



NEWS



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- Critical fire alerts issued for L.A., Ventura counties ahead of powerful Santa Ana winds Tuesday

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A burst of hot, dry Santa Ana winds will sweep through the region's mountain areas on Tuesday, forecasters said, elevating the risk of wildfires and leading to potential power shutoffs for thousands of Southern California Edison customers.

The utility company said Monday that officials were considering shutting off power — as a precaution to prevent fires — to 4,000 customers in Los Angeles County — in unincorporated communities north of the Santa Clarita Valley like Acton and Agua Dulce.

In Riverside County, as many as 12,000 customers in Moreno Valley, east Hemet and nearby communities could also see their power turned off. In **San Bernardino County**, SCE warned of possible shutdowns for 25,000 customers near Big Bear Lake.

The possibility of power shutdowns was announced ahead of expected triple-digits temperatures Tuesday as a result of warm Santa Ana winds blowing across the region.

Previously rare, electric utilities have warned that power shut offs could become more frequent as a tool to prevent wildfires. In Northern California on Monday, as many as 124,000 Pacific Gas & Electric customers were under the threat of losing power as temperatures rose and windy conditions increased.

PG&E power lines were founded to have started the massively destructive and deadly Camp fire last year, leading to convictions on multiple felonies resulting in \$16.5 billion in penalties and a bankruptcy filing.

An investigation into the Woolsey fire that tore through L.A. and Ventura counties in late 2018 is ongoing, with no cause determined. But thousands of people who lost homes have sued SCE, claiming power lines owned by the utility started the fire.

This week's winds will be brief, but will hit already dried-out mountain areas starting Monday night and last through Wednesday morning, according to the National Weather Service.

The NWS Los Angeles office issued a warning for Tuesday of elevated fire danger L.A., Ventura, and Santa Barbara counties.

Winds in L.A. and Ventura will increase the "potential for large fire growth" and the "rapid spread of any fire," according to the alert.

Wind gusts of 30 to 40 miles per hour were expected in mountain areas. In valleys, wind gusts could reach between 25 and 35 miles per hour. The winds will bring down humidity levels, and dry out grasses, making them more susceptible to fires.

Light wind gusts could also buffet mountain areas of Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside counties Tuesday, but the NWS did not issue fire-risk alerts for those area. Gusts could peak at 36 miles per hour near Big Bear, and 31 miles per hour near Idyllwild.

Parts of the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys could reach the triple digits Tuesday, the NWS said in its forecast. Coastal areas immediately away from beaches could reach into the 90s.

In Woodland Hills, temperatures could reach 102 degrees Tuesday. Pasadena could hit 98 degrees. Downtown Los Angeles and Long Beach could see temperatures topping out at 92 and 90 degrees, respectively.

Temperatures were also expected to bake most of Orange County and the Inland Empire on Tuesday: 93 degrees in Anaheim, 98 in San Bernardino and 99 in Riverside.

But by Wednesday, calmer winds and lower temperatures should return.

“The dry and breezy conditions are expected to persist through early Wednesday, with cooler conditions expected later in the week,” NWS meteorologists said in the alert.

“Due to the gusty winds, hot temperatures, low humidities, and very dry fuels, elevated fire danger is expected, with periods of brief critical fire danger,” the alert said.

The winds are the result of a ridge of high-pressure air moving from Nevada to southwestern Arizona, according to the NWS.

Mike Wofford, an NWS meteorologist, said the winds this week will preview longer Santa Ana wind patterns that typically start in late October, when strong winds can last three or four days.

“The biggest impact (this week) will really be drying out,” the region, Wofford said. “We’ll see a big boost in temperatures tomorrow.”

But he said the winds likely won’t be strong enough to cause major damage. “We won’t see big rigs out on the highway ready to topple over in the wind,” he said.

Still, residents should be wary of damage from falling trees Tuesday — months of drought-like conditions have likely left root systems for some trees dried out and weaker.

“A little puff of winds can send those things tumbling down,” Wofford said.

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