

6.4 earthquake ends a period of seismic calm for Southland

No serious injuries or deaths are reported in the quake, estimated to have been felt by 15 million people.

BY RONG-GONG LIN II, KAREN KAPLAN, ALEJANDRA REYES-VELARDE AND HARRIET RYAN

RIDGECREST, Calif. — The largest earthquake in two decades rattled Southern California on Thursday morning, shaking communities from Las Vegas to Long Beach and ending a quiet period in the state's seismic history.

Striking at 10:33 a.m., the magnitude 6.4 quake was centered about 125 miles northeast of Los Angeles in the remote Searles Valley area near where Inyo, San Bernardino and Kern counties meet. It was felt as far away as Ensenada and Mexicali in Mexico, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Reno and Chico.

Authorities said there were no immediate reports of deaths, serious injuries or major infrastructure damage, though emergency responders were still inspecting areas around the city of Ridgecrest.

Patients at Ridgecrest Regional Hospital were evacuated “out of an abundance of caution,” hospital Chief Executive James Suver said. About 20 patients were transferred to other facilities while seismic engineers inspected broken pipes in the facility. “For true emergencies, we will stabilize them and then get them to the right level of care,” he said.

Ridgecrest, a community of about 29,000 known to many skiers as a pit stop on the way to Mammoth, was inundated with offers of help from neighboring towns, congressional leaders such as Rep. Kevin McCarthy and Sen. Kamala Harris, and even the White House, Mayor Peggy Breeden said.

“With all this cooperation ... we expect we will be able to move on to this and not see too many awful things happen,” Breeden said.

The quake, estimated to have been felt by some 15 million people, was the largest with an epicenter in Southern California since the magnitude 7.1 Hector Mine quake struck the Mojave Desert in 1999, about 35 miles north of Twentynine Palms Marine Corps base. The region's last earthquake felt as widely as Thursday's was the magnitude 7.2

earthquake on Easter Sunday 2010 that had an epicenter across the border in Baja California.

Before Thursday, it had been almost five years since the state experienced an earthquake of magnitude 6 or stronger. Experts had said the period of calm was sure to end, and when it did it would likely bring destruction.

The sparsely populated Searles Valley location of the earthquake appeared to mitigate the damage. An event of similar magnitude in the Los Angeles Basin, such as 1994's magnitude 6.7 Northridge quake, would have undoubtedly meant deaths and severe property damage.

The rocking in Searles Valley began with two foreshocks: an initial quake of magnitude 4 at 10:02 a.m., followed seven minutes later by a 2.5. About 24 minutes later, the mainshock began seven miles underground, lasting five seconds.

The quake hit as children were putting on a Fourth of July performance at Burroughs High School in Ridgecrest, Vicki Siegel said.

"The kids were crying and scared. And so I don't know what kind of damage was done inside the building but we all got out," she said. "They probably all have PTSD now."

In rural Inyokern, about 10 miles from Ridgecrest, 72-year-old Virginia Henry was reading in her bedroom when it began. She lost power in her home but was able to drive to Ridgecrest to check on her toy and game store.

"Everything is fine. A lot of businesses are open," she said.

In L.A., the shaking felt longer, with a rolling quality that lasted long enough for many to pull out cellphones and document swinging chandeliers and sloshing swimming pools. One scientist in Pasadena estimated she felt 10 seconds of shaking; others thought it was longer.

Cynthia Alvarez, who was at work at a hotel in El Segundo, said the swaying made her dizzy.

"It wouldn't stop. It just kept feeling like you were in a boat," Alvarez said.

By midafternoon, more than 200 aftershocks had been recorded, including 10 of magnitude 4 or greater.

Caltech seismologist Lucy Jones, California's foremost earthquake expert, said that aftershocks will continue to rumble through Kern County, and there is a small chance that the quake was a "foreshock" of an even greater quake to come.

The Searles Valley earthquake, like almost all others, was a product of randomness that comes with California straddling a major tectonic boundary, with a part of the state sliding past another.

California's location on the border between the North American and Pacific plates is a central reason for what has made the state attractive in its recorded history — from its reserves of oil to its magnificent mountains — but also comes with the fraught reality of quakes that can come at any time, without any predictive pattern.

“This is an area that normally has lots and lots of earthquakes,” Jones said.

Responding to reporters at a news conference asking whether there might be any explanation for the earthquake — perhaps something related to nearby geothermal energy production, which has been going on for many decades — Jones said there wasn't any reason to believe that it was anything but nature doing its job.

“We are afraid of randomness and we try to make patterns,” Jones said, but “fundamentally, it's a random distribution.”

“Having a 6.4 in this part of Southern California is totally typical,” said U.S. Geological Survey research geophysicist Rob Graves.

The faults that moved Thursday were nowhere near California's most feared fault — they are about 100 miles northeast of the San Andreas, said Caltech seismologist Egill Hauksson.

Although the area east of the state's grandest mountain range, the Sierra Nevada, is far from the San Andreas, it is a seismically active area. In 1872, an earthquake with an estimated magnitude of 7.2 hit the Owens Valley, killing 27 people in Lone Pine. Mammoth has recorded dozens of magnitude 6 earthquakes.

The Little Lake fault, in the general area of faults where Thursday's earthquake occurred, saw a magnitude 6 earthquake in 1984, Hauksson said.

Although Thursday's earthquake was the first of magnitude 6 or greater since the Napa earthquake of 2014 killed two, injured 300 and damaged more than 2,000 structures, it was too early to say that California's so-called earthquake drought was over.

“It takes a year or so of data to decide if the rate has changed. It's like trying to say the stock exchange has gone up because it went up for one day,” Hauksson said.

Thursday's quake also had nothing to do with the recent swarm in Fontana. It's too far away, Hauksson said.

The U.S. Geological Survey is dispatching geologists to Kern County to look for a surface rupture and gather other data.

The earthquake was centered roughly 80 miles northeast of a stretch of the 106-year-old Los Angeles Aqueduct spanning the San Andreas fault.

“Aqueduct personnel have been deployed as part of our standard earthquake response protocols to inspect the aqueduct and reservoirs,” said Joe Ramallo, a spokesman for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. “In the city, critical facilities are also being checked.”

“There is no information nor reports of damage at this time,” he said.

Ivan Amerson, 35, was eating lunch with his family in the isolated town of Trona when the quake hit.

“It was kind of an odd earthquake because you could hear it coming,” he said.

Afterward, the town became a chaotic scene, Amerson said. There was no power, a chemical plant that operates in town shut its doors abruptly and citizens, including Amerson, began packing up to leave.

He said he was headed to his father’s house in Costa Mesa.

“We’re going to the beach,” he said.

“It’s a good time not to be inland.”

Times staff writers Joseph Serna, Irfan Khan, Anita Chabria, Alex Wigglesworth, Louis Sahagun, Alexa Diaz, David Montero, Mary Bernard, Alejandra Reyes-Velarde, Dakota Smith, Marques Harper, Phil Willon, Julia Wick, Robin Rauzi, Julissa James, Seema Mehta, Giulia McDonnell Nieto del Rio, Jeanette Marantos and Emily Baumgaertner contributed to this report.

Near earthquake epicenter in Trona, ‘it looks like a tornado went through’

By ALEJANDRA REYES-VELARDE
JUL 05, 2019 | 8:45 AM





Shattered glass covers the ground in the town of Trona on July 4 after a 6.4 magnitude shook Southern California. (Etienne Laurent / EPA-EFE / REX /)

The small, unincorporated Searles Valley community of Trona seemed relatively unshaken by the magnitude 6.4 earthquake that rocked Southern California on Thursday afternoon, despite moderate damage to the town.

A sense of community is what will get people through this quake, say residents, most of whom work at the Searles Valley Minerals plant or the local high school.

When the quake struck Thursday morning, the remote town — situated in the northwest corner of San Bernardino County, the quake’s epicenter — was quiet. The general store, library and a clinic all had “Closed” signs pasted to the doors in anticipation of the Fourth of July holiday.

Christina Sanders, a volunteer firefighter, was at her boyfriend’s house with their children when the shaking started. The kids screamed and cried, she said.

“I watched the roof in the garage flex in and go back out.”

At first, the children thought the rattling was caused by military planes, which fly there often and whose sonic booms have shaken the house, she said. But Sanders knew immediately what it was — and that she had to head to the fire station.

She drove the streets in her firetruck for an hour, checking in with neighbors who had all lost power.

She stopped at the home of Rhonda Seyrkels, who gave her a thumbs-up. Sanders returned it and continued her rounds.

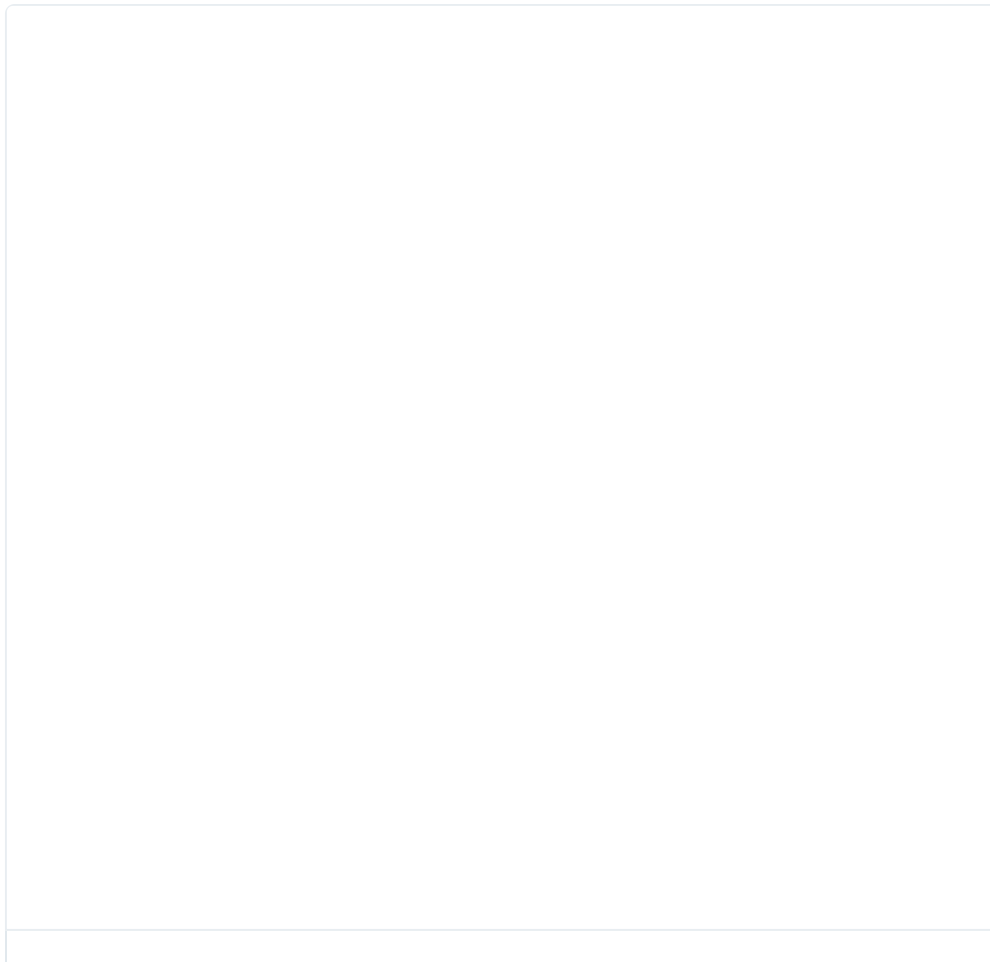
When Sanders finally returned to her own home, she found a pipe had broken and her house was flooded 2 feet deep with water. Everything had fallen off the top of her refrigerator and nearby shelves, and her 70-inch flat screen TV was face-down on the floor.

“It looks like a tornado went through there and tore it up,” she said.

After surveying the mess, Sanders headed back to the station.

“I just shut my water and power off and just left it there,” she said. “The community is more important.”

That can-do attitude could even be seen in state officials' response to the quake. A giant crack that formed across Highway 178 on the outskirts of Trona had already been repaired by Caltrans crews an hour after the temblor tore up the road.





Caltrans District 8
@Caltrans8

Crack across SR 178 near Trona was repaired within one hour by Caltrans District 9 Maintenance crews [#caltrans8](#) [@Caltrans9](#)

295 3:22 PM - Jul 4, 2019

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Caltrans District 8
@Caltrans8

Caltrans District 9 Maintenance crews make repairs to cracks along SR 178 near Trona within an hour after 6.4 quake in Ridgecrest [#Caltrans8](#) [@Caltrans9](#) [@CA_Trans_Agency](#) [@CaltransHQ](#)

348 4:14 PM - Jul 4, 2019

[158 people are talking about this](#)

By Thursday afternoon, Seyrkels drove to the fire station to drop off spaghetti and macaroni and cheese for the volunteers. The small station is not usually fully staffed, but on Thursday it was one of the few signs of life in Trona, a town of just under 2,000. Firefighters chatted about the damage they had seen and residents occasionally dropped by asking for supplies.

“We just had to let them know we appreciate them,” Seyrkels said, and apologized to Sanders that she couldn’t bring more food.

Seyrkels said she was in Ridgecrest — 10 miles from the epicenter — buying ingredients for a barbecue when the quake hit, so the family couldn't finish shopping. In the end, three households were able to cobble together enough to make ribs, tri-tip, deviled eggs and steak.

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“It was supposed to be better,” she said. “We were supposed to have dessert.”

“The show must go on,” said Winter Wilson, a family member and neighbor. “It’s still about the kids.”

Seyrkels agreed.

“It’s a small community,” she said. “We stick together because we have to. We’re so far away from everybody else.”

San Bernardino County Fire Department Battalion Chief Bill Villarino said most of Trona sustained minor to moderate damage. Some chimneys collapsed, and mobile homes were shaken off their bases, he said, but that was the worst of it.

No one was injured, and there were no evacuations, Villarino added, but half a dozen water mains broke — two of them major — causing water to spout out of the ground.

Water shoots from a broken main along Trona Road following Thursday's magnitude 6.4 earthquake. (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)

Power wasn't expected to be restored until Friday morning at the earliest, Villarino said.

Aftershocks seemed to strike the area roughly every half-hour, and residents braced themselves for another larger jolt.

Others stopped by the fire station, thanking firefighters and asking for water and ice. But the fire department was also limited in its resources and directed one family to a nearby golf course being used as a cooling center.

The town's usual emergency sites and shelters — a senior facility and the library — were closed for the holiday or had been damaged.

For San Bernardino County Fire Department Capt. Steve Simpson, the main priority was checking in with the industrial plant.

The site produces materials such as boric acid, sodium carbonate, sodium sulfate and several specialty forms of borax used in soaps and other industrial materials. It uses chemicals that if released could be toxic to the community, according to Simpson and Sanders.

“It hasn't happened yet,” said Sanders, who also works as a security guard and EMT for the plant. She said there are many precautions in place to protect against leaks.

“Our chemicals are secure and did not release into the community, and I can say there are no injuries,” according to a security representative for the plant who did not want to be named because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

The plant was not evacuated, but nonessential personnel were dismissed, he said.

Shawn Dodson was still in bed when the first earthquake struck. The volunteer firefighter and instrumentation technician for the mineral plant had stayed up late the night before watching a movie with his wife.

She came running into the room, screaming for him to wake up, about 10 a.m., when a magnitude 4.0 foreshock struck.

“She was just freaked out,” Dodson said.

About 30 minutes later, the bigger magnitude 6.4 quake came.

“The house shook like I've never heard before,” he said. “I've never experienced an earthquake like that.”

The family hadn't had any plans for the Fourth of July, but that changed after the shaking stopped.

“Well, you know what we’re doing now,” Dodson told his wife after the quake. The whole family — Dodson, his wife and three children — headed to the fire station to help out.

COMMENTS (2)

NEWS

'It felt like the house was going to collapse,' Ridgecrest resident says of 6.4 magnitude earthquake

By **BRIAN WHITEHEAD** | bwhitehead@scng.com and **BRIAN ROKOS** | brokos@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun
PUBLISHED: July 4, 2019 at 5:10 pm | UPDATED: July 4, 2019 at 11:21 pm

As a [6.4 magnitude earthquake roared through the minute Kern County city of Ridgecrest](#) Thursday, July 4, resident Jorge Toral said his house shook like Jell-O with just the slightest movement.

"It felt like the house was going to collapse," the 30-year-old father of three said a few hours after the initial quake.

Reported at 10:33 a.m., the holiday temblor, [one of the region's biggest since the 1994 Northridge quake](#) and the first to surpass magnitude 6 in two decades, displaced dozens of men, women and children celebrating the Fourth of July in their desert community of about 28,000.

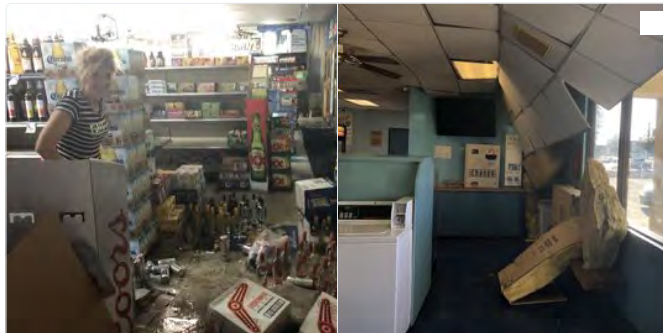
"Things started going crazy," said resident Aaron Leming, who added that water from his mother's pool overflowed during the quake. "My car actually moved. It lasted about 10 seconds even though I felt like it lasted for a minute or two."

As [aftershocks continued into the afternoon and early evening](#), Toral, who was watching television when the main quake hit, joined others chased from their homes in a Walmart parking lot to collect free water and Gatorade.

Many residents – fearful of a second large quake – said they, too, saw their houses sway during the temblor.

Dave Meade, 60, went as far as to pantomime how violently his house shifted.

"We felt traumatic shaking," said 27-year-old Caleb Metcalf, who recently moved to Ridgecrest, his wife's hometown. "It woke us up from a dead sleep. It was scary. Everything flew off the walls."



 **Brian Rokos**
@Brian_Rokos

The owner of a Ridgecrest market and adjacent Laundromat suffered a double indignity in the earthquake: Scores of glass bottles crashed to the floor, and in the Laundromat, the trap ceiling fell.

3 6:46 PM - Jul 4, 2019

[See Brian Rokos's other Tweets](#)

About 80 miles from the Lancaster/Palmdale area, 110 miles from Bakersfield and 120 miles from San Bernardino, Ridgecrest last felt a sizable earthquake in August 1995, when a 5.4 magnitude temblor shook the area and reportedly created more than 2,500 aftershocks over the course of five weeks.

Later that year, a 5.8 quake struck the area, then the largest to hit Southern California since the Northridge quake.

Thursday's temblor, which prompted an emergency proclamation from Gov. Gavin Newsom, forced the evacuation of Ridgecrest Regional Hospital, a landmark off US Route 395, which runs through town.

While the hospital did not appear to suffer damage during the initial quake or the immediate aftershocks, hospital spokeswoman Jayde Glenn said, as a precaution, 25 patients – the facility's capacity – were transported mostly by air to hospitals in Palmdale, Lancaster, and Bakersfield.

No patients were in surgery or in critical condition at the time of the earthquake, Glenn said.

Despite the evacuation, the hospital's emergency room and urgent care facility remained open. A portable tent was set up outside the building to treat incoming patients.

Hospital officials said a seismic engineer will inspect the facility before it completely reopens.

Kern County Fire Department officials said crews responded to nearly two dozen incidents around and near Ridgecrest following the quake, including calls for medical assistance and structure fires. While safe from severe damage, several local grocery stores lost power, requiring shoppers to pay with cash. Some goods fell off shelves and created a mess.

Downed power lines littered roads.

Meade, a civilian scientist who works on the geothermal program on the nearby Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, called Ridgecrest, whose Wikipedia page already has a section devoted to Thursday's earthquake, a "quiet town."

"It's a good place to raise kids," he said.

Tags: [Earthquakes](#), [Top Stories Breeze](#), [Top Stories IVDB](#), [Top Stories LADN](#), [Top Stories LBPT](#), [Top Stories OCR](#), [Top Stories PE](#), [Top Stories PSN](#), [Top Stories RDF](#), [Top Stories SGVT](#), [Top Stories Sun](#), [Top Stories WDN](#)

Brian Whitehead

Brian Whitehead covers San Bernardino for The Sun. Bred in Grand Terrace, he graduated from Riverside Notre Dame High and Cal

'It was the scare of my life'

Fourth of July quake leads to evacuations and long lines for gas



RIDGECREST Regional Hospital staff members help transfer patients to other care facilities as a precaution after Thursday's magnitude 6.4 quake. Hospital officials said the property was being inspected for damage. (Irfan Khan Los Angeles Times)

BY LOUIS SAHAGUN, JOSEPH SERNA, ALEXA DÍAZ AND HAILEY BRANSON-POTTS

RIDGECREST, Calif. — The Chambers family was in holiday mode when the shaking began.

Jazmin Chambers was cooking bacon and eggs. Her husband, Kevin, and 5-year-old daughter, Kailyn, were frosting a cake for a July Fourth party. Then, pictures on the wall

of their Ridgecrest house started falling. A drinking glass shattered. The refrigerator moved.

The family and everyone else in Ridgecrest and throughout Kern County had an unexpected Fourth of July guest: a magnitude 6.4 earthquake, the largest to hit Southern California in nearly two decades.

Jazmin, 34, was rattled. A Texas native, she had only seen earthquakes on TV and in the movies. She and her husband are military veterans who moved to Ridgecrest last year from Washington to raise their growing family.

“Oh my gosh, it was the scare of my life,” she said. “Afterward, I couldn’t even concentrate. My body was shaking.”

Her infant daughter slept through it. Kailyn resumed her cake-frosting duties as soon as the rattling stopped. Her husband joyfully dubbed it The Independence Shake Down.

“We’re proceeding as normal,” he said a few hours later. “I got the chicken, some steaks, some pork chops we’re going to put on the grill. I don’t think that’s going to stop the show.”

Striking at 10:33 a.m., the quake was centered about 125 miles northeast of Los Angeles in the Mojave Desert’s remote Searles Valley, near where Inyo, San Bernardino and Kern counties meet.

Officials with the Kern County Fire Department said there were no major injuries reported as of Thursday afternoon, just cuts and bruises. Authorities in Ridgecrest responded to dozens of calls for help, ranging from medical assistance to structure fires.

Patients at Ridgecrest Regional Hospital were evacuated as a “cautionary measure while inspectors searched the property for signs of damage,” said Jayde Glenn, the hospital’s marketing director. Twenty-five patients were taken by helicopter and ambulance to other medical facilities in Palmdale, Lancaster and Bakersfield, she said.

In Ridgecrest on Thursday afternoon, gas stations were mobbed with cars as people tried to fill their tanks with gasoline after the earthquake. The electricity was out in parts of town, and traffic lights weren’t working, causing traffic jams.

Jim Simmons, 69, a lifelong resident of Ridgecrest and a consultant at the hospital, said he was sitting in a chair at home Thursday morning when he heard a crack and some groaning. His entire house started swaying.

“It rocked me out of the chair and onto the floor,” he said. “Looking up, I saw framed pictures and CDs falling off the walls and the shelves on all sides.”

He stepped outside and saw two plumes of smoke, including one curling above a house a few blocks away. He walked to the house and stood among several neighbors who watched, feeling helpless, as it burned. He rushed to the hospital to volunteer in case it needed help.

“When I arrived, I was immediately pressed into service,” he said. “The hospital was completely full of fire trucks, paramedics, helicopters on the ground and in the air. What a scene.”

At the Minit Shop, a Ridgecrest Boulevard convenience store, the floors were littered with cans of hairspray, diapers, cans of beer and kibbles of pet food. Workers swept up broken glass and wiped off items to see what they could salvage and put back on the shelves. The smell of spilled wine hung in the air.

“Oh, God!” said one customer who headed to the back of the store and saw pools of red wine on the floor.

Javaid Waseem, who owns the store along with his brother, was at home and rushed to Minit Shop when the earthquake hit. The brothers immediately shut off the gasoline pumps outside, closed the store and called in extra employees to clean up the mess.

When they restarted the pumps a few hours later, a steady stream of customers came to fill their tanks, wary of another earthquake.

“This is the first time I’ve seen this since I moved to California,” said Waseem, 45, who moved to Ridgecrest from New York in 2006. “I’m glad we are safe, but the damage inside the store — it’s going to take time.”

Barbara Butler, 90, was shopping in the Dollar Tree at China Lake and Ridgecrest boulevards when the temblor hit. She wasn’t looking for anything in particular and was just getting in her daily steps when she felt a jolt and saw a shelf of cleaning supplies come toppling down.

Butler walks with a cane and was able to maneuver out of the way before the shelf crashed to the floor. The lights went out.

“I could feel a little tremor,” Butler said. “‘Huh, we’re having a little shaker.’ And then — whammo! — you got the big one. I quickly, as quickly as a 90-year-old can move, went down an aisle a little bit. I got splashed with stuff.”

Other customers helped her to her car, and she rushed home to check on things.

She said a collection of glass cups and saucers that had belonged to her mother was destroyed, as was an antique case that housed them. “But they’re just things,” said Butler, who has lived in the area for 50 years.

Oscar Pineda, 41, of Ridgecrest and his family were heading out of town after hearing repeated predictions on television of possible large aftershocks to come.

“After a hundred aftershocks, we’re outta here,” he said as he his wife and their two young sons packed the family car and headed to spend the night with a relative in Lancaster.

They were in their backyard when the shaking began. “My sons were wide-eyed and wondering out loud, nervously, ‘Daddy what’s happening?’ ” Pineda said.

“I was honest with them. I said: ‘The earth is shaking. It’s an earthquake.’ But my 6-year-old wasn’t satisfied. ‘Why, Daddy? Why is the ground shaking?’ I said, ‘Every once in a while, God shakes up the world.’ He looked up at me and said, ‘Well, OK, Daddy.’ ”

Sahagun and Díaz reported from Ridgecrest, Serna and Branson-Potts from Los Angeles.

NEWS

Earthquake in Ridgecrest a reminder for Southern Californians to prepare for emergencies

Public agencies shared tips on social media following the 6.4 magnitude quake Thursday, July 4



Edgar Rivera reads as he keeps watch at Thrifty Wash after the trap ceiling partially fell during the 6.4 earthquake in Ridgecrest on Thursday, July 4, 2019. (Photo by Terry Pierson, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

By **BRIAN WHITEHEAD** | bwhitehead@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun

PUBLISHED: July 4, 2019 at 10:35 pm | UPDATED: July 5, 2019 at 8:28 am

As the Kern County city of Ridgecrest rebounds from [the 6.4 magnitude earthquake that struck](#) Thursday, July 4, public agencies are imploring Southern California communities and residents to prepare for disaster.

Caltrans District 8, which oversees Riverside and San Bernardino counties, on Thursday [encouraged residents](#) to keep a survival kit, water, comfortable clothing and shoes in their cars in case of emergency. Among the items to include in a survival pack are toothbrushes and bars of soap, a whistle and a flashlight, cash and coins, sunblock and bug repellent.

Residents always should carry enough water for three days, Caltrans officials say.

Southern California Gas, meanwhile, advised customers not to shut off their natural gas after an earthquake unless they notice a gas leak. Customers should call 911 and immediately leave the area if they smell or hear natural gas, company officials [tweeted Thursday](#).

“Earthquakes can happen at any time ... and we need to be prepared,” California Earthquake Authority CEO Glenn Pomeroy said in a statement. “It’s important to know what to do to stay safe when the ground starts shaking.”

The California Earthquake Authority is a privately-funded, publicly-managed nonprofit providing residential earthquake insurance.

Los Angeles County Fire officials on Thursday [reminded Southern California residents](#) to drop, cover and hold during an earthquake. After the shaking, residents should be prepared for aftershocks and check for fires, hazards and damaged utilities.

Experts at the state [Seismic Safety Commission](#) also recommend helping neighbors who may require special assistance, particularly the elderly and people with disabilities.

And to be informed during all types of disasters and emergencies, residents can sign up for alerts through city and county agencies.

Tags: [Earthquakes](#), [fire](#), [Top Stories Sun](#), [wildfires](#)

Why L.A.'s early warning system didn't send an alert before the magnitude 6.4 quake

By RONG-GONG LIN II
JUL 04, 2019 | 6:20 PM





An early alert system working during a Bay Area quake. (USGS)

Did the ShakeAlertLA system fail to provide an earthquake early warning?

Los Angeles residents were asking that question after Thursday's earthquake that was felt throughout Southern California, when they didn't get an early warning from the much-anticipated ShakeAlertLA app, released by the city of Los Angeles earlier this year.

Did it fail? Not quite. The ShakeAlertLA smartphone app was only designed to alert users of cellphones physically located in Los Angeles County if there was a decent chance of destruction, with the warning system forecasting at least “light shaking,” or level 4 on the Modified Mercalli Intensity Scale.

What was actually felt Thursday in Los Angeles County, while seemingly scary, was actually not that bad. It was forecast by the earthquake early warning system as bringing shaking too weak to cause significant damage in Los Angeles County, said U.S. Geological Survey research geophysicist Rob Graves.

“It didn’t meet the threshold for the L.A. area,” said Doug Given, the U.S. Geological Survey’s earthquake early warning coordinator.

”The level of shaking in the city of Los Angeles was not damaging,” Graves said.

ShakeAlertLA is a mobile phone app developed by the city that transmits earthquake early warnings based off a separate, but similarly named, system called ShakeAlert and run by the U.S. Geological Survey.

The USGS’ system relies on hundreds of earthquake sensors scattered throughout the West Coast. There is no public smartphone app yet available that sends earthquake early warnings throughout all of California.

However, scientists are continuing to test, refine and perfect the USGS' ShakeAlert system that aims to provide earthquake early warnings throughout California, and eventually Oregon and Washington.

[Here's what earthquake magnitudes mean—and why an 8 can be so much scarier than a 6 »](#)

That ShakeAlert system worked — it's just that the public does not yet have access to that information as scientists continue to refine its public delivery system. The USGS' ShakeAlert system issued an alert about 6.9 seconds after the shaking began, Given said.

Had there been a public warning system in place for Kern and San Bernardino counties, the USGS ShakeAlert system would not have been fast enough to issue an early warning for Ridgecrest — at 10 miles away from the epicenter too close to get a warning, but enough to give some warning to California City, about 50 miles southwest of the epicenter.

Caltech seismologist Egill Hauksson said he received a warning that shaking was coming toward his location in the Pasadena area before the shaking arrived from an earthquake that began some 200 miles away.

The intensity of shaking was obviously worse closer to the epicenter, maxing out at intensity level 8, or severe shaking, but that occurred in a much more remote area.

The city of Ridgecrest, population 29,000, endured intensity level 6 or “very strong” shaking, in which damage that might occur could result in broken

chimneys, considerable damage in poorly built or badly designed buildings, but negligible damage in buildings of good design and construction.

The ShakeAlert forecast of the shaking intensity in L.A. County was slightly off. Although the ShakeAlert forecast conducted almost instantaneously did not forecast Intensity 4 or “light,” shaking in Los Angeles County, such shaking actually did occur in the northern part of the Los Angeles County, including East L.A., Palmdale, Pasadena, Santa Clarita, Santa Monica, Hollywood and Pomona. Other parts recorded Intensity 2 or 3, or “weak,” shaking, such as USC, Los Angeles International Airport, Long Beach, Malibu and Watts.

But generally speaking, there were no reports of significant damage in L.A. County.

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Officials have debated how sensitive to make earthquake early warnings.

“The question is what should the threshold be,” Graves said. “This is a subjective judgment. You don’t necessarily want too many alerts to go out when nothing of consequence happens. On the other side, you don’t want to set it too high when you don’t send out an alert when you should have.

“In this case, we’re right at that fuzzy boundary,” Graves said.

Officials with the city of Los Angeles, who manage the ShakeAlertLA app, suggested they would consider lowering the threshold for alerts. “We hear you and will lower

the alert threshold," the city's Twitter account said.

Trail to popular but risky waterfall closed

San Bernardino National Forest cites frequent injuries and rescues for its closure of access to Big Falls.



HIKERS on the Big Falls Trail in San Bernardino National Forest can go only to a waterfall overlook. Above, the lower portion of the falls. (Zach Behrens U.S. Forest Service)

BY JACLYN COSGROVE

Search and rescue teams are called so frequently to the area surrounding one of Southern California's tallest waterfalls that one particular rock has become known to locals as "Blood Rock."

A slip on the rock has sent several people tumbling down the middle fall of Big Falls, often causing injury and rescue by helicopter.

That's why, starting on the Fourth of July, visitors on the Big Falls Trail in San Bernardino National Forest will be allowed to hike only to a waterfall overlook. Off-trail areas beyond the railing will be closed because of safety concerns.

"There have been too many search and rescues in this area in the past," Joe Rechsteiner, district ranger for the Front Country Ranger District, said in a statement. "We want to make sure the public enjoys this beautiful spot while staying safe. Some of the rocks in Falls Creek are deceptively slippery."

The closure will last through May 24, 2020, unless it's rescinded earlier.

Anyone sneaking into the prohibited area can be fined as much as \$5,000 for violating the forest's order. Violators also face a maximum of six months in jail.

Similar increases in rescues have emerged across Southern California as more people flock to natural spaces, often after learning about those places on Instagram and other social media platforms.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's search and rescue teams conducted 681 missions in 2017, the largest number in five years.

It's a 38% increase from their 491 rescues in 2013.

The teams' leaders have said the largest factor for that increase is people posting videos of extreme activities online.

Rescue teams in Santa Barbara and San Bernardino counties have seen similar increases.

NEWS > CRIME + PUBLIC SAFETY

Off-trail area of Big Falls Trail in Forest Falls to be closed to public until May 2020



Authorities gave advice in 2018 on how to stay safe after two Southern California hikers were rescued from waterfalls recently by helicopter. A Redlands woman was rescued Jan. 7, 2018, after a couple standing at this overlook, shown on June 18, 2016, heard and saw her at the top of Upper Big Falls near Forest Falls. (KURT MILLER, STAFF FILE PHOTO)

By **ROBERT GUNDRAN** | rgundran@scng.com |

PUBLISHED: July 3, 2019 at 10:51 pm | UPDATED: July 4, 2019 at 12:00 am

Hikers looking to stray off the beaten path on Big Falls Trail will be unable until May 2020, due to an order issued by the San Bernardino National Forest Service.

The Forest Service said in a press release Wednesday that since so many search-and-rescues have happened in the area in the past, officials will be prohibiting all hiking past the railing of a waterfall overlook on Big Falls Trail.

Big Falls Trail is reached by turning east off Highway 38 onto Valley of the Falls Road in Forest Falls, according to the forest.

The order is effective Thursday and was issued until May 24, 2020, because of slippery rocks in the area. The order may be rescinded before May 2020, though.

Search and rescues by the San Bernardino County Fire and Sheriff's Departments are so frequent in the area that one rock in particular is known to locals as "Blood Rock," according to the Forest Service.

People who slip on the rock have been injured and required rescue by helicopter, officials said.

"There have been too many search and rescues in this area in the past," said Joe Rechsteiner, the district ranger for the Front Country Ranger District. "We want to make sure the public enjoys this beautiful spot while staying safe."

The only people who will be allowed to access the off-trail section are law enforcement officers or rescue and firefighting forces in the performances of their official duties.

Tags: [public safety](#), [Top Stories RDF](#), [Top Stories Sun](#)

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By audi.com

2019 Elite Fleets Honored at GFX

June 18, 2019 • by GF Staff (</authors/324937/staff>)





Elite Fleets at the Honors Celebration were (l-r): Brian Franklin from the City of Tulsa, Okla.; Craig Donovan from San Bernardino County, Calif.; and Craig Croner from the City of Boise, Idaho.

Photo by Yvette Ponthier

Government Fleet magazine recognized the 2019 Elite Fleets at the Government Fleet Expo & Conference on June 18.

The Elite Fleets are former No. 1 fleets that continue to perform at a high level and show leadership across the public fleet industry. Each fleet is honored with a plaque during the Honors Celebration at GFX, which took place in New Orleans this year.

This year's Elite Fleets are:

- The City of Boise, Idaho — accepted by Administrative Services Manager Craig Croner
- The City of Tulsa, Okla. — accepted by Fleet Manager Brian Franklin

- San Bernardino County, Calif. — accepted by Fleet Superintendent Craig Donovan

The City of Columbus, Ohio, and the City of Mesa, Ariz., are also Elite Fleets.

More information about the Elite Fleets and their initiatives to lead the industry will be published in an upcoming issue of *Government Fleet* magazine.

Cadiz Inc. Announces New Hemp Crop Research at Cadiz Valley Ranch Agricultural Operation

GlobeNewswire•July 2, 2019

LOS ANGELES, July 02, 2019 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Cadiz Inc. ([CDZI](#)) (the “Company”) is pleased to announce it has begun an experimental commercial hemp research program at its agricultural property in Cadiz, California, in the Mojave Desert approximately 100 miles northeast of Palm Springs. The trial program will inform the potential for large-scale commercial production of hemp, a newly legalized and innovative crop, at Cadiz and in other desert environments.

“We are enthusiastic about the opportunities presented by the commercial production of hemp at Cadiz, where we offer an ideal location for this highly sought-after crop,” said Cadiz Inc. CEO and President Scott Slater. “Hemp presents an attractive opportunity for us to farm our overlying land in a manner complementary to our water conservation objectives. Pending the results of the trial, we look forward to expanding operations and delivering new business opportunities to the community.”

Hemp is a strain of the Cannabis sativa plant species that is grown specifically for the industrial uses of its derived products. Hemp is related to marijuana, another strain of Cannabis sativa, but hemp contains only very low concentrations (less than 0.3%) of the compound tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive compound that marijuana is known-for. Hemp can be refined into over 25,000 different uses.

Hemp is a fast-growing plant crop in which the whole of the plant is harvested and put to use. It was one of the first plants turned into usable fiber 10,000 years ago and today commercial uses of hemp include paper, textiles, clothing, biodegradable plastics, cement, paint, insulation, biofuel, food, and animal feed. Hemp oil from the seeds can be used in the manufacture of oil-based paints, in creams as a moisturizing agent, for cooking, and in plastics. Hemp seeds are also used in health foods, organic body care, and other nutraceuticals. Hemp contains over 100 different compounds or cannabinoids, of which cannabidiol (CBD) is currently the most popular and sold for a variety of end-uses.

According to [New Frontier Data](#), a market research firm concentrated on the cannabis industry, total US sales for hemp-based products were approximately \$1.1 billion in 2018, and are projected to more than double by 2022. An April 2019 report from Bank of America Merrill Lynch estimated the potential average annual spend on CBD products in the U.S. at \$1.9 billion in 2019, growing to \$11.5 billion by 2032.

The hemp trial program at Cadiz is focused on studying growth potential of a variety of strains in the desert environment. Hemp is an attractive rotation crop for farmers because it detoxifies the soil and prevents soil erosion. After harvest, the remaining root structure breaks down into the soil, providing valuable nutrients. Hemp is more water efficient than tree, nut and row crops, relying on only 1.5- 2 acre feet of water per acre of planted

land. Hemp at Cadiz will be sun-grown in the open air, not in a green house, and will be grown organically increasing its value in the market. The location has access to rail and highway infrastructure to bring products to market.

Cadiz is already the largest agricultural operation in San Bernardino County. The Company owns 35,000 acres of private property with water rights overlying an extensive groundwater aquifer system with more water in storage than Lake Mead. Since the 1980s Cadiz has farmed vineyard, orchard and seasonable row crops, relying on groundwater for irrigation. Approximately 10,000 acres of the Cadiz Valley property is permitted for agricultural production, and the balance is zoned for agricultural use. Groundwater relied upon for irrigation is managed in accordance with permits from the County. Groundwater use has been sustainable for 25 years with water levels in the aquifer presently at an all-time high and no adverse surface land impacts. Water quality is also secure with TDS below 350 ppb and meeting all state and federal drinking water standards without treatment.

“Our remote location, abundant land and water resources, combined with our decades of desert agriculture experience make Cadiz a perfect setting and partner for commercial hemp production,” Slater continued. “Organic hemp at Cadiz will face no issues attributable with the drift of pesticides or cross pollination that applies in areas with heavily concentrated agriculture. We are excited about the prospects of being on the front-end of the sustainable, organic, sun-grown hemp agriculture research.”

The farming of industrial hemp was made legal nationwide on December 20, 2018 when the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (the “2018 Farm Bill”) was signed into law. The Hemp Farming Act (S. 2667), included in the 2018 Farm Bill, modified the Controlled Substances Act (“CSA”) to exempt hemp from the definition of marijuana and removed it from the list of Schedule I substances under the CSA. The 2018 Farm Bill allows hemp cultivation broadly, not simply pilot programs for studying market interest in hemp-derived products. Industrial hemp will now be treated like an agricultural commodity, not a controlled substance.

California began regulating industrial hemp in September 2013 with the passage of the California Industrial Hemp Farming Act, Senate Bill 566, which separated it from the definition of marijuana. On September 30, 2018, Governor Jerry Brown signed and approved Senate Bill 1409, which amended the definition of industrial hemp to no longer be limited to a fiber or oilseed crop and allowing for cultivation of industrial hemp for commercial and research purposes.

About Cadiz Inc.

Founded in 1983, Cadiz Inc. ([CDZI](#)) is a publicly-held natural resources company that owns 70 square miles of property with significant water resources in Southern California. The Company maintains an organic agricultural development in the Cadiz Valley of eastern San Bernardino County, California and is partnering with public water agencies to implement the [Cadiz Water Project](#), which over two phases will create a new water supply for approximately 400,000 people and make available up to 1 million acre-feet of new groundwater storage capacity for the region. Cadiz abides by a wide-ranging Green Compact focused on environmental conservation and sustainable practices to manage its land, water and agricultural resources. For more information, please visit www.cadizinc.com.

Contact:

Courtney Degener
Cadiz Inc.
213-271-1600
cdegener@cadizinc.com

FORWARD LOOKING STATEMENT: This release contains forward-looking statements that are subject to significant risks and uncertainties, including statements related to the future operating and financial performance of the Company and the financing activities of the Company. Although the Company believes that the expectations reflected in our forward-looking statements are reasonable, it can give no assurance that such expectations will prove to be correct. Factors that could cause actual results or events to differ materially from those reflected in the Company's forward-looking statements include the Company's ability to maximize value for Cadiz land and water resources, the Company's ability to obtain new financing as needed, the receipt of additional permits for the water project and other factors and considerations detailed in the Company's Securities and Exchange Commission filings.

Children's Fund collects backpacks and school supplies for local youth

Children's Fund Jul 3, 2019



Syrone Harvey, Program Coordinator at Children's Fund, displays one of the backpacks collected for children in San Bernardino County.

Courtesy photo

SAN BERNARDINO CO., Calif. – Children's Fund is inviting the

community to help provide new backpacks full of school supplies for San Bernardino County foster and other vulnerable youth now through Friday, July 12.

"Our community's children are worth the investment," says Betty Chambers, Director of Programs at Children's Fund. "Providing a new backpack full of needed school supplies to foster and other vulnerable youth enforces the idea that they are valued and are important."

There are three ways to participate in this year's Backpack & School Supplies Drive.

First, you may bring your backpack and school supply donations to Children's Fund's office located at 348 W. Hospitality Lane #110, in San Bernardino. Second, you may visit their Amazon Wish list at

childrensfund.org/backpacks to purchase and ship backpacks and supplies directly to Children's Fund's office. Lastly, monetary donations by credit card can be made securely online at childrensfund.org.

For more information visit childrensfund.org/backpacks or call (909) 379-6035.

Deputy injured while arresting man

By **Martin Estacio**

Staff Writer

Posted Jul 3, 2019 at 5:04 PM

Updated Jul 3, 2019 at 5:04 PM

APPLE VALLEY — A Sheriff's deputy was injured Tuesday afternoon while taking a man into custody who was allegedly attempting to touch children at a local pool, authorities said.

At about 2:11 p.m., Deputy Tyler Loup was hailed by people at the Apple Valley Aquatics Center. He was informed that a "white male subject was in the pool allegedly attempting to touch children inappropriately," according to a San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department statement.

Several people pointed out the man, later identified as 28-year-old Steven Basulto of Hesperia.

Basulto "began acting erratically and refused to answer any questions," when Loup attempted to speak to him.

Loup tried to detain and handcuff Basulto, when he became "physically combative" and bit Loup on his hand, causing an injury to his finger, authorities said.

Other deputies responded to the location and were able to arrest Basulto.

Loup was transported to a hospital for treatment.

Booking records show Basulto is being held at the West Valley Detention Center in lieu of \$100,000 bail.

He is booked on suspicion of annoying or molesting a child under 18 years of age and resisting an executive officer. His hearing is scheduled at the Victorville Superior Courthouse on Friday.

The investigation is ongoing. Anyone with information regarding this incident is encouraged to call Deputy Tyler McGee at 760-240-7400.

Persons wishing to remain anonymous can contact the We-Tip Hotline at 1-800-782-7463 or online at www.wetip.com.

Martin Estacio may be reached at MEstacio@VVDailyPress.com or at 760-955-5358.

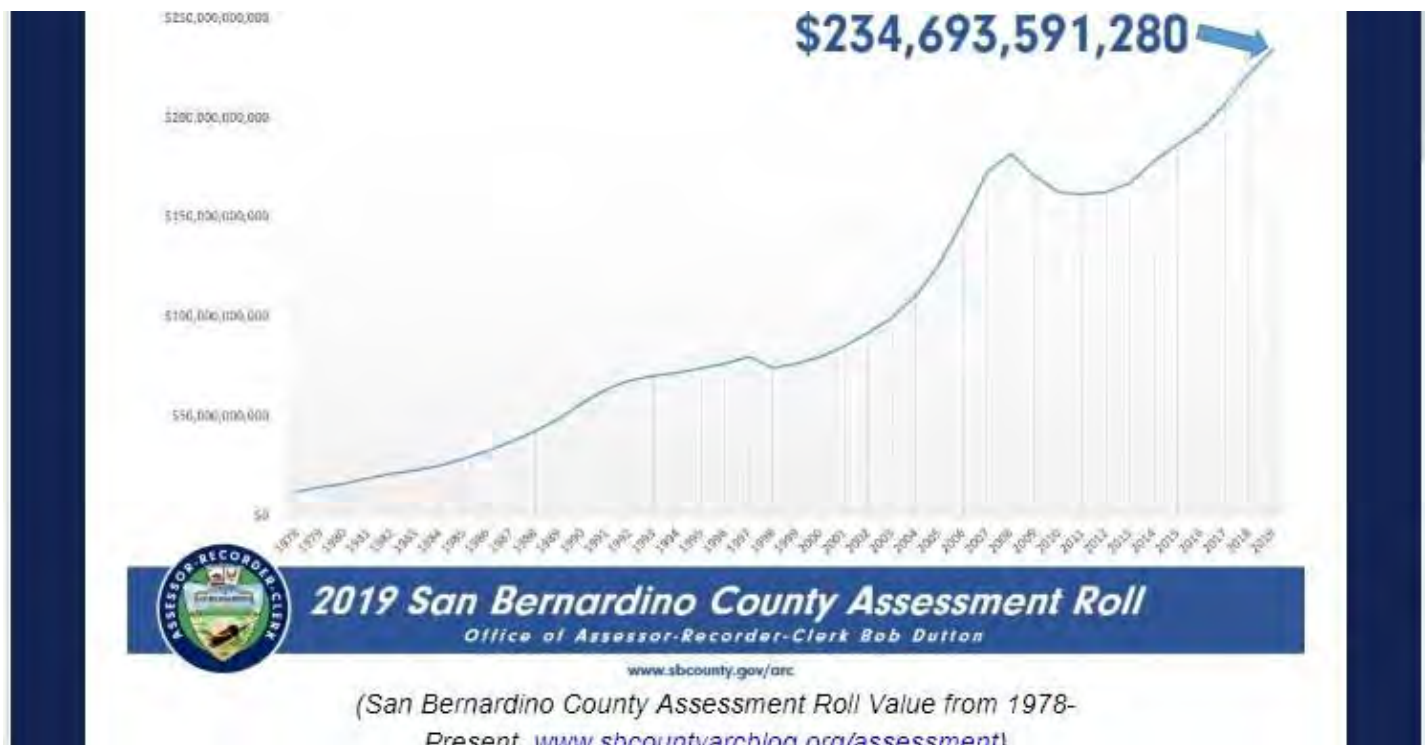
Follow him on Twitter [@DP_mestacio](https://twitter.com/DP_mestacio).



Politics

San Bernardino County Assessor Signs 2019 Assessment Roll

By **Press Release**- July 3, 2019 TAGS: COUNTY OF SAN BERNARDINO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HOMES



[San Bernardino, CA](#) – San Bernardino County Assessor-Recorder-Clerk Bob Dutton signed the 2019 Annual Property Assessment Roll.

State law requires county assessors to annually determine the assessed value of all property in their respective county. The 2019 San Bernardino County Assessment Roll contains 814,067 taxable parcels valued at \$234,693,591,280 which is a 5.8% net increase as compared to the 2018 Assessment Roll. Upon his signature, Assessor Dutton delivered the 2019 Assessment Roll to the San Bernardino County Auditor-Controller/Treasurer/Tax Collector.



"I am pleased to report the signing of the 2019 Assessment Roll showing continued steady growth in property valuations," said San Bernardino County Assessor-Recorder-Clerk Bob Dutton. "This year's Assessment Roll for San Bernardino County is over \$234 billion, which represents a 5.8% increase from the prior year. A majority of assessment value growth this past year was due to transfers of ownership, followed by commercial and residential construction, indicating healthy activity in our local economy. This is a very positive sign for the county."

Individuals wishing to see their personal assessed values may visit the Assessor's website at www.sbcounty.gov/arc and click on the Online Services, Property Information Management System link. The public can also call the Assessor's toll-free number at 1-877-885-7654.

To view the 2019 Assessment Roll, including all 24 cities and unincorporated areas, visit: www.sbcountyarcblog.org/assessment.

The cost of flying the Stars and Stripes

By Matthew Cabe Weeklies Editor

Posted Jul 3, 2019 at 12:01 AM

Updated Jul 3, 2019 at 10:05 PM

High Desert municipalities spend varying amounts each year to replace American flags, but damage is almost always caused by wind.

In 2007, the Pew Research Center published a report that examined patriotism in the United States, including how Americans show pride for their country.

The findings shouldn't shock anyone.

That year, Pew's "political values" survey found that 90% of respondents agreed with the statement, "I am very patriotic." That figure was consistent in similar studies dating back to 1987.

Pew's 20 years of data found "overwhelming" agreement with the statement, and for many Americans, "demonstrating patriotism means showing the flag," according to the report.

Overall, 62% of Americans surveyed between Dec. 12, 2006, and Jan. 9, 2007, said they displayed the flag at home, in the office or on a vehicle.

More recently, WalletHub published somewhat similar findings on June 25 that showed 61% of Americans own a U.S. flag.

At least one takeaway from the statistics is easy to deduce: flying the Stars and Stripes, generally speaking, is prevalent in American society.

In the High Desert, though, the elements can make such patriotic displays costly endeavors that require regular upkeep.

For example, Adelanto Stadium's flag is changed every two months due to "high winds," according to City Clerk Brenda Lopez. That's six new flags per year at that site.

The flag is flown at three other municipal locations in Adelanto, including City Hall. At those sites, Lopez said flags are replaced four times per year. In total, the city spends about \$1,500 annually to replace damaged flags.

Ahead of Thursday's Independence Day celebrations, the Daily Press requested similar information from officials in every High Desert city, as well as in San Bernardino County. We wanted to know how many U.S. flags are displayed in each city, where the flags are displayed, how often they're replaced and how much is spent to replace them.

The information received appears to suggest, among other details, that no two local governments handle the task of replacing flags in precisely the same way. Moreover, the number flags on display at municipally run facilities had little bearing on replacement costs in a given city.

Across the High Desert, as little as \$300 and as much as \$3,500 is either spent or budgeted annually for new flags, according to the responses.

Barstow and Hesperia bookended the cost spectrum, with the former city representing the low end. Barstow city spokesperson Anthony Riley said the flag is flown at seven city-operated sites. Officials replace between three and five flags per year depending on the "wind factor," he said.

"Sites will vary, but traditionally the Cora Harper (Community) Center and (the) maintenance yard are more frequent due to inclement weather."

While Barstow spends about \$300 annually, Riley said the amount may also vary depending on need. All new flags are purchased via money from the Public Works budget.

In Hesperia, a \$3,500 annual budget provides funding to replace American, state and city flags at City Hall, the Mojave Corporation Yard, the police station and the animal shelter, spokesperson Rachel Molina said.

Staff members in the Hesperia's Facilities Division are responsible for upkeep. On average, flags at the four sites are replaced once per year, but Molina said "especially strong winds may necessitate more frequent replacement."

"Typically, replacement more than twice per year isn't necessary," she said.

While the number of flags and the amount spent each year on upkeep varied, the primary cause for replacing damaged (i.e. torn or frayed) flags was the same across all five cities.

"It is usually due to wind," said Apple Valley spokesperson Orlando Acevedo, who listed the sun and, in rare cases, vandalism as other causes. "The town funds replacement costs, which, I estimate, are \$2,200 to \$3,200 for all flags, annually."

Old Glory flies at five town-run facilities, including Horsemen's Center Park, the Apple Valley Golf Course and Town Hall, Acevedo said. Replacement cycles and costs vary and depend on the flag's size.

Most are replaced two to three times a year, with the amount spent "ranging from \$25 for smaller flags to \$400 for the larger flag at Town Hall," according to Acevedo.

While Apple Valley spends \$400 for its larger flag, Victorville's annual purchases rarely exceed \$500 for new U.S. flags at numerous sites, including all 11 of the city's fire stations, according to city spokesperson Sue Jones.

"We spent an additional \$500 this past year to replace the American flag at each of our fire stations as part of our transition to Victorville City Fire," Jones said.

Victorville's policy is to replace all flags each year regardless of condition, according to Jones.

"For the most part, damage to our flags is caused by the elements," she said. "In the last five years, we only had one incident where the halyard was cut and the flag was stolen."

That incident prompted city officials swap the rope used to raise and lower flags with halyards that have a 1/8-inch cable running through their centers.

A flag is also on display at the Old Town Victorville Veterans Memorial, but Jones said members of Victor Valley High School's California Cadet Corps 262nd Battalion help replace it annually during Veterans Day ceremonies.

"This is a tradition that has been in place for many years," she said.

Meanwhile, San Bernardino County spokesperson David Wert estimated the number of county-owned and -maintained facilities that fly the U.S. flag at 30, including between six and eight in the High Desert.

Many county facilities are leased. As such, Wert said flags flown there are the responsibility of the property owners. Still, the county spent \$5,250 in 2018 for 25 replacement sets that included the U.S., state and county flags.

Wert said that's not an annual cost, though, because the "county does not isolate flag-replacement jobs from the other maintenance jobs carried out by County Facilities Management personnel."

None were purchased in 2017 because flags are purchased not to replace damaged flags but to keep an ample supply on hand so damaged flags can be replaced immediately," Wert said. "The county apparently had an ample supply throughout 2017, but needed to restock the shelves in 2018."

For the county, U.S. flags cost \$55, state flags are \$65 and county flags are \$90, according to Wert.

Weeklies Editor Matthew Cabe can be reached at MCabe@VVDailyPress.com or at 760-951-6254. Follow him on Twitter [@DP_MatthewCabe](https://twitter.com/DP_MatthewCabe).

http://www.hidesertstar.com/news/article_5e2dbe6a-9dea-11e9-9553-4b6f33d3e95f.html

TOP STORY

18-year-old on probation arrested for starting fire

By Stacy Moore Hi-Desert Star Jul 3, 2019



Flames destroy a shed on Keeler Avenue in Yucca Mesa Tuesday. A resident of the property, Justin Mason, 18, was arrested on suspicion of starting the fire.

Yvonne Mack Hi-Desert Star

YUCCA MESA — An 18-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of arson after fire destroyed a shed, water tower and about two acres of brush Tuesday evening at 2828 Keeler Ave.

Justin Mason is being held at West Valley Detention Center on \$100,000 bail and is due in the Joshua Tree superior court Friday, although the district attorney has not yet formally filed charges.

Sheriff's Sgt. Derek Garvin said the fire started in a shed on a property where Mason and other members of his family live in two houses. One of his family members called to report the fire at 6:19 p.m. and claimed that Mason had threatened her with a gun before, according to the call log.

Because of the potential that a weapon was on the scene, the Sheriff's Department responded first.

"The firefighters had wait until we could clear the scene," Garvin said.

When sheriff's deputies arrived, they found a couple of people trying to put out the fire, including Mason, he added.

Everyone on the scene was cooperative and investigators did not find evidence of a gun, Garvin said, so the firefighters were able to move into place and start extinguishing the flames.

County fire Battalion Chief Mike McClintock said firefighters were dispatched at 6:19 p.m. and were cleared to enter the scene 20 minutes later.

They found two outbuildings well involved in flames with some extension into nearby vegetation.

Crews immediately attacked the flames and were able to keep the total land burned to 1.7 acres, although the shed and outbuilding were completely destroyed, McClintock said.

County fire sent three engines and a battalion chief, while Cal Fire also sent three engines because the land was just bordering the state responsibility area.

"They helped us work on containing that and we appreciate it," McClintock said.

In the meantime, the Sheriff's Department was working on the scene as well.





"After an investigation and interviews, we wound up taking Mason into custody for negligent starting of a fire," Garvin said.

Members of the fire and sheriff's departments are working together on the investigation, with the sheriff's arson and bomb squad taking the lead.

Mason is on probation for convictions on May 22 of two misdemeanors: trespassing and possession of ammunition, which he was prohibited from owning because of previous charges. He pleaded guilty and in exchange, the court dismissed a third charge of drug possession.

NEWS CRIME + PUBLIC SAFETY

Man arrested on suspicion of sexually abusing two children in Highland and San Bernardino

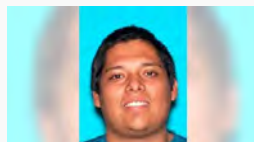
By    **ROBERT GUNDRAN** | rgundran@scng.com | 
PUBLISHED: July 3, 2019 at 4:50 pm | UPDATED: July 3, 2019 at 4:50 pm

A 24-year-old San Bernardino man was arrested Tuesday afternoon on suspicion of sexually abusing two children

The San Bernardino Police Department said it and the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department worked an investigation on David Junior Torres together. Investigators alleged Torres started

sexually abusing the two children in Highland in 2014.

The family moved from Highland to San Bernardino, where the abuse continued, officials said. Torres was known and trusted by the family, and the allegations of sexual abuse were reported to both police and the Sheriff's Department in late 2018.



David Junior Torres, 24, of San Bernardino, was arrested on suspicion of sexually abusing two children. (Photo courtesy of the San Bernardino Police Department)

Both agencies interviewed Torres, and he was ultimately arrested on Tuesday in Highland at around 1:30 p.m.

Torres was booked into the Central Detention Center in San Bernardino on suspicion of continued sexual abuse of a child and lewd and lascivious acts with a child under 14. He is next scheduled to appear in court on Friday.

https://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/news/more-than-pounds-of-illegal-fireworks-with-street-value-of/article_115692fc-9de4-11e9-a9f0-139d1e47bd8b.html

More than 125,000 pounds of illegal fireworks with street value of \$21 million are confiscated in San Bernardino County

Jul 3, 2019 Updated 50 min ago



These illegal fireworks were confiscated by the Fontana Police Department recently. In a separate operation, CAL FIRE law enforcement officers confiscated more than 125,000 pounds of illegal fireworks from throughout San Bernardino County. (Contributed photo by Fontana Police Department)

A recent multi-agency operation in San Bernardino County resulted in the confiscation of 125,124 pounds of illegal fireworks with a street value of about \$21 million, officials said on July 3.

CAL FIRE law enforcement officers from the San Bernardino Unit led the huge operation in several areas of the county, arresting four people and issuing 453 citations.

Also involved in the operation were the CAL FIRE/Office of the State Fire Marshal, San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office and Redlands Fire Department.



“This is a significant volume of illegal fireworks removed from the flow of fireworks into the greater Los Angeles basin. Every pound of illegal fireworks confiscated potentially reduces fire starts as well as injuries and death caused by their use,” said Glenn Barley, unit chief of the CAL FIRE San Bernardino Unit.

It is illegal to transport, possess, use or store fireworks in areas that do not allow use. Safe and Sane fireworks are only approved in certain jurisdictions and must remain in the community where they are purchased.

Every year, an average of 18,500 fires are caused by fireworks, including structure fires and vehicle fires, with an average of \$43 million in property damage, CAL FIRE said in a news release.

----- IN ADDITION to the CAL FIRE operation, the Fontana Police Department seized more than 1,000 pounds of illegal fireworks this past week, according to the Fontana P.D. Facebook page.

While Safe and Sane fireworks are allowed within the majority of Fontana's city limits, all fireworks -- including Safe and Sane -- are prohibited in Fontana's high fire hazard area in the northern area of the city.

Per municipal code section 15-616, property in the city north of Summit Avenue, west of Interstate 15 and east of Lytle Creek Road is deemed a high fire hazard area.

All fireworks are prohibited in the unincorporated county areas of Fontana.

Persons who have information about illegal fireworks in Fontana are urged to call Fontana P.D. Dispatch at (909) 350-7700.

LOCAL NEWS

Redlands leaders wait on decision to waive fees for events tied to for-profit businesses

Fundraising events like the Believe Walk and Hangar 24 AirFest could lose tens of thousands of dollars if city denies waivers



Believe Walk co-founder Cathy Stockton tells the Redlands City Council about what makes the event special on Tuesday, July 2, 2019. The event could be disqualified for fee waivers from the city if the Council passes a new policy. (Jennifer Iyer, Redlands Daily Facts/SCNG)

By [JENNIFER IYER](mailto:jiyer@scng.com) | jiyer@scng.com | Redlands Daily Facts

Redlands [waives hundreds of thousands of dollars in fees](#) every year for nonprofit groups holding events in town, and some say that taxpayer money could be put to other uses.

On Tuesday, July 2, the City Council considered putting rules in place governing those waivers after a slew of event organizers and residents spoke, some not taking sides or encouraging the city to discontinue the waivers altogether, but most shared how such events are a positive force in the community.

Councilman Paul Barich, who proposed creating a waiver policy, said he wanted to establish rules to guide officials when considering whether to excuse certain groups from paying fees associated with use of city facilities, blocking off streets, providing public safety personnel, and other such costs.

“We’re elected to look after the funds, and look after the citizens, and we’ve got to be able to justify some of the things we do,” Barich said. “We’re just looking at setting some guidelines.”

He said the money saved from some fee waivers could be used to put more police on the streets year-round, not just during special events.

The current resolution regarding fee waivers, which was adopted in 2002, requires applicants to “report on their efforts to patronize Redlands’ businesses for promotional products.”

Cathy Stockton, [co-founder of the Believe Walk](#), which could be denied a fee waiver if the rules were adopted, shared how downtown comes alive with [thousands of colorful shirts and costumes](#) during the cancer-awareness event each October.

“To see the sea of faces and to feel the sense of community and love, that radiates a belief that we all make a difference in helping area families,” Stockton said.

In 2018, the council waived about \$22,000 in fees for the Believe Walk.

Nancy Negrette, chairwoman and president of Stater Bros. Charities., co-presenter of the walk, like many who spoke Tuesday, took issue with a rule that would disqualify events associated with for-profit organizations.

Negrette said the city receives “significant financial benefits” from the walk, which brought in more than 10,000 participants last year.

“Thousands of visitors bring new business. They shop, eat, stay and patronize the businesses in the city of Redlands the weekend of the events,” she said.

Stater Bros. Charities, she said, has donated \$27 million to area nonprofits, with more than \$1.6 million going to groups in the city, including the [Assistance League of Redlands](#), [Micah House](#), the [Optimist Club](#).

Sue Cook with Hangar 24 Charities, which presents the Hangar 24 AirFest each spring, said the rule disqualifying nonprofits tied to businesses was targeting her event. The AirFest waiver this year was for more than \$94,000, up about \$10,000 from the previous year.

Cook said in 2018 the charity gave away \$52,000 in proceeds from the event to local groups.

Resident Mike Warren, with [Inland Empire Lighthouse for the Blind](#) in San Bernardino, also spoke. His organization could be disqualified if the rule to only give waivers to groups based in Redlands is adopted.

“This proposal is a solution in search of a problem that does not exist,” he said. “The City Council has always had the power to make decisions regarding fee waivers.”

His organization received a \$1,149.58 fee waiver for its [May car show and chili cook-off](#).

Debbie Kitchen said she liked the “action” the events bring to the city and didn’t want to see a policy that would drive them away, though, she said, she appreciated that the council “took a stab at a very unpopular topic.”

Marissa Kramer with the [Redlands Chamber of Commerce](#) said she was neither for nor against the proposed policy change, but asked the council to be “mindful of allowing fundraising events, family-friendly events that benefit many of our local businesses and our city-funded entities like our Redlands animal shelter.”

The chamber, she said, holds several events which are geared to boost the local economy, such as the [New Year’s Eve Orange Drop](#), which received a \$20,645.20 waiver, and the [Dog Jog](#), a \$4,492 waiver.

Mayor Paul Foster and Mayor Pro Tem Denise Davis opposed the resolution, but Councilwoman Toni Momberger and Councilman Eddie Tejada said they liked the idea of having a policy, and supported tweaking the wording and bringing it back at a later meeting.

Rising salaries and other city expenses push fee waiver demands up each year, Momberger noted.

“The way it is now, with no policy in place, we have just been voting ‘yes’ to every request and we end up sometimes agreeing to spend more ... than what an event estimates it will raise for charity,” she added.

The council voted 3-2 to continue the discussion with Davis and Foster dissenting.

Foster said the amount of fees waived adds up to 0.0026% of the entire city budget, which [this year is \\$75 million](#).

“We have issues that require much more serious contemplation like fixing our [water treatment facility](#) and the [proposed sales tax issue](#), and [homelessness](#), and [policing](#),” Foster said. “... we have bigger issues than to start diminishing what has made Redlands so very special.”

NEWS > CRIME + PUBLIC SAFETY

San Bernardino man dreamed of becoming entrepreneur before getting gunned down in Stater Bros.



Reginald Williams Sr. talks about son Reggie Williams Jr. at a news conference July 3, 2019, at the San Bernardino Police Department. Williams Jr. was shot to death June 10 inside a Stater Bros. market. (Brian Rokos, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

By **BRIAN ROKOS** | brokos@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise

PUBLISHED: July 3, 2019 at 4:19 pm | UPDATED: July 3, 2019 at 4:34 pm

Reggie Williams Jr. was working on his dream of becoming an entrepreneur.

Williams, 23, of San Bernardino, had purchased the press he needed to produce his own line of T-shirts. And he was taking real estate classes.

“He wanted to try to be his own boss and hire people and treat them fairly,” his father, Reginald Williams Sr., said at a news conference on Wednesday, July 3, at the Police Department.

[But those plans ended June 10](#), when, San Bernardino police say, a 16-year-old shot Williams Jr. to death inside the Stater Bros. market at 444 Baseline St., a homicide – the city’s 18th in 2019 – that prompted Williams Sr. to implore criminals to put their guns down.

The boy was arrested Tuesday on suspicion of murder, the same day that [29-year-old Alisha Turner pleaded no contest](#) to being an accessory to a crime in the same case.

Williams Jr. – who once worked at a different Stater Bros. – went to the store to shop for groceries for the barbecue he was hosting for friends and family members that day.

Detective Jon Plummer said the shooting happened because of some sort of disagreement that began inside the market. Tips from the community led to police serving several search warrants and ultimately arresting the teen.

Williams’ mother, Raquel Smith, said she is certain her son did not intentionally instigate the trouble.

“I raised my son with integrity, dignity, great values and morals,” she said. “He respected everyone he came in contact with. Unfortunately, not everyone carries those values anymore.”

Williams’ father said, “From what I’m hearing, he walked in, bumped into some guys, they had some words like some young men have at that age. In the old days, it would just be a fistfight. But these days, the guns are the energy, the guns are the muscle.”

Williams’ brother, Ronald, said Reggie didn’t know his assailants.

Williams left behind his parents, two sisters, a brother and his girlfriend, Lay Lewis, who is pregnant.

“He was a good person,” Lewis said. “He did not deserve this.”

The victim's mom thanked the community for its support and law enforcement for making arrests.

"I just wish San Bernardino would do better," she added.

Williams' father took the plea a step further:

"I'm going to say this: Can we please just have this summer in San Bernardino without violence? Please, this summer don't do anything. If you use a gun, you're known as a coward now."

The investigation is continuing. Police ask anyone with information about the case to call 909-384-5668.

Tags: [homicide](#), [Top Stories IVDB](#), [Top Stories PE](#), [Top Stories RDF](#), [Top Stories Sun](#)

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Brian Rokos

Brian Rokos writes about public safety issues such as policing, criminal justice, scams, how law affects public safety, firefighting tactics and wildland fire danger. He has also covered the cities of San Bernardino, Corona, Norco, Lake Elsinore, Perris, Canyon Lake and Hemet. Before that he supervised reporters and worked as a copy editor. For some reason, he enjoys movies where the Earth is threatened with extinction.

Follow Brian Rokos [@Brian_Rokos](#)

VIEW COMMENTS

LOCAL NEWS

San Bernardino mayor's chief of staff to leave city this month

Bill Essayli has served as the chief spokesman for Mayor John Valdivia



Former Republican Assembly candidate Bill Essayli served as San Bernardino Mayor John Valdivia's chief of staff upon Valdivia's swearing in last December. (Courtesy photo).

By **BRIAN WHITEHEAD** | bwhitehead@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun

PUBLISHED: July 3, 2019 at 4:41 pm | UPDATED: July 3, 2019 at 4:54 pm

Bill Essayli, chief of staff to San Bernardino Mayor John Valdivia, will leave the city this month to return to practicing law, he confirmed Wednesday, July 3.

The former Republican candidate for Assembly has been Valdivia's spokesman since the first-year mayor assumed office in December.

"It's been a privilege to serve as the Mayor's chief of staff," Essayli said Wednesday in a statement. "My mission has always been to help the people of San Bernardino restore their city to prosperity and make it a safe place to live again."

In a phone interview, Valdivia said Essayli is leaving on "very good terms."

"Bill Essayli has been a tremendous help to me," Valdivia added. "He's a great guy. He's a fabulous guy who's been a great addition to the team. I wish him a lot of good luck."

Essayli's departure creates a vacancy in the Mayor's Office, which earlier this year [added two part-time field representatives and a full-time receptionist](#) following a majority vote of the council.

Increasing staffing in the Mayor's Office was [a major point of contention](#) early in Valdivia's term, as the city's top elected official originally sought to establish six new positions in his office, a move that would have cost the city up to \$483,000 in future years.

As Valdivia's chief of staff, Essayli often presented to city leaders plans brought forth by the Mayor's Office, something Councilman Fred Shorett said he had not seen during his nine-plus years on the council.

"I wish him well going forward," Shorett said by phone Wednesday. "But I think he overstepped his bounds in his position as chief of staff. I don't believe we even need a chief of staff with the reduced responsibilities of the mayor based on the new charter."

In March, tensions between Essayli and Shorett [boiled over during a budget study workshop](#) scheduled by the Mayor's Office that Shorett characterized as an attempt to publicly flog then-City Manager Andrea Miller.

Ultimately, a majority of the council decided to [fire Miller in May](#) after learning of a since-erased \$11.2 million deficit in the fiscal year that began Monday, July 1.

In his statement, Essayli noted policy makers' accomplishments the past eight months.

“I’m very proud that during my tenure the Mayor’s Office and the City Council were able to restructure the Police Department and implement community oriented policing, appoint a new city manager, help reconcile an inherited deficit of over \$10 million, and avoid millions of dollars in potential fines and excessive spending that would have otherwise gone unchallenged by prior leadership.”

On Wednesday, Valdivia said he presently is interviewing four candidates for the chief of staff position, but declined to provide their names or say when he will name a replacement.

Smog is making a comeback

For years, California has celebrated what is undoubtedly a great environmental achievement: the dramatic reduction of the lung-searing, eye-burning pollution that used to blanket Southern California and that made this region the smog capital of the United States.

But smog is making a comeback. The worst effects are being felt in San Bernardino, Riverside and other inland communities, which have seen an uptick in unhealthy air days over the last few years, [The Times reported](#).

The worsening air quality comes as the region is facing a federal deadline to slash smog-forming pollution 45% by 2023 or risk penalties, including the loss of federal funding. It was always going to be a struggle to meet that deadline and the more stringent ozone standards that will come in the next decade. But now researchers say climate change appears to be making pollution conditions worse, which means it could be even harder for Southern California to finally clean up its air.

This is yet another potent reminder of how critical it is that California move as quickly as possible toward a zero-emission future, both to protect residents living in the smoggiest areas and to help prevent the most devastating effects of climate change.

Last year, San Bernardino had 102 days when smog reached unhealthy levels. That's more unhealthy days than the city has logged since the mid-1990s. High levels of ozone pollution can permanently damage [children's lungs](#) and raise adults' risk of heart attacks and other deadly effects.

Inland communities, which tend to be lower income, bear the brunt of the region's air pollution problem. Pollution from cars, trucks and factories gets blown inland, where heat and sunlight transform the chemicals into ozone — or smog — which is trapped over the region by the mountains and weather conditions. By comparison, the coastal Westside had just two unhealthy air days in 2018. Cutting smog-forming emissions is also an environmental justice issue.

But Southern California is facing tremendous challenges. People are driving more. The movement of goods from the region's giant shipping ports to warehouses and distribution centers is a rapidly growing, highly polluting industry. More than 80% of the region's smog-forming pollution is created by vehicles, which are regulated by the state and federal governments. (The transportation sector is also the state's largest source of the greenhouse gases responsible for climate change.)

The region is falling behind on its plans to meet federal Clean Air Act standards. In 2016, the South Coast Air Quality Management District — the agency responsible for cleaning up the air — adopted a blueprint to slash pollution that relied on somehow procuring \$1 billion a year to provide incentives to businesses and individuals to switch to low-emissions vehicles and equipment.

The AQMD has said it needs to raise \$14 billion by 2031; so far, the agency is on track to raise about a quarter of that amount. Various funding proposals have been floated, from a fee on shipping containers to a sales tax increase. The Times editorial board has been [skeptical](#) of a tax increase.

The region needs a lot more help from the state and federal governments. Unfortunately, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under President Trump appears more interested in rolling back air quality protections. Still, we hope the federal government — which is responsible for enforcing the Clean Air Act — will at least put up a lot more money to subsidize the purchase of cleaner vehicles to help the region meet its smog-cutting deadlines.

California has sought to be a world leader on climate change, with ambitious goals to slash greenhouse gases over the coming decades. But the state should also be moving much faster to clean up its [transportation systems](#), and particularly its diesel trucks, in the near term through incentives and regulations. That would do double duty — reducing emissions responsible for smog as well as for climate change.

After decades of progress, Southern California can't afford to lose the fight for clean air.

The New York Times

The Zika Virus Is Still a Threat. Here's What Experts Know.

By **Andrew Jacobs**

July 2, 2019

SÃO PAULO, Brazil — Remember Zika?

With measles and Ebola grabbing headlines, it is easy to forget the health panic of 2016, when Zika was linked to severe birth defects in thousands of Brazilian newborns whose mothers were infected while pregnant, striking fear across the country and much of the Americas.

As health officials struggled to halt its spread, the virus galloped through Latin America and the Caribbean that spring and summer and eventually reached the United States, sickening more than 200 people in Florida and Texas and prompting countless travelers to cancel vacations in the tropics.

Then, seemingly overnight, the epidemic evaporated and public attention moved on.

But Zika, it turns out, did not vanish.

“Zika has completely fallen off the radar, but the lack of media attention doesn’t mean it’s disappeared,” said Dr. Karin Nielson, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at U.C.L.A. who studies Zika’s impact in Brazil. “In some ways, the situation is a bit more dangerous because people aren’t aware of it.”

The virus, which is mostly spread by mosquitoes but also through sex with an infected person, is still circulating in Brazil and other countries that were at the center of the epidemic, and two years ago the same strain from the Americas arrived in continental Africa for the first time. That strain, researchers recently discovered, had been causing birth defects in Asia long before the Zika epidemic of 2016.

Another concern is over places where the mosquito that spreads the virus — the female *Aedes aegypti* — is endemic but have so far been spared locally transmitted cases of Zika. On Tuesday, the World Health Organization issued a report on Zika that listed 61 such countries, among them densely populated behemoths like China, Egypt and Pakistan as well as much of Africa.

[Here's what you should know about Zika and travel.]

Even Brazil remains vulnerable: The 2016 epidemic largely spared the country's south and most notably São Paulo, its biggest city. Warming temperatures associated with climate change are expected to expand the range of *Aedes*, according to a recent study, putting tens of millions more people at risk for Zika and other mosquito-borne diseases.

"The next outbreak is not a matter of if, but when," said Dr. Ernesto T.A. Marques, a public health researcher at The Oswaldo Cruz Foundation in Rio de Janeiro who is also an assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh.

In the United States, the *Aedes* mosquito can be found across significant swaths of the country during summer, though epidemiologists say the potential for large-scale American outbreaks is limited by the near ubiquity of air conditioning, window screens and local mosquito control efforts.



A female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. Andre Penner/Associated Press

"It also helps that people in the U.S. tend to live fairly far apart in single-family homes," said Dr. Lyle R. Petersen, who oversees vector-borne diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "This is a mosquito that doesn't fly very far."

While the number of new cases of Zika so far is small — last year there were nearly 20,000 infections in Brazil compared to more than 200,000 during the epidemic's peak — countries like Angola, Thailand, Vietnam and Cape Verde have reported newborns with Zika-related microcephaly, the condition that leaves babies with the misshapen heads and profound neurological damage that stoked global anxiety.

Zika has been taking a path similar to other viral infections that offer immunity to those who have fallen ill and recovered. In Brazil, Colombia, Puerto Rico and other places hard hit by the epidemic, so-called herd immunity may limit the potential for new outbreaks because the virus cannot gain enough traction to spread among those who have never been infected.

But over time, the benefits of herd immunity wane as more children are born, providing fresh tinder for the next epidemiological wildfire. Researchers are also unsure whether those infected with Zika are immune for life, or just for a period of time.

Public health officials have been frustrated by haphazard cooperation from countries worried about the stigma associated with Zika as well as those overwhelmed by other health crises. In Angola, the government did not initially report dozens of microcephaly cases that were first discovered by Portuguese researchers. Earlier this year, India protested its inclusion on the C.D.C.'s advisory list for pregnant women during a Zika outbreak in the country's northwest. In April, the C.D.C. modified its warning.

Dr. Eve Lackritz, who leads W.H.O.'s Zika Task Force, said one of her main tasks is to keep up the sense of urgency. "My biggest fear is complacency and lack of interest by the global community," she said.

In its new report, the W.H.O. conceded that there was no way to know with certainty whether Zika was still circulating in the 87 countries with previously recorded cases of transmission. Its advice for pregnant women seeking to travel reflects that ambiguity: cover up exposed skin with light colored clothing, use insect repellent and "carefully consider the risks." (It also advises men returning from areas with known Zika outbreaks to consider abstaining from sex for at least three months.)

[The topics new parents are talking about. Evidence-based guidance. Personal stories that matter. Sign up for the NYT Parenting newsletter for the info you need about pregnancy and more.]

Dr. Peterson of the C.D.C. and others who study Zika and closely related viruses, including dengue, yellow fever and chikungunya, say they are worried the world is unprepared for the next outbreak.

For one, the underlying conditions that enabled the epidemic — crowded urban neighborhoods whose residents are too poor to afford insect repellent or window screens — remain a problem in much of the developing world. *Aedes* has developed a particular fondness for human blood and has adapted so well to urban living that it can quickly breed in overturned bottle caps and other refuse after a rainfall.

A 10-month-old with microcephaly receiving physiotherapy to try to stimulate muscle control, in Luanda, Angola, last year. Stephen Eisenhammer/Reuters

“Our biggest fear is that we will never get rid of Zika, just like we can’t get rid of dengue,” said Paolo Zanutto, a molecular virologist at the University of São Paulo. Compounding that fear, he said, is the possibility that Zika virus could find a host in animals, especially monkeys, making it even harder to control.

Early hopes for a vaccine against Zika have also stumbled. Although a number of potential vaccines are in the pipeline, the ebbing of the epidemic has made it hard to test their efficacy in the field.

Arboviruses like dengue, chikungunya and yellow fever provide something of a template for the future of Zika. During the 1940s and 50s, successful eradication campaigns aimed at quelling deadly yellow fever outbreaks vanquished *Aedes* from Brazil and much of the region. But by the 1970s, as those efforts were abandoned, the mosquito quickly re-established itself, leading to increasingly intense outbreaks of dengue and yellow fever, and more recently the emergence of new arboviral pathogens like chikungunya and Zika. These days, dengue infects over 100 million people globally a year, killing 10,000.

Until 2015, Zika was an obscure and fairly harmless virus that produced flulike symptoms. First identified in 1947 among monkeys in the Zika forest of Uganda, it later found a foothold in humans and then spread across Africa, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. The virus is believed to have most likely arrived in Brazil with a traveler attending the World Cup there in the summer of 2014. Scientists are still stumped as to why Zika began causing birth defects.

“We thought of Zika as an inconsequential disease, but then it exploded in Brazil with devastating consequences,” said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. “The larger lesson for us is that we have to always be prepared for the emergence and re-emergence of viruses and microbes.”

Zika has presented health officials with a number of challenges. Tracking its spread has been difficult because many countries, especially those with weak public health systems, lack the ability to identify new cases. Compounding the problem is that the vast majority of people infected experience symptoms so mild they rarely seek medical care. And because Zika, dengue and chikungunya all produce fever, joint pain and rashes, Zika cases are often misdiagnosed.

One of the biggest obstacles to better surveillance — and to informing pregnant women that they’ve been infected — is the lack of a rapid, inexpensive diagnostic test.

“At this point we can only guess the number of new infections,” said Dr. Scott C. Weaver, a virologist at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston who was among the first to predict Zika’s arrival in the Americas.

As public health experts across the world continue their prevention work, thousands of families here in Brazil are already struggling with Zika’s impact. The first Zika babies are turning 3 and 4, and their families, many of them poor, are increasingly overwhelmed, said Dr. Marques, the researcher from Rio de Janeiro.

“It’s a nightmare for these mothers,” he said. “And as the children grow older, it’s not going to get any easier.”

LOCAL NEWS

Upland's revenues grow, outpacing increased pension costs

The new budget includes \$41.9 million in general fund spending and \$42.9 million in anticipated operating revenue.



Upland City Hall at 460 N Euclid Ave as seen on Monday July 1, 2019. (Photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

By [BEAU YARBROUGH](#) | byarbrough@scng.com | Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

PUBLISHED: July 3, 2019 at 4:32 pm | UPDATED: July 3, 2019 at 4:34 pm

Six years after a former official warned the [city of Upland was in danger of going bankrupt](#), it is now in the black, even as its pension obligations continue to grow.

News of the city's improved financial footing comes as the San Bernardino County Grand Jury urges Upland to [get serious about tackling its unfunded pension obligations](#), which continue to grow.

On June 24, the Upland City Council approved the budget for the current fiscal year, which began July 1. Although the budget shows pension obligation costs rising, it also suggests that the wolf is not yet at the door.

The new budget includes \$41.9 million in general fund spending. [That's up \\$1 million over the year before](#), including an additional \$546,830 in pension increases and salaries, and an increase of \$460,160 in maintenance and operations.

But revenue is going up even faster, with \$42.9 million in anticipated operating revenue. That's up \$1.73 million over the year before, including an additional \$727,420 in property taxes thanks to an increase in assessed values and property sales.

"I first noticed the city finances were improved for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2016," Councilwoman Janice Elliott said Wednesday. Since her election, [the city has contracted with the county for fire protection services](#), replaced full-time employees with contractors and delayed infrastructure maintenance to cut costs.

"That's going to make things look rosy, but they don't make things disappear," Elliott said. "You're actually going to spend more money when you finally catch up on repairs."

But the city's pension debt is growing as well. The new budget pegs Upland's unfunded pension liability at \$38,350, up from \$33,760 in the previous year.

The California Public Employee Retirement System represents 1.9 million public employees. Cities throughout the state are struggling to keep up with payments to the retirement system, which has been burdened in part by employees with CalPERS pensions living longer lives, requiring more money than was previously anticipated to continue paying their pensions.

According to Stanford University's Institute for Economic Policy Research, [government agencies statewide may owe more than \\$1 trillion to CalPERS](#), depending on investment returns. According to Stanford's [PensionTracker.org](#) website, each Upland household is responsible for \$13,072 in unfunded pension debt from the city of Upland and \$186 in unfunded debt from the Upland City Housing Authority.

It could be worse, though: According to the same site, the average California household is responsible for \$78,334 in unfunded pension debt. Montclair plans to [dip into its reserves to cover its unfunded pension liabilities](#) for the coming year.

In its report, the Grand Jury gave Upland an Aug. 27 deadline to respond to its request for an explicit plan to deal with its unfunded pension obligations.

“Although we haven’t passed a policy on it, we have contributed a significant amount of money to an account that is solely dedicated to paying for the pension,” Elliott said.

Interim City Manager Rosemary Hoerning did not respond to requests for comment.

US + Family of Las Vegas concert shooting victim sues gunmakers

Live TV



By Ray Sanchez and Melissa Alonso, CNN

🕒 Updated 4:22 PM ET, Wed July 3, 2019



DAVID BECKER/GETTY IMAGES; NORTH AMERICA/GETTY IMAGES

Concertgoers ran from the Route 91 Harvest country music festival on October 1, 2017 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

(CNN) — The family of a woman killed after bullets rained down on [Las Vegas concertgoers](#) in October 2017 has filed a wrongful death suit against eight gunmakers and three dealers, alleging the rifles used in [the mass shooting](#) violate federal law and can be easily modified to [fire like automatic weapons](#).

The lawsuit filed Tuesday names Colt and other manufacturers as well as dealers, saying the eight [AR-15 assault rifles](#) used in the shootings unleashed a barrage of 1,049 rounds of automatic fire on the crowd in less than 10 minutes. The suit said the manufacturers were not only aware the weapons could easily be modified to fire automatically, but also promoted their ferocious firepower.

The [shooting, which left 58 dead, hundreds injured and many more traumatized](#), began when the gunman smashed windows in his 32nd floor suite at the Mandalay Bay and fired on thousands of concertgoers at the Route 91 Harvest Festival across the street. Police said the gunman then fatally shot himself.

The federal suit was filed in Nevada on behalf of the family of Carolyn "Carrie" Parsons, 31, who lived outside of Seattle and was at the concert with friends when she was fatally shot behind the shoulder.

Lawrence G. Keane, a senior vice president and general counsel for the firearm trade group National Shooting Sports Foundation, said the suit was without merit. He said the lawsuit demonstrated the need for the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act of 2005, which grants immunity to manufacturers.

"The responsibility for the crimes committed on that tragic night in Las Vegas (rests) with the criminal who committed the violent and reprehensible acts," Keane said in a statement.

Live TV ●



"It is wrong to blame the manufacturers of legal, non-defective products lawfully sold for the actions of a madman. Doing so would be like attempting to hold Ford responsible for a deranged criminal who affixes after-market parts to a Mustang and then misused that car to attack a group of pedestrians."

CNN has sought comment from Colt's Manufacturing Company and others named in the lawsuit.

The suit said an AR-15 modified with a "bump stock" -- which makes it easier to fire rounds from a semi-automatic weapon by harnessing the gun's recoil to "bump" the trigger faster -- violates federal law because it "will continually fire rounds after a single trigger pull." In 2018, a new federal regulation [officially banned bump-fire stocks](#).

The complaint said there are "simple hacks" and "hundreds of videos" online of AR-15 enthusiasts modifying the gun with "no tools at all." The suit also noted that "manufacturers chose to ignore" legislative efforts to "address the catastrophic danger posed by easily modifiable weapons."

The lawyers for Parsons' parents -- Jim and Ann-Marie -- include Josh Koskoff and Katie Mesner-Hage, who also represent the families of several victims of the Sandy Hook massacre in Connecticut in [a case against Remington Arms Company and others](#).

"Someone has to stand up and tell gun companies that making a gun that can be so easily modified into a machine gun is not okay," Ann-Marie Parsons said in a statement.

"They need to know that they will be held accountable for their profiteering and for the devastation they wreak on innocent victims and their families."

The owner of the Mandalay Bay hotel has faced a barrage of lawsuits over the shooting. MGM Resorts International has said it bears no liability for the concert massacre. Last year, [the company named more than 1,000 of the shooting victims as defendants](#) in two lawsuits of its own. The entertainment giant is not seeking monetary damages but, citing a federal law, asks the courts to protect it from legal actions filed by the victims.



Las Vegas shooting: Police fire officer who hesitated during massacre

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

JUL 03, 2019 | 6:15 AM
| LAS VEGAS

Authorities have confirmed the dismissal of a veteran Las Vegas police officer who froze in the hallway of a Strip hotel during a 2017 mass shooting as a gunman on the floor above opened fire on a country music festival.

Officer Larry Hadfield, spokesman for the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, said Tuesday night that Officer Cordell Hendrex was fired March 20. Hadfield did not offer additional details or answer questions regarding an internal review of the actions of Hendrex and other officers that night.

Police union president Steve Grammas told the Associated Press in an email that Hendrex had been fired because of his actions during the Oct. 1, 2017, mass shooting.

Hendrex acknowledged in a police report that he was "terrified with fear" as the gunman above killed 58 people in the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

"I froze right there in the middle of the hall, for how long I can't say," he wrote in the report.

Police body camera video released by the department shows Hendrex, along with a rookie officer and three hotel security officers, waiting in the hallway of the 31st floor in the Mandalay Bay Resort and

Casino for about five minutes before moving to a stairwell leading to the 32nd floor, where the gunman was raining bullets onto the crowd above.

They remained in the stairwell for at least 15 minutes, when the video clip ends.

A phone call to a publicly listed number for Hendrex was not answered Tuesday night.

Grammas told the Las Vegas Review-Journal, which first reported Hendrex's firing, that the union does not believe the officer should have been fired and is fighting to get him reinstated.

News of Hendrex's firing comes on the heels of the firing of four police officers in Florida as a result of their inaction to the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, where a gunman killed 17 people.

Skid row housing, but for whom?

A downtown rezoning plan could make way for homes — while displacing homeless.

BY GALE HOLLAND

Apartments and condominiums for the middle class could be coming to skid row, under a rezoning plan unveiled Tuesday.

But skid row advocates warn the plan, currently in draft form, would displace many of the approximately 4,000 homeless people living in the blighted downtown area, or leave them in the streets.

The plan, more than a year in the making, still must withstand further review before going before the L.A. City Council for approval next year. It would convert parts of skid row and the adjoining Fashion and Arts districts from warehouse and industrial uses to residential.

If approved and implemented, 100,000 new housing units could be built by 2040, accommodating 176,000 new residents.

Downtown currently has 76,000 residents, up from about 18,000 two decades ago.

In a concession to advocates who had accused the city of gentrifying skid row, development in the heart of the 50-block area, now home to tent cities, would be restricted to housing people, with annual earnings of \$10,000 to \$58,000.

But residential projects in the outer rings of skid row, bordering the Fashion and Arts districts and Little Tokyo, would have no income restrictions — although developers, under a new “community benefits program,” would be allowed to put up bigger buildings if they included units for poor people, or added parks, public squares or other amenities.

Craig Weber, principal planner for the city of Los Angeles, said the rezoning plan will encourage growth near transit and “housing opportunities for all.”

A May 2018 report by the California Housing Partnership Corp. said Los Angeles County needs 568,255 more affordable rental housing units to meet the current demand, but downtown housing development has tilted heavily to the high end.

Jerry Jones, policy director at the Inner City Law Center, a skid row legal services group, applauded closing part of skid row to market-rate housing. But he said the plan opens too much of the historic down-and-out neighborhood to the same luxury lofts and condominiums that blanket much of downtown.

“People are making a fortune building in downtown Los Angeles,” Jones said. “It’s not OK to make a plan that doesn’t address the needs of current neighborhoods.”

Jones said developers should be required to set aside as much as 25% of any new skid row housing development for poor people, and replace low-income housing lost to redevelopment on a one-to-one basis.

Weber said the rezoning plan does not dictate how much housing for poor people will be built — or where.

“The plan does not outline specifically where, how much and what types of affordable units will be built,” he said. “Rather, the plan seeks to expand the opportunity for affordable housing through policies, zoning and the community benefits program.”

New hurdle in homeless rights case

Skid row group files petition to block legal settlement that limits city's ability to clean up encampments.

BY GALE HOLLAND AND DAKOTA SMITH

Property owners and residents of shelters on skid row are going to court to block a contentious legal settlement that restricts Los Angeles' ability to clear homeless encampments in the heavily blighted downtown district.

In a petition to intervene in the case, property owners and residents argue the settlement "will only extend and worsen the [homelessness] crisis we are facing in this city." They also say the city prevented them from jumping into the case sooner by [negotiating in secret](#) and withholding the terms of the deal, even after the [City Council voted in March to reach an agreement with civil rights lawyers](#).

A spokesman for City Atty. Mike Feuer said the city had no comment. A hearing is set for Aug. 12.

The petition blames the buildup of tents and belongings on the sidewalks of skid row on a series of court orders by a federal judge that limited the enforcement of camps by the city. That, residents and property owners say, has brought rats and disease into skid row and surrounding neighborhoods.

"That's not compassionate, that's cruel," attorney Elizabeth Mitchell said.

The underlying case, Mitchell vs. City of Los Angeles, [was brought in 2016 on behalf of four homeless people and two advocacy groups](#), challenging the constitutionality of seizures of their property during sweeps by police and sanitation workers. Attorneys for the plaintiffs in the original case did not respond to messages.

Under the settlement the city reached in March [and made public in May](#), authorities can haul away and destroy sofas, pallets and hazardous materials, including needles and human waste, that they find in the camps, but may no longer toss homeless people's personal property that exceeds what would fit in a 60-gallon garbage bag or container — a limit the city tried and failed to set. The terms apply only to skid row and surrounding streets downtown.

The petition to intervene was brought on behalf of the DTLA Alliance for Human Rights, a group new to the skid row controversy. In legal papers, the group is described as an

alliance of downtown “stakeholders” working for incremental solutions to the “human rights crisis” of mental illness and homelessness on skid row.

Members include Inner City Arts President Bob Smiland and several residents of the Union Rescue Mission, a skid row shelter headed by the Rev. Andy Bales. Smiland and Bales are on the board of the business improvement district for the downtown industrial district, which handles security and cleanups on skid row. But neither group is involved in the court petition.

[“I want to find a place for all the people to go, then all the stuff will go away,”](#) Bales said.

Estela Lopez, executive director of the business improvement district in the industrial area, said her group as a whole has no involvement. Rena Leddy, executive director of the business improvement district for the L.A. Fashion District, said Wednesday that her group also hasn’t joined the petition.

Mitchell and attorney Matthew Umhofer said they could not discuss who is paying for the litigation.

The Central City Assn., a powerful downtown business group, also is not funding it, President Jessica Lall said.

In a declaration filed with the petition, Joseph Burk, who rents his skid row building for film and TV productions, said he has lost business because of what one prospect called the “Mad Max” scene around his property.

The petition says that Galvester Gaulding, a homeless resident of the Midnight Mission on skid row, has watched people get stabbed in front of him and said in a declaration that he has seen 10 dead bodies in the last 14 months. Because of increased crime, drug use and disease, skid row resident Karyn Pinsky said she can’t let her 3-year-old son play in the park, and has to push her stroller down the middle of the street to avoid tents clogging the sidewalks, according to the legal documents.

The petition to intervene is the second legal action in recent weeks that could affect enforcement of L.A.’s sprawling camps. Theodore B. Olson, a veteran litigator of cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, is challenging an appellate decision that prohibits cities in nine states, including California, from punishing homeless people for sleeping outside when shelter is unavailable.

Keep pushing for more housing

Gov. Newsom's plan to penalize cities that don't add enough new units is necessary but insufficient.

In January, not even a week into his new job, Gov. Gavin Newsom made a big, bold threat to cities that have stalled or shirked their responsibility to build enough housing to meet their community's needs.

Don't build housing? You won't get state transportation dollars, the governor warned.

Six months later, Newsom is settling for a more incremental, but still necessary, change. The Legislature is expected to sign off this week on a bill that would allow a judge to impose steep fines — up to \$600,000 a month — on cities that willfully flout the state's "fair share" housing law, which requires that jurisdictions plan and zone for enough market-rate and affordable housing to meet population growth.

Note one big difference: Newsom originally wanted to hold cities responsible for actually producing enough housing to meet state goals. The compromise with the Legislature merely requires them to plan for enough housing.

This isn't exactly the dramatic action on the state's debilitating housing shortage that Newsom pitched.

His original idea to withhold gas-tax-funded transportation dollars proved to be a nonstarter with legislators, who feared a public backlash, particularly after Californians voted to uphold the gas tax hike to pay for local road repairs and transit investments. Cities, too, raised concerns about whether they could meet new homebuilding goals.

There are currently few consequences for local governments that fail to comply with the basic requirements of the state's "fair share" housing law.

The revised proposal offers what Newsom and legislative leaders describe as a carrot-and-stick approach.

The carrot is the promise of more money for jurisdictions that adopt "pro-housing" policies. Those cities would have an advantage when applying for state grants, including for cap-and-trade dollars for transit-adjacent affordable housing and for funding for sidewalks, sewer lines and other infrastructure projects to support housing development.

The stick is the threat of steep fines for cities that repeatedly refuse to zone enough land to accommodate sufficient affordable and market-rate housing. Yet those penalties could only be imposed after a lengthy process. The attorney general would have to file a lawsuit — as Newsom and Atty. Gen. Xavier Becerra did earlier this year against the city of Huntington Beach.

Under the bill, if a judge agreed with the state, the city would have another year to come into compliance. If the city still refused, it would face rising penalties that could reach \$600,000 a month relatively quickly. Eventually, the judge could appoint someone to take over the zoning and land use for the city.

The stick would fall only on cities that are the most obstinate. It is a necessary step because there are currently few consequences for local governments that fail to comply with the basic requirements of the “fair share” law.

This change, even if it won't result in a flood of new homes getting built in the next few years, is an important step in a process of overhauling the state's laws to require local governments to make room for more housing at all income levels. But it's only one step. There's a lot more work needed to further tighten laws and to make sure they are enforced, so that it's harder for elected officials to bend to NIMBY impulses to block reasonable housing projects.

The lack of housing, especially affordable housing, is driving an epidemic of homelessness. Even people who don't become homeless often cannot afford to live in coastal urban areas, and have to move to far-flung suburbs and commute hours to where the jobs are, worsening traffic and air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Employers say high housing costs also hurt the state's economy by making it hard to attract and retain skilled workers — a problem that has led some companies to relocate to states where their middle-class workers can afford to buy homes.

Newsom was right to think big on California's housing crisis, which he called “an existential threat to our state's future.” The compromise bill before the Legislature is a worthwhile reform, but the governor needs to keep pushing for much more change if California is going to finally end the housing shortage.

NEWS > CRIME + PUBLIC SAFETY

Records: Former Beaumont councilmember allegedly violated probation when he left country, didn't report felony investigation

Mark Anthony Orozco had to disclose the matter within 48 hours, Riverside County Probation Department said.



Beaumont City Councilman Mark Orozco pleaded guilty to soliciting a bribe and to perjury. File photo by Stan Lim, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG

By **RICHARD K. DE ATLEY** | rdeatley@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise

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A former Beaumont City Council member who pleaded guilty in 2017 to bribery and perjury charges remained in custody Wednesday after he allegedly violated probation when he failed to report that he was being investigated in a new felony case and had left the country without permission.

Mark Anthony Orozco, 42, in one instance did not within the required 48 hours tell his probation officer that he had talked to Beaumont police, who were investigating him for a separate felony allegation involving abuse of an individual, a Riverside County Probation Department document filed in his case said.

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A probation officer received the police report on the case June 27, and Orozco had been contacted by officers June 25.

Also, Orozco was searched at the probation office on June 28, and a June 25 receipt for a Tijuana, Mexico restaurant was found in his right pocket. Orozco had not received permission to leave California, the document said.

Orozco was read his rights, “and declined to comment on the receipt without his attorney present,” the allegation said. He was taken into custody.

The alleged violations could mean as much as six months more jail time for Orozco.

There was no response to an email and phone call to the lawyer listed as his defense attorney on the probation department's court filing.

Beaumont police filed their report with the district attorney's office earlier this week, a spokeswoman for the department said. No charges have been filed as of Wednesday, court records showed.

"The defendant's progress on probation thus far can be described as poor," the June 28 document filed by the Probation Department said.

The Probation Department was tipped about the Beaumont Police investigation on the same day officers had talked to Orozco, but the court document noted the information did not come directly from him.

The Riverside County Probation Department is recommending six additional months in custody for the violations, citing their "egregious nature."

Orozco was originally sentenced to three years probation and six months home confinement and resigned his council seat after his September 2017 guilty pleas.

Orozco pleaded guilty to soliciting a bribe from Pardee Homes and ordering the falsification of rival's campaign reporting form. Representatives from Pardee Homes refused to pay the bribe and instead reported the crime to the district attorney's office.

The falsified campaign form was a scheme to retaliate against Beaumont City Council member Nancy Carroll, who had voted for Lloyd White for mayor instead of Orozco, prosecutors said.

They said after Orozco engineered the false claim, which turned a legitimate expenditure into an unreported cash donation, he tried to smear Carroll by sending emails pointing it out.

Orozco was slated for a hearing on the parole violation allegations Wednesday but that was continued to July 8, court records show.

NEWS > POLITICS

Report: At least \$1 billion needed to buy Riverside County habitat land – and time's running out

Grand Jury says meeting the goal poses “significant financial risk” to county.



A Stephens' kangaroo rat looks for a burrow after being released from a trap in the San Jacinto River near Hemet in this 2011 file photo. A new Riverside County grand jury report criticizes the agency responsible for overseeing and adding to habitat for endangered species like the rat (File photo by Stan Lim, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG).

By **JEFF HORSEMAN** | jhorseman@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise

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It will take another \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion – far more than once publicly projected – to buy up enough land to protect endangered animals and plants in western Riverside County through a conservation plan that’s unlikely to be completed on time, according to a new report from the Riverside County Civil Grand Jury.

[The report, released on June 26](#), also chides leaders of the [Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority](#) for lax oversight and dubious spending. Specifically, the report questions the wisdom of spending on lobbyists and outside contractors while not paying for park rangers and maintenance for land already conserved under the 15-year-old plan.

At least one expert not connected to the grand jury echoed the basic allegations in the report.

“The (Regional Conservation Authority) and its board members need to do their job and meet the conservation obligations they signed up for,” Ileene Anderson, a senior biologist at the Center for Biological Diversity, said in an emailed statement.

“The grand jury report reveals some very serious problems. Failing to address them endangers the plan itself, not to mention the nearly 150 species that desperately need protection in western Riverside County,” Anderson added. “Plants, animals and taxpayers deserve better.”

“Besides threatening the species they are to protect by not acquiring sufficient lands and money, the RCA is allowing the already protected lands like the wonderful San Jacinto Wildlife Area to become ‘islands’ surrounded by urbanization,” said George Hague, Sierra Club Moreno Valley Group conservation chair.

Charles Landry, executive director of the Conservation Authority, issued a written response to the grand jury’s allegations, saying his organization “appreciates the Grand Jury’s acknowledgement of the work our agency provides and the challenges we face in creating the County’s 500,000-acre reserve system while facilitating the rapid permitting of transportation projects (over \$4 billion to date).”

Landry suggested the organization is aware of the funding shortfall: “We also appreciate (the grand jury’s) recognition of the substantial funds required to meet the plan’s acquisition goals for the next decade.”

The grand jury, a court-appointed panel of 19 citizens who are replaced annually, examines public agencies’ inner workings and suggests improvements. Its reports typically are released once a year, usually in late June.

Enacted in 2004, the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan is one of the biggest land conservation programs in the country, seeking to preserve a half-million acres by 2029. The goal is to protect 146 species of plants and animals – including creatures such as the endangered [Stephen’s kangaroo rat](#) and flora such as the [San Diego ambrosia plant](#) – while still allowing future development and infrastructure.

The conservation authority, an alliance of county government and 18 cities, plus a half-dozen regional and state agencies, oversees ongoing efforts to acquire land and maintain what’s already protected through the plan.

The grand jury suggested the agency’s leadership (the authority is overseen by a 23-member board consisting of the five county supervisors and elected officials from 18 cities) doesn’t understand the agency’s purpose. Board members, according to the report, “have a limited understanding of the (the authority’s) very complex requirements and obligations.”

When the plan was established, about 15 years ago, 347,000 acres of western Riverside County already were set aside. The goal was to use a combination of state and federal financing to buy up the remaining 153,000 acres. To date, less than half that land – about 61,000 acres – has been preserved.

Initially, officials projected the cost of acquiring land would run about \$4,000 an acre, or roughly \$61.2 million. But over the years, as property values have gone up – and with the imposition of guidelines calling for the preservation of so-called “criteria cells” to link sensitive stretches of land – the price has shot up to about \$13,000 an acre.

Figuring in added price bumps over time, the new estimated price tag could run north of \$1 billion, a number the grand jury described as “staggering.”

“This represents a significant financial risk to the County,” the grand jury wrote.

What’s more, the grand jury projects that the agency isn’t on a pace to acquire the property it needs in time to meet an original 25-year timeline. “The approval process and accompanying environmental reviews (to extend the timeline) would likely be arduous, time-consuming and possibly contentious.”

The authority’s board “has not acknowledged its inability to meet the current timetable,” the report added.

The grand jury also found that there isn’t nearly enough money on hand to maintain land even if the agency could buy it up. As of now, according to the grand jury, there is about \$5.8 million in an endowment to pay for future maintenance and oversight of habitat land; far less than the \$70 million once projected as necessary. Among other things, the current budget lacks money for park rangers, the jury reported.

Without maintenance and rangers, the grand jury reports that the land already is being degraded by “fires and floods, as well as off-highway vehicles ... and homeless encampments.” Such damage, the grand jury wrote, “will only increase in the future.”

The grand jury took the Conservation Authority to task for spending on “costly contracts” for various services, including unspecified lawyer’s bills and \$200,000 a year for two federal lobbyists. “These costs drain the limited general funds, used to build up the endowment and other services.”

Plan funding was to come from fees connected to new housing and commercial properties and landfill services, as well as transportation taxes and grants, among other sources, the grand jury reported.

And, in 2005, development fees yielded more than \$33 million for the plan. But the recession of 2007 and '08, and slow economic growth that followed, caused those fees to drop to \$10 million a year or less, the report read. Funding sources also were capped or eliminated, and money from landfill-tipping and infrastructure fees in recent years hasn't matched even dwindling development fees, according to the grand jury.

[A bill pending in Congress seeks to free up federal funding to buy more land](#) by creating a wildlife refuge. The bill, HR 2956, is sponsored by Reps. Ken Calvert, R-Corona, Mark Takano, D-Riverside and Pete Aguilar, D-Redlands.

The plan's funding issue "is not new, and has been an ongoing challenge since our inception," Landry wrote.

"That's why we are excited" about HR 2956.