



# NEWS



## News Headlines 11/30/2016

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## An astounding 102 million trees are now dead in California

Brad Plumer, Vox

Posted: November 22, 2016, 4:00 PM EST



Flames spread up a hillside near firefighters at the Blue Cut fire on August 18, 2016, near Wrightwood, California. Photo by David McNew/Getty Images

Forest managers have never seen anything like it. Across California, an astounding 102 million trees have died over the past six years from drought and disease — including 62 million trees in 2016 alone, the US Forest Service estimates. Once-mighty oaks and pines have faded into ghastly hues of brown and gray.

The biggest worry is that these dead, dry forests will become highly combustible when California’s annual fire season rolls around next summer. The south and central Sierra Nevada regions, where most of the dead trees are located, are at particular risk of severe wildfires:

So how did we get to this point? “When you’re talking about tree mortality, it’s a whole bunch of things linked together,” says David Rizzo, chair of the plant pathology department at the University of California Davis. “The drought is important, but you also have to look at land-use and management decisions that go back a long time.”

### Why California’s trees are now dying in record numbers

Let’s start at the beginning. Centuries ago, before California became thickly populated, small wildfires used to course periodically through the Sierra Nevada region, thinning out the pine and conifer forests and rejuvenating the ecosystems.

Over the past 100 years, however, humans have largely suppressed those small fires to protect homes and cities that have been built nearby. That means modern-day forests are much thicker and denser than they ever were historically. And that’s terrible news when drought comes along, Rizzo explains, because it means there are more and more trees and plants competing for scarce water.\*

Today, California is in the midst of a historically brutal six-year drought — exacerbated by unusually warm summer temperatures. Those dense forests are particularly water-starved. They’ve become weak, susceptible to disease and other afflictions.

And now along comes the bark beetle, which loves to prey on species like oak and pine.

In normal years, a healthy tree can fight off bark beetles trying to squirm into its bark by producing pitch that drives them out. But drought-weakened trees can't muster a proper defense. Once the beetles drill in, they start hatching larvae that eat away the tree's system for transporting nutrients, and spread fungus that inhibits sap production. This beetle problem is made worse by global warming: As temperatures rise, more bark beetles can survive the winter, driving population growth.

And there's more: As Rizzo and his colleagues discovered earlier this year, a separate fungal pathogen introduced into California in the 1990s has also started killing millions of oak trees along the coast, from Monterey County on north. The disease, known as "sudden oak death," creates ugly cankers on the tree trunk that bleed out sap — a fatal condition for some trees.

Put that all together, and you have an ugly situation across the state. "The scale of die-off in California is unprecedented in our modern history," Randy Moore, a forester for the US Forest Service, told the Los Angeles Times. The agency notes that tree mortality will remain high in 2017, particularly in dense forests affected by root disease and bark beetles.

The biggest near-term danger from dead trees: wildfire

There are plenty of reasons to worry about dead trees, but the most pressing is wildfire. California is just emerging from an especially brutal fire season, with the Blue Cut fire in San Bernardino County alone forcing 85,000 people to evacuate. And these millions of dry tree corpses are an ominous sign for next summer, as well.

The extent and severity of California's fire season is driven by many factors: wind, rain, temperature. But mass tree die-offs can be a problem for two reasons, says Brandon Collins, a research scientist with UC Berkeley's Fire Science Laboratory. The dead trees lower the moisture content of the forest, and when their leaves and needles fall to the ground, that adds to the surface fuel that usually drives wildfires in places like the Sierra Nevada. Not only can wildfires spread faster, but there's a greater chance that entire trees will go up in flames (known as "torching") — making fires more severe.\*\*

This is particularly a problem in the south and central Sierra Nevada regions, which include populated areas like Fresno and Kern Counties. In some patches, more than 50 to 80 percent of trees have died. "It's just eye-catching," says Collins, describing the scene. "If it was just one out of every five trees dead, then okay, a few trees might torch, but you wouldn't get really big runs. But the problem is when those dead trees are concentrated in large patches."

Collins says that federal and state agencies typically manage to suppress about 97 percent of all ignitions. But the small handful that get out of control are the ones to worry about. In August, the Blue Cut fire in Southern California erupted on a 100 degree Fahrenheit day that featured 30 mph winds — it quickly spread and ended up burning 37,000 acres and destroying 105 homes. That's the situation everyone's worried about next year.

So what can California do about all these dead trees?

Now, one way to combat the immediate fire risk would be to go in and remove many of those dead trees. But that's much harder to do than it sounds. Private companies are unlikely to go in and grab those trees: There are simply no longer enough mills in the region to drive demand for all that extra wood, says Collins. (And the trees would have to be grabbed quickly, before they start rotting.)

Meanwhile, state and federal budget agencies don't have the funds for tree removal at this massive scale. Each year, wildfires keep getting bigger and costlier to tackle (in part because more people live near fire zones, which means more houses to protect). So, each year, the US Department of Agriculture is devoting more and more of its limited budget to fighting existing fires rather than preventing them in the first place.

"Until Congress passes a permanent fix to the fire budget," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in a statement on November 18, "we can't break this cycle of diverting funds away from restoration work to fight the immediate threat of the large unpredictable fires caused by the fuel buildups themselves." (See more on that budget battle [here](#).)

A more lasting solution, meanwhile, would be to prevent so many trees from dying in the first place. Rizzo points out that this would require coming up with a comprehensive plan to deal with everything from fire to bark beetles to disease.

But to take just one aspect here: Remember, one of the underlying causes of this die-off is that California's forests have become incredibly dense — when drought hits, there are too many trees in need of already scarce water. So one idea, Collins says, would be for forest managers to go in and manually thin out the forests. In California, though, this runs the risk of adversely affecting key endangered (and legally protected) species like the Pacific fisher and California spotted owl.

A more elegant — but also more controversial — idea would be to bring back the periodic small wildfires that were a mainstay of the forest landscape centuries ago. Carefully managed prescribed fires could thin out the forests *and* be good for wildlife. We'd be restoring forests to something closer to their earlier, healthier state.

The hitch here, says Collins, is that prescribed fires are incredibly tricky to pull off in dense forests that have been allowed to build up for many decades. If you want to intentionally set a small fire that doesn't spiral out of control, you need perfect weather conditions — not too windy, not too hot, neither too wet nor dry — that don't come along very often. Second, Southern California already has awful air pollution problems, and the smoke from prescribed fires could cause areas like the San Joaquin basin to run afoul of federal pollution limits.

Still, in recent years, more and more fire ecologists have argued that prescribed fires will eventually have to become part of the solution in dealing with wildfires. (See [here](#) for more on the complexities of that.) The western forests we've shaped over the past 100 years have become eerily warped, as this year's tree die-offs show. And, particularly as global warming makes the region hotter and drier, the price we're paying will become increasingly untenable.

<http://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2016/11/22/13709442/dead-trees-california-wildfire>

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## Tips for having a safe, warm winter in the High Desert

Daily Press

Posted: November 23, 2016, 8:44 AM



The use of heat sources like a fireplace or space heater are always helpful during the winter months, but the San Bernardino County Fire Department is advising residents to take precautions to greatly decrease the chance of a preventable home fire. David Goldman, Associated Press

The **San Bernardino County Fire Department** is urging residents to keep safe while staying warm as cooler weather arrives in the High Desert.

The use of heat sources like a fireplace or space heater are always helpful during the winter months, but taking precautions can greatly decrease the chance of a preventable home fire.

Here are some safety tips:

- Change furnace filters to keep equipment running efficiently and safely;
- Place all space heaters at least 3 feet away from furniture, walls, curtains or anything that burns;
- Check thermostats to make sure the furnace doesn't turn itself on before you're ready for it, and give yourself time to check furnace vents, especially floor vents, to make sure they're not blocked;
- Never install unvented gas heaters in bedrooms or bathrooms, where the small room size pose an added danger of rapid carbon monoxide build-up;
- Have your chimney inspected and cleaned by a professional before each heating season and have it cleaned regularly;
- Be sure to have a proper spark arrester on all chimney tops to prevent burning embers from blowing out of the top of the chimney and starting a fire on your roof or a neighbor's. Screens should have openings of no more than a half-inch— a quarter-inch if you live next to a wilderness area;
- Never use a fireplace during high winds, especially if you have a wood shake roof;
- Be sure that you have a fireplace screen large enough to block flying embers and rolling logs from escaping onto your floor;
- Store cooled ashes in a tightly sealed metal container. Cardboard boxes, paper bags, and plastic containers quickly catch fire;

- Never burn trash, paper, or green wood in your fireplace. These materials cause a combustible build-up on the lining of your fireplace that may eventually catch fire, possibly damaging the chimney and threatening your home;
- Make sure that any fireplace fires are completely out before leaving the house or going to bed.
- Remember, never use a charcoal-burning barbecue or heater indoors. When burned indoors, charcoal produces deadly amounts of carbon monoxide gas that is odorless, tasteless, and invisible;
- Make sure tree branches are cleared at least 10 feet from the chimney opening.

Before lighting any fire, residents should:

- Check to see that the flue is open;
- Keep a screen in front of the fireplace at all times, especially when the fire is burning;
- Before closing the flue, be sure that the fire is completely out;
- Check the phone directory for a professional fireplace contractor to assist you with any needs or questions you may have.

County Fire also advises residents to make sure their home is equipped with working smoke detectors and fire extinguishers, and to install, test and maintain these devices in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Every home should have two means of escape from every room and families should develop and practice a fire escape plan for their household. For more information and fire safety tips, visit [www.sbcfire.org](http://www.sbcfire.org).

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20161123/tips-for-having-safe-warm-winter-in-high-desert>

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## Man struck by car causes major road closure on Bear Valley Road

Monica Solano, Daily Press

Posted: November 23, 2016, 7:36 PM



Officials carry a male pedestrian onto a stretcher after he was struck by a vehicle Wednesday night at the intersection of Bear Valley Road and Cypress Avenue. Monica Solano, Daily Press

**VICTORVILLE** — A male pedestrian suffered unknown injuries and was flown to a nearby hospital after being struck by a vehicle Wednesday night, officials said.

At 5:21 p.m., deputies from the Victorville Sheriff's Station and **San Bernardino County Fire Department** responded to a report of a man that was struck by a woman driving a silver Honda Civic at the intersection of Bear Valley Road and Cypress Avenue in Victorville.

Deputies responded to the scene and located the man, who was approximately 50 to 55 years old, lying on the ground in the road's No. 3 lane, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department Deputy Jeff Dean told the Daily Press on scene.

Through further investigation, it was determined that the driver was traveling westbound on Bear Valley Road in the No. 3 lane when the man attempted to cross the north side of Bear Valley Road and was struck by the vehicle, causing the driver to swerve onto Cypress Avenue, Dean said.

According to Dean, witnesses at the scene said they saw the man leave the local Food Store just before he was hit by the Honda.

The man was flown by Mercy Air to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center for severe injuries, and he was said to have suffered multiple broken bones, Dean said.

The driver of the Honda suffered some moderate lacerations and was treated and released on scene.

"No indication of drugs or alcohol were a factor in the incident," Dean said. "Other witnesses on scene said the driver was traveling at normal speed and obeying traffic laws when the man at the last minute attempted to cross the other side of the street."

Bear Valley Road between Balsam and 11th Avenue will remain closed for five hours as deputies continue to investigate the scene, Dean said.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20161123/man-struck-by-car-causes-major-road-closure-on-bear-valley-road>

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## **SB County Fire Reminds Residents to Stay Safe With Holiday Decorations**

Victor Valley News

Posted: November 28, 2016



(VVNG.com)- With the holiday season upon us, the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** reminds residents of the following holiday decorating and natural Christmas tree safety tips.

### **CHECK THE LIGHTS, CHECK THE CORDS**

Before you put up any electrically lighted decorations, you should check the equipment to make sure it will operate safely. Check for burned-out lights, empty sockets and broken bulbs. Inspect wires carefully for breaks, fraying and damaged connections before energizing your holiday decorations. Any damaged strands of lights should be thrown out.

### **ARTIFICIAL OR NATURAL TREE?**

Both can be enjoyed safely. If you use an artificial tree, make sure it is made of safe, fireproof materials. If your artificial tree is pre-lit, make sure you test the tree and check all electrical cords and connectors for damage, fraying or broken parts before using the tree. On a pre-lit tree, check carefully for burnt-out, broken or damaged light sockets. Damaged equipment should be replaced or repaired before using the tree.

### **MAKE A FRESH CUT**

If you use a natural tree, make a fresh 1-inch cut at the base to open up pores clogged by sap. The fresh cut surface should be creamy-white so that the tree will be able to drink water.

### **PUT IN WATER**

For a natural tree, choose a sturdy stand that holds at least one gallon of water. Rinse the stand with a mixture of one capful of bleach and one cup of water before inserting the tree. This rinsing reduces the growth of microorganisms that can block the tree's ability to absorb water. If the tree is not going into the house soon after purchase, it should be stored in a bucket of water in a cool place away from wind and sun.

### **WATER DAILY**

An average natural tree may consume between a quart and a gallon of water per day. If the water level drops



below the cut end of the trunk, a seal will form and no more water will be absorbed – SO DON'T FORGET TO WATER THE TREE EVERY DAY!

#### MINI-LIGHTS PRODUCE LESS HEAT

Miniature lights produce less heat and reduce drying on a natural tree. Always check lights for frayed or cracked wiring and broken sockets before placing on a tree. Do not attempt to repair a worn light—throw it away! Turn off tree lights when leaving the house or before going to bed. Avoid overloading circuits. Plug no more than three light sets into a single outlet.

#### KEEP AWAY FROM HEAT SOURCES

Place the tree away from heat sources: heating vents, fireplaces, wood stoves, radiators, TV sets, or sunny windows. Keep rearranged furniture away from heat sources as well. Be careful not to block a door with the tree or with rearranged furniture.

#### REMOVE AND RECYCLE THE TREE PROMPTLY

After the holidays, remove a natural tree from the house as soon as possible. Never burn any part of a Christmas tree in a wood stove or fireplace; it burns too fast and is explosive! The best alternative is to RECYCLE your tree through your local city or county program.

Have a safe and Happy Holiday season!

(San Bernardino County Fire press release)

<http://www.vvng.com/sb-county-fire-reminds-residents-to-stay-safe-with-holiday-decorations/>

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## Upland may snuff out Fire Department, hire county instead, to save money

David Allen, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Posted: November 29, 2016, 2:01 PM



Engineer Paul Kramer, with Upland Fire Station 163 on Benson Avenue, climbs into his engine Wednesday November 27, 2013 for an assignment. FILE PHOTO



People came out to a long, dispiriting Upland City Council meeting Monday at which the first step was taken to disband the Fire Department. PHOTO BY DAVID ALLEN

Upland took the first step Monday to disband its Fire Department after more than a century of service, seeking to turn fire protection over to San Bernardino County.

The move by the City Council might save the beleaguered city \$3.5 million a year, in large part by imposing a parcel tax on property owners of \$148 a year.

Unlike La Verne, whose leaders threatened to do something interesting last week but lost their nerve, Upland knows how to make news.

With our reporter out on leave, I jumped back into city affairs by attending Monday's council meeting and was rewarded with activity, but not much comedy. Although at the end, a few residents did serenade departing Mayor Ray Musser with a chorus of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

The agenda item on the Fire Department was titled “annexing to **San Bernardino County Fire Protection District** for fire service delivery,” factual but unemotional. I might have preferred a more pointed title, like, “Good Lord, we can’t even afford a freakin’ Fire Department anymore.”

Still, it was quite enough inducement to attend, with a second item, a “financial stability plan,” serving as icing on the cake.

Upland spends nearly \$46 million a year, most of which goes to police and fire. Interim City Manager Marty Thouvenell got a proposal from the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department but concluded that keeping a city police force is \$1.3 million cheaper.

Outsourcing fire protection has more promise for savings. Rather than continue to spend \$11.9 million on a city fire department, Thouvenell says Upland can contract with the county for \$7.6 million and get equal, and possibly better, service.

The actual difference in providing the service is roughly \$600,000 to \$1 million, but the savings are greater because annexing to the county fire district would include a parcel tax that would generate \$3 million per year and lower the city’s contract costs.

Most speakers at Monday’s meeting expressed sympathy with the concept of outsourcing the Fire Department, which was established in 1911, only five years after incorporation.

Even the president of the firefighter union was muted, saying options should be explored and the application process should give a clear picture of the situation.

You have to feel bad for the department. First it was merged with Montclair as a cost-saving move that didn’t work out; now it’s likely on its way out entirely.

The council voted 5-0 to file the application and authorize Thouvenell to negotiate a contract that would return to the council for discussion and possible approval by mid-2017.

The goal is for any takeover to occur prior to Aug. 8, the deadline for putting a parcel tax on the assessor’s tax rolls.

Regarding the financial stability plan, Thouvenell and an array of employees and outside advisers painted a sobering picture of Upland’s situation. The city, which in 2012 considered taking the first step in filing for bankruptcy, has cut so deeply, they said, that basic services have been compromised.

No money has been set aside to replace city vehicles, building repairs — like new heating and air conditioning for the Senior Center and Police Department — have been deferred for years and streets, sidewalks and parking lots are deteriorating.

The latter isn’t news to anyone who drives around the city. Upland spends \$3.2 million on streets per year but ought to be spending \$8.5 million, according to the report. You no doubt have your own favorite Upland street; mine is Second Avenue through downtown, which is like driving on a washboard.

A “properly funded” budget, as the report calls it, would be \$12.5 million more than it is now, about 27 percent larger, and would allow for more police, more tree trimming and more street repair.

Shifting to county fire protection, implementing parking fees at the Metrolink lots, seeking energy efficient building upgrades and other steps would relieve pressure on the budget and keep the city functioning for a couple of years as a longer-term plan is developed — which may include a sales tax.

“We can’t continue down this path and call it ‘gracious living,’ ” Mark Bertone, a businessman who was among those advising Thouvenell, said at the meeting.

Council members, again on a 5-0 vote, gave Thouvenell backing on the overall direction as he begins shaping the next budget. That was two big wins for him.

It would have been nice if the meeting hadn’t lasted past 10:30 p.m., but we can’t have everything.

Afterward, I questioned why this was on the last agenda before Musser and Councilman Glenn Bozar leave the council. Shouldn’t the new council make such a momentous call?

Working backward from the assessor’s deadline, Thouvenell told me, the annexation process had to start by Dec. 1 to stay on track.

Since the outcome was unanimous rather than a split vote, I had to admit there was nothing nefarious about having current council members do it.

“Besides,” Thouvenell told me, regarding Upland’s financial issues, “a lot of it was their fault.” No argument there.

<http://www.dailybulletin.com/government-and-politics/20161129/upland-may-snuff-out-fire-department-hire-county-instead-to-save-money>

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## **Ready Sb County App Aims To Help In Natural Disasters**

**Z107.7 News**

Posted: November 30, 2016

The state of California and San Bernardino County have set up websites and apps to help residents in case of natural disasters and emergencies. The California Office of Emergency Services, [caloes.ca.gov](http://caloes.ca.gov), has tips for individuals, families, businesses, and schools and teachers, on how to prepare. Kirby Davis has more information about a free phone app developed by the county...

San Bernardino County has prepared a new app for smart phones to help residents prepare and plan for disasters. The Ready SB County app allows users to share their status with selected contacts with the push of a button, receive critical emergency alerts, locate the county’s emergency shelters, view up-to-date evacuation route maps, get the latest news and weather for San Bernardino county. The app also creates a personalized emergency preparedness plan that includes what you’ll need for an emergency supply kit, an emergency food supply shopping list; an emergency communications plan, and critical information to prepare your home for a disaster. This free app is available for both Android and iPhones and can be used with or without an Internet connection.

<http://z1077fm.com/ready-sb-county-app-aims-to-help-in-natural-disasters/>