which has about 4,500 residents.

In all, authorities stated 82,000 people had been evacuated and 34,500 homes were affected by the evacuations.

"Got all the dogs out, and the two kitties," evacuee Royce Bordes said frantically. "There are fires all around it (the home). But the firemen are doing a wonderful job."

Six firefighters became entrapped by the wildfire while defending homes in the Swarthout Canyon area, west of Cajon Pass, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**.

The firefighters were able to take shelter in a nearby structure, but two firefighters suffered minor injuries. The injured firefighters were taken to the hospital where they were treated and released.

The fire department said the injured firefighters were heading back to the fire line to defend structures. One fire truck sustained moderate fire damage while the firefighters were entrapped.

A smoke advisory was issued for portions of San Bernardino County, including parts of the San Bernardino Valley and the San Bernardino Mountains.

The cause of the fire was not known.

<http://abc7.com/news/blue-cut-fire-burns-15k-acres-82k-evacuated/1471966/>

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## Bluecut Fire Update: CHP reopens NB I-15 through Cajon Pass

*Southbound I-15 still closed until further notice*

Victor Valley Daily Press

Posted: August 17, 2016, 7:13 AM



A fire truck drives up the closed Interstate 15 on Tuesday while battling the Bluecut Fire. CHP announced it would be reopening the northbound lanes at 10:15 p.m. Wednesday night. James Quigg, Daily Press



A San Bernardino County Fire Captain looks for a better place for his crew while fighting the Bluecut Fire on Wednesday August 17, 2016. James Quigg, Daily Press

**CAJON PASS** — As veteran firefighters marveled at its speed and erratic behavior, the monstrous Bluecut Fire grew to 25,626 acres on Wednesday and continued to threaten large swaths of the Victor Valley, Cajon Pass and Wrightwood, authorities said. Cal Fire said firefighters had managed 4 percent containment.

The California Highway Patrol Inland Division announced that the northbound Interstate 215/15 interchange would be opening at 10:15 p.m. and northbound I-15 through the Cajon Pass would be opened fully soon after, although southbound I-15 remained closed.

Incident command confirmed a number of homes had burned, but was unable to determine if anyone had been killed in the blaze, which grew from 18,000 acres Tuesday night. Early Wednesday, the Forest Service reported the fire had ballooned to 30,000 acres. It revised those figures downward at 6 p.m.

"The growth of this fire is not surprising after seeing the fire activity today and knowing how many canyons and area this fire exists in," **San Bernardino County Fire** spokesman Eric Sherwin told the Daily Press.

"Wrightwood is being threatened by multiple points of the fire. We are getting our assessment team out here to see how many homes and structures have been destroyed. Another asset we are putting to use is the Sheriff's cadaver dogs. We have not had any reports of fatalities or missing persons. But (we know) there is a very real possibility based on the number of people that did not leave once they were told to evacuate."

Earlier Wednesday afternoon, an official source close to the Daily Press said that all aircraft had been grounded because of turbulence, except for one air attack unit that is just keeping tabs on the fire. Temperatures near 100 degrees, humidity lower than 10 percent and southwest winds gusting to 30 mph hampered firefighters' efforts.

Some media reported the blaze had burned 65,000 acres and covered 101 square miles, but Cal Fire told the Daily Press that it could not confirm those numbers. Later, those outlets retracted those estimates. "Officials on the ground are not going to update acreage at this point because the fire is too active," an official source told the Daily Press at 4 p.m.

"The fire is burning up canyons as it moves north," Sherwin said. "The fire established itself in numerous canyons that took off to threaten the communities that exist within those canyons and beyond. We do have a big push of the fire as it moves out west of the Cajon Valley. We have similar fire activity in Lone Pine."

San Bernardino County 1st District Supervisor said fire officials told him the Bluecut Fire covered 46 square miles in the Cajon Pass and High Desert.

"These winds, we've never seen it" like this, Lovingood said. "It's casting embers a mile, two miles out."

Among the destroyed structures was the historic Summit Inn near Oak Hill Road off Interstate 15.

Meanwhile, California Highway Patrol officials said they did not know when Interstate 15 would reopen. The Bluecut Fire forced authorities to shut down the freeway between Devore and Hesperia on Tuesday, northbound at the 15-215 interchange and southbound just north of Main Street.

CHP Assistant Chief Rich Stewart said there were downed power lines and possible roadway damage in the Cajon Pass. Caltrans officials said that crews were working to replace damaged I-15 guardrails all afternoon.

"We will be continuing to be reassessing that throughout the day and hopefully get it open as soon as possible," Stewart said. "We understand that's a major impact to the motoring public and the commercial industry. We have thousands of vehicles travel through the Cajon Pass every day and we are doing everything we can to open up the freeway as quickly as we can.

"We ask the public to continue finding alternate routes of travel and be patient. We advise everyone to stay away from this area if possible. Especially the commercial traffic. We are getting some reports that some of the big rigs are going on Highway 138 and getting stuck up there. That is causing problems to the operations and we don't need anything else to impact that."

Hot, dry and windy conditions continued to plague the 1,584 personnel battling the Bluecut Fire. Red Flag conditions will remain in effect through Thursday night.

The Interagency Incident Management Team 4 (Opliger) has assumed command of the fire. Incident Commander Mike Wakoski, a San Bernardino County Fire Department battalion chief, said there were 1,309

firefighters on scene, with 18 crews, 15 helicopters and 10 air tankers involved in the fight, as well as 152 engines.

Wakoski said fuels in the Cajon Pass 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 fires, 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, speaking at a morning press conference, said he got an aerial view of the fire. He 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, 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.”

Phelan animal sanctuary Forever Wild released a statement on its Facebook page saying its property and animals were safe due to the swift response of firefighters and emergency responders.

San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department officials announced additional mandatory evacuations in the Phelan and Piñon Hills area. Residents south of Phelan Road, east of Sheep Creek Road 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 Rancho 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.

San Bernardino County Sheriff John McMahan said deputies would patrol evacuated areas for any looters.

“We will continue to do our very best to patrol those neighborhoods that have been evacuated and look for anybody that might be doing anything inappropriate, burglarizing or vandalizing those homes that have been vacated. Our staff will be there the entire time until the areas are able to be reoccupied by those residents,” McMahan said.

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, including Mariposa Road south of Rancho Road.

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

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.

This story will be updated throughout the day as more information becomes available.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/article/20160817/NEWS/160819796/0/SEARCH>

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## **Authorities: Evacuate when you're told, don't wait until the last minute**

**Steve Hunt, Victor Valley Daily Press**

Posted: August 17, 2016, 10:58 AM

It has become a mantra of public safety officials: If you're told to evacuate, don't wait.

One person after another at Wednesday morning's press conference at Glen Helen Regional Park in San Bernardino said the same thing. There is a reason why law enforcement and fire officials issued evacuation orders for nearly 35,000 homes and more than 82,000 High Desert residents on Tuesday: The Bluecut Fire was raging out of control and headed their way.

"If we ask you to leave, you have to leave," said John Miller, public affairs officer for the U.S. Forest Service based at the San Bernardino National Forest headquarters. "The worst thing for people to do is to wait until the last minute. We've seen that throughout the state this year."

"We have over 100 personnel assigned to this fire helping with evacuations," San Bernardino County Sheriff John McMahon said. "We're evacuating nearly 35,000 homes, which represents nearly 85,000 people. The evacuation area has spread a little to the west this morning."

"We have over 100 personnel assigned to this fire dealing with the evacuations. We are hooking up with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department in the Wrightwood area to evacuate that part of the county. ... When officers ask you to leave, we would ask that you do leave and not shelter in place."

And what are the potential consequences of staying in your home if you are asked to evacuate? Authorities were using cadaver dogs Wednesday to check burned homes along Highway 138 for bodies.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday a group of firefighters nearly perished when trying to protect a couple who had dismissed evacuation orders and stayed in their home.

According to a **San Bernardino County Fire** press release, six firefighters "became entrapped by fire while defending homes and assisting evacuations in the Swarthout Canyon area west of Cajon Pass."

Those six were part of two County Fire engine companies assigned to the area northwest of Cajon Boulevard (old Route 66). The six sheltered in place in a nearby structure, but two firefighters sustained minor injuries and were taken to a hospital. The pair were treated and released and rejoined their team in the field. One fire engine sustained moderate damage.

County Fire urges residents to be prepared and to know your evacuation routes. "Residents who refuse to evacuate put their own and other people's lives at risk," the statement read.

"We'd hate for fire to overrun your neighborhood and for you to not have a way to escape," McMahon said. "Our interest is to make sure everybody is safe."

"We have a lot of communities at risk," Miller said. "We have a lot of infrastructure at risk."

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/article/20160817/NEWS/160819791/0/SEARCH>

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## **The Blue Cut fire could cost Southern California's shipping industry \$1 million a day**

**Rachel Uranga, Daily News**

Posted: August 17, 2016, 3:38 PM



Railroad officials inspect a fire damaged train trestle in the Cajon Pass Wednesday morning. The Blue Cut Fire continues to burn out of control off of Highway 138 and I-15 Wednesday. Will Lester — Staff Photographer

Wildfire-spurred highway and rail-line closures hobbled Southern California's shipping industry Wednesday. The smoke-choked slowdown is expected to cost millions of dollars a day.

The mammoth Blue Cut fire's impact swept well beyond the Cajon Pass — slowing deliveries, disrupting schedules and setting off headaches for truckers, retailers, shippers and crews staffing Southern California's ports.

"This is a huge corridor that is being impacted," said Eric Sauer, vice president of the California Trucking Association. "It's going to have a trickle effect from the ports on."

"It's too preliminary to quantify the full cost to the trucking industry, but it could cost up to \$1 million a day in additional operating costs," Sauer said.

Interstate 15, the main route between Las Vegas and Southern California, closed down indefinitely around noon Tuesday as flames chased tens of thousands of residents from their homes. The flames forced big-rig truckers to make a tough choice — stop at rest stops and gas stations or divert hundreds of miles east or west.

More than 5,000 cargo trucks use the route daily, carrying everything from fresh produce for supermarket shelves to construction tools en route to Las Vegas and back.

“These are major, major corridors,” said Joe Rajkovicz, a longtime trucker and current spokesman for the Western States Trucking Association. “You are looking at something like a 200-mile diversion for truckers.”

For much of Tuesday and Wednesday, the north-south railroad lines for Union Pacific Railroad and BNSF Railway through the Cajon Pass were shut down, delaying the distribution of millions of dollars’ worth of goods.

Fire officials said late Wednesday that three of the four railway lines that run through the pass had been reopened.

Those lines belong to BNSF, which stationed flaggers and extra officers to make sure operations through the pass run smoothly, said San Bernardino National Forest spokesperson John Miller.

The fourth line, belonging to Union Pacific, sustained substantial damage to a bridge and remained closed. Miller said he was told that the damage had caused a backup all the way to Kansas.

Anywhere from 50 to 70 cargo-stacked Union Pacific trains course daily along the railroad line — the only one that goes directly to Barstow and Las Vegas from Southern California, home to the country’s busiest seaport complex — toting goods from Arizona and points east up to the Pacific Northwest. (BNSF also runs trains along the line, but it did not return calls for this story.)

At the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, stacks of cargo containers grew. “Right now the rail lines aren’t moving,” said Michael Gold, spokesman at the Port of Long Beach at mid-day Wednesday. “(Containers) are being unloaded on to the port’s terminals and they are staying there.”

For now, the congestion is manageable, he said. But it’s unclear when all of the rails lines through the region will be fully operational.

“We are trying to reroute,” said Justin E. Jacobs, a spokesperson for Union Pacific.

Union Pacific has options. It also runs a rail line along the coast and another to the east. For trains that can be rerouted to those lines, the railroad is pulling container boxes off the main track and rolling them via side tracks or moving them to nearby rail yards in Los Angeles and Colton.

When fire officials declare travel safe, engineers will check bridges and tracks to determine when trains can go back online.

Big rig drivers and transportation companies that ship cargo from the ports could face another problem.

“If this is a long fire, it can create equipment shortages at the ports,” said Weston LaBar, CEO of the Harbor Trucking Association. The hauling equipment and cargo boxes that are essential to shipping are often rented

or leased by truck drivers. If they are unavailable for an extended period of time or if drivers must prolong their rentals, it could become expensive or create scarcity.

“Folks are gearing up to be able to keep a supply of their equipment in case there are shortages,” he said.

Rajkovacz said most truckers will just keep moving.

“There is no easy answer with the road closure,” Rajkovacz said. “But truckers are savvy in making these diversions. We have just been trying to keep truckers apprised that the road is still closed and they better think about alternates if they need to go into Victorville.”

Throughout the day and night, he said, he followed truckers sharing tips on alternate routes via social media. CalTrans warned drivers of semi-trucks and motorhomes to avoid shortcuts through state routes 18 and 138, where the road narrows and includes a hairpin turn that can cause heavy loads to flip.

At the Pilot Travel Center in Hesperia, about 20 miles from the Cajon Pass at the intersection of Interstate 15 and route 395, clerk Christina Goetz said bleary-eyed truckers waiting out the fire had been in and out all day.

“It’s packed, the most congested it’s ever been,” she said. “A lot of (the truckers) had to stay the night and still can’t sleep. They are parked in the street.”

At the Wendy’s next door, truckers gulped coffee and talked about their next move, she said. They didn’t expect a quick solution.

“The firefighters said it’s pretty crazy out there,” she said.

<http://www.dailynews.com/general-news/20160817/the-blue-cut-fire-could-cost-southern-californias-shipping-industry-1-million-a-day>

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## **More than 80,000 told to evacuate in California fire**

*Authorities: Fire is 'imminent threat to public safety'*

**Madison Park and Gul Tuysuz, CNN**

Posted: August 18, 2016, 1:07AM EDT

(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.

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.

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.

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.wbaltv.com/national/california-wildfire-forces-thousands-of-evacuations/41236964>

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## Blue Cut Fire Latest Danger

Mike Harris, Mountain News

Posted: Thursday, August 18, 2016 6:00 AM



No sooner had mountain residents breathed a sigh of relief on Tuesday that the Pilot Fire was 100 percent contained than news spread of a new danger—the Blue Cut Fire—that had broken out west of the I-15 and the Cajon Pass and was quickly spreading.

The Blue Cut Fire, now at 30,000 acres as of Wednesday morning and growing with no containment in sight, was being driven by erratic, gusty winds and single-digit humidity levels. The entire town of Wrightwood was ordered evacuated, rail traffic threatened and many homes burned.

I-15 was closed, northbound at the I-215 and southbound at Ranchero Road, as was Highway 138 between County Line to Highway 173. Several other local road closures were also posted.

The I-15 and SR-138 closures on Tuesday meant many vehicles were rerouted up Highway 18 and onto SR-138 through Crestline. Mountain residents trying to get home Tuesday night reported long hours of stop-and-go traffic, cars pulled out onto turnouts and even a report of a semi-truck getting stuck traveling up SR-18.

Caltrans on Wednesday warned that oversize, over-length vehicles (semi-trucks, motor homes, etc.) are advised not to use the SR-18 or SR-138 through the San Bernardino Mountains.

For a time on Tuesday morning, six **San Bernardino County firefighters** became trapped by wildfire while defending homes and assisting evacuations in the Swarthout Canyon area west of Cajon Pass. The firefighters were part of two county engine companies assigned to the area northwest of Cajon Boulevard.

Firefighters were able to shelter in place within a nearby structure, but two firefighters sustained minor injuries. Both firefighters were transported to an area hospital where they were treated and released. County Fire said both were now back on the fire line defending structures. One fire engine sustained moderate fire damage.

As of early Wednesday, an estimated 82,000 persons had been ordered evacuated. An unknown number of structures have been damaged or destroyed.

[http://www.mountain-news.com/news/article\\_0d45916e-64d4-11e6-8bd9-1766bdee29b3.html](http://www.mountain-news.com/news/article_0d45916e-64d4-11e6-8bd9-1766bdee29b3.html)

## Blue Cut fire burns into 3rd day, south 15 Freeway in the process of reopening

Beatriz Valenzuela, San Bernardino Sun and Brian Rokos, The Press-Enterprise

Posted: August 18, 2016, 6:21 AM



Cal Fire Capt. Gretchen Gonzales, left, and firefighter Steve Rodberg, of Laguna Niguel, battle the Blue Cut Fire late Wednesday, Aug. 17, 2016, along Lytle Creek Road. (Photo by Kevin Sullivan/Orange County Register)

The southbound 15 Freeway through the Cajon Pass is in the process of reopening, the California Highway Patrol reported shortly before 10 a.m. Thursday, after the massive Blue Cut fire forced it closed for the last two days.

The southbound lanes were closed Tuesday at Rancho Road in Hesperia.

All off-ramps will remain closed, the CHP said in a tweet.

The northbound lanes of the 15 Freeway were reopened late Wednesday night.

The Blue Cut fire grew slightly overnight, reaching 31,600 acres with 4 percent containment Thursday morning as firefighters battled it for the third day.

That's only slightly larger Thursday morning than the night before, with the same percent of its perimeter contained.

"This is still a raging wildfire," said Tracey Martinez, spokeswoman for the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**.

More resources -- equipment, firefighters and fire managers -- were on the job Thursday, with more on the way, Martinez said. More than 1,500 people are involved in fighting the fire, and the cause has not been established.

The fire has destroyed about a dozen homes since Tuesday, though no official numbers have been provided.

Stranded motorists trying to get to the High Desert and beyond were able to get back on the road. However, highways 138 and 2 remain closed.

The fire did not damage the 15 Freeway itself, but it did damage guardrails that need to be repaired, said Caltrans spokeswoman Terri Kasinga. Throughout the evening, flatbed trucks delivered concrete K-rails, which were being set up as barricades in areas where the guardrails had been burned.

Winds were expected to push flames up through the Lytle Creek and Lone Pine canyons, according to the incident commander's fire behavior forecast. Ridge-top winds are blowing from the south-southwest could spread flames into the Wrightwood area through Slover Canyon at the top of Lone Pine Canyon.

Flames could also spread to the west, north of Highway 138.

Crews will be spraying fire-resistant gel on homes that are potentially in danger, just as they did in 2015 during the Lake fire in the Big Bear area. Then the practice was credited with saving 15 to 20 buildings.

Also Thursday, teams are assessing damage to property. That information will help San Bernardino County decide what services, such as assessors, tax collectors and insurance companies, need to be brought to the neighborhoods that burned, Martinez said.

The teams also will note which properties had defensible spaces around them that would limit the likelihood that homes would burn. Martinez said even if some homes burned despite clearing brush and flammable property, "Defensible space has been proven to save lives and save property."

On Wednesday, crews were able to prevent flames from jumping some fire breaks dug by bulldozers.

"They definitely saved the communities of Wrightwood and Lytle Creek," Martinez said.

As firefighting efforts continued into Thursday, the mountain communities of Lytle Creek and Wrightwood remained threatened amid a forecast of gusty winds and low humidity.

Firefighters were able to protect those mountain communities as well as the West Cajon Valley, San Bernardino County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig said in a tweet Thursday.

Many seasoned firefighters had never seen a fire behave like the Blue Cut fire, U.S. Forest Service supervisor Jody Noiron told them at a briefing Thursday morning.

"Some of you have been doing this 30 years," she said.

The fire was first spotted on the west side of the 15 Freeway near Kenwood Avenue late Tuesday morning. It quickly exploded from a few acres to 300 and continued to grow at an alarming pace.

Several veteran fire officials commented on the rapid pace of the fire, which may have been aided by a combination of dry brush and erratic winds.

Cal Fire Capt. Gretchen Gonzales said the "winds have been awful" Wednesday as her Thousand Palms crew worked to successfully protect the communities in Lytle Creek, where Sheep Canyon and Lytle Creek roads meet.

BNSF said in a statement Thursday that while two of its main lines between San Bernardino and Barstow reopened Wednesday evening, a third would remain closed. Shipments moving through that corridor could be delayed 36 to 48 hours, the statement said.

<http://www.dailybulletin.com/general-news/20160818/blue-cut-fire-burns-into-3rd-day-south-15-freeway-in-the-process-of-reopening>

## **UPDATE: Southbound lanes of Interstate 15 to be reopened soon**

*Bluecut Fire burns 31,600 acres, 1,584 firefighters battling Cajon Pass blaze*

**Victor Valley Daily Press**

Posted: August 18, 2016, 6:53 AM



A DC-10 drops fire retardant on the Bluecut Fire. David Pardo, Daily Press

**CAJON PASS** — California Highway Patrol announced Thursday morning that officials were in the process of reopening southbound lanes of Interstate 15, according to CHP Inland's Twitter account.

While southbound lanes of the freeway were expected to open shortly, all off-ramps in the Cajon Pass will remain closed. Northbound lanes were reopened shortly after 10 p.m. Wednesday.

CHP Assistant Chief Rich Stewart said there were downed power lines and possible roadway damage in the Cajon Pass. Caltrans crews worked to replace damaged I-15 guardrails on Wednesday.

Fire officials said Thursday morning that close to 1,600 firefighters were battling the menacing Bluecut Fire, which grew to 31,600 acres overnight and remains 4 percent contained.

The blaze was reported to have scorched through 25,626 acres, according to the previous update Wednesday night.

Incident Command said firefighters would continue to provide structure defense and establish fire containment lines “as opportunities present” throughout the day.

Firefighters will continue attacking the fire Thursday morning, battling hot, dry and windy conditions, as red flag conditions are expected to persist throughout the day. Ridgetop winds are expected to blow at 20 mph, with gusts up to 30 mph.

Further information regarding the fire was not immediately available Thursday morning.

**San Bernardino County Fire Department** Chief Mark Hartwig took to Twitter Thursday morning and said firefighters on Wednesday were able to protect the communities of Wrightwood, Lytle Creek and West Cajon Valley in “tough conditions.”

The Interagency Incident Management Team 4 (Opliger) spokesman Eric Sherwin told the Daily Press on Wednesday that fire crews were worried about those communities “being hit hard.”

Sherwin said Wrightwood was being threatened by multiple points of the blaze.

Numerous fire engines were seen heading west on Highway 2 from Highway 138, a little after 5 p.m. on Wednesday as flames burned through hills and eventually caressed Highway 2.

Erica Nicolai, who lives just off Highway 2, was watching the flames on Wednesday starting to climb over the hills behind the homes in the area, roughly a mile west of Highway 138. Nicolai told the Daily Press Thursday morning that she stayed put at her house because the fire had not exactly burned close to her home.

“The ridge is still burning pretty good, but it looks like my home will be safe,” she said a little after 7:30 a.m. “I was told the fire is being blown north of the town and the town is not in imminent danger. As far as I know, no houses have burned in Wrightwood.”

Nicolai said some of her neighbors that opted to stay put as well, alternated shifts sitting on top of a roof keeping a watchful eye on the fire. She said the neighbor would warn the rest of the eight households just off Highway 2 if the blaze was approaching too close for comfort.

Nicolai said this is the first time she has been ordered to evacuate since moving just outside of Wrightwood four years ago.

“This all happened so fast,” she said as she stood outside of her van jam-packed with belongings and her three dogs. “We weren’t ready for it. We thought we were. I’m just waiting here to see what happens and how close it will get to my house because if I leave right now and the fire doesn’t end up threatening my home, they won’t let me back in. Word around here is that they may have the roads closed off until Monday. I have a place to go, but I don’t want to figure out a way to get down the hill.

“As an American homeowner, leaving when you’re told to evacuate is not a law. People online are criticizing those that aren’t leaving. But I really have no choice. I’m here but I’m not in the way of the firefighters. If the fire comes up to my home, my van is ready, I’m grabbing my five-year-old and the dogs and we are leaving. But it doesn’t look like we will have to do so.”

Reagan Irwin shared her Nicolai’s concern about leaving and not being able to return home. Irwin said it would take flames in her backyard to finally leave the area.

Being told to evacuate was a scary feeling, she said. Especially not knowing what exactly to pack.

“Everything I own is inside my home. Trying to pick certain thing to take with you is difficult,” she said. “I grabbed clothes, then grabbed a Buddah that I love, my grandmother’s ashes and her picture, something my daughter made me for Valentine’s Day and a candlestick from my ex-husband’s grandmother. I didn’t know what else to get.”

Incident Command on Wednesday confirmed a number of homes had burned, but was unable to determine if anyone had been killed in the blaze, which grew to 18,000 acres in less than 10 hours.

Early Wednesday, fire officials said the fire had ballooned to 30,000 acres, but those figures were revised at 6 p.m. An afternoon update from Incident Command erroneously said the Bluecut Fire had doubled in size. But Sherwin told the Daily Press that the error was due to a “glitch” in mapping software.

The raging blaze in the Cajon Pass erupted Tuesday morning, 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.

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 Rancho 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. Residents south of Phelan Road, east of Sheep Creek Road and west to Green Road are also under mandatory evacuations.

This story will be updated throughout the day as more information becomes available.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20160818/update-southbound-lanes-of-interstate-15-to-be-reopened-soon>

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## California Wildfire Brings Destruction and Uncertainty

Christopher Weber and Christine Armario, Associated Press

Posted: August 18, 2016, 11:09 AM ET

A ferocious wildfire had swallowed up many homes as it spread across more than 49 square miles of mountain and desert east of Los Angeles. Exactly how many, however, and to whom they belonged, remained uncertain.

Firefighters were faced with the difficult task of tallying that damage while still battling the huge, unruly blaze amid hot, dry and gusty weather that was expected through Thursday evening.

That left evacuees in a cruel limbo, forced to spend another night wondering whether anything they owned was still intact.

They included Shawn Brady, who had been told by a neighbor that flames had raged down their street. But he was waiting for official word.

"What I've been told is that flames are currently ripping through my house," said Brady, a dockworker who lives on the outskirts of the evacuated town of Wrightwood with his mother, sister and a dog.

"I'm trying to remain optimistic," Brady said as he sat outside a shelter for evacuees in Fontana. "It's the not knowing that's the worst."

San Bernardino County fire officials could only confirm that dozens of structures had burned, and that big numbers are likely.

"There will be a lot of families that come home to nothing," **county Fire Chief Mark Hartwig** said Wednesday after flying over a fire scene he described as "devastating."

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

Firefighters had at least established a foothold of control of the blaze the day after it broke out for unknown reasons in the Cajon Pass near Interstate 15, the vital artery between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. The fire was 4 percent contained on Wednesday.

The California Highway Patrol reopened I-15 late Wednesday night, while the southbound side remained closed. Reopening the south side Thursday depended on repair of guardrails.

Those assessing damage were also looking for dead and injured, but none had been reported yet. Cadaver dogs were searching the ruins for anyone who was overrun by the flames.

Five years of drought have turned the state's wildlands into a tinder box, with eight fires currently burning from Shasta County in the far north to Camp Pendleton just north of San Diego.

Residents like Vi Delgado and her daughter April Christy were also among those wondering whether their home was intact, though they had found out that their pets and the shelter animals they take care of had been saved. They had been through earlier wildfires, but nothing like this one.

"No joke, we were literally being chased by the fire," Christy said in a voice choked with emotion in a minivan outside the Fontana evacuation center. "You've got flames on the side of you. You've got flames behind you."

More than 34,000 homes and about 82,000 people were under evacuation warnings as firefighters concentrated their efforts on saving homes in the mountain communities of Lytle Creek, Wrightwood and Phelan. They implored residents not to think twice if told to leave, but it appears many were staying.

"From reports that we were hearing, possibly up to half didn't leave," said Lyn Sieliet, a U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman.

"It does change the way that we can fight fire," she added, "Now we have to worry about the people in there as well as trying to protect the structures and trying to build a line of defense as the fire comes toward that area."

A fleet of 10 air tankers and 15 helicopters and an army of 1,500 firefighters took on the blaze, many of them coming fresh from other wildfires around the state.

Another large fire, north of San Francisco, was fading. The 6-square-mile blaze was 55 percent contained after destroying at least 268 structures, including 175 homes and eight businesses, in the working-class community of Lower Lake over the weekend.

Damin Pashilk, 40, is charged with starting the blaze along with more than a dozen other counts of arson and one of attempted arson in connection with fires dating back to July 2015. He appeared in court Wednesday, but he did not enter a plea.

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/california-wildfire-brings-destruction-uncertainty-41475598>

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## Foothill Fires Quickly Contained

Mike Harris, Mountain News

Posted: August 18, 2016, 6:00AM



County Fire and Forest Service personnel were able to hold the Basin Fire at the bottom of the hill on Tuesday to less than 45 acres.

Two fires at the base of the hill—one near Wildwood Park and the other between Sterling and Quail Canyon Roads—were quickly contained earlier this week by fast action on the part of firefighters.

On Sunday, the Waterman Fire started in the afternoon near Wildwood Park in the City of San Bernardino near Arrowhead Avenue. **County Fire**, Cal Fire and Forest Service firefighters quickly moved on the fire and held it two acres.

A larger fire, named the Basin Fire, started Tuesday at around 3 p.m. north of Foothill Boulevard near Sterling Avenue and east of Quail Canyon, proved more of a threat.

The fire quickly became established on the hillside and spread into the San Bernardino National Forest. A swift and decisive response by County Fire and Forest Service crews held the fire to about 45 acres.

Along with 10 engines, four hand crews, one dozer and three water tenders, aircraft units included two helicopters, two air tankers and one air attack unit. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

[http://www.mountain-news.com/news/article\\_31d41c8e-64d5-11e6-8579-63c36883dfdc.html](http://www.mountain-news.com/news/article_31d41c8e-64d5-11e6-8579-63c36883dfdc.html)

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## RV Hauling a Jeep Erupts Into Flames on the NB-15 Freeway

Victor Valley News

Posted: August 18, 2016



Victorville, Calif: (VVNG.com) – **San Bernardino County Fire** and CHP responded to a vehicle fire on the NB I-15 freeway Thursday morning.

A white Jeep being hauled by an RV erupted into flames at about 7:45 a.m. south of Palmdale Road.

Per CHP incident logs, all northbound lanes were temporarily blocked while firefighters put out the vehicle fire.

A tow truck has been requested to tow the 40 ft. motor home and Jeep.

The cause of the fire is currently under investigation.

<http://www.vvng.com/rv-hauling-a-jeep-erupts-into-flames-on-the-nb-15-freeway/>