



# NEWS



## News Headlines 09/07/2020

- Evacuations for El Dorado fire spread into Riverside County; coming Santa Ana winds prompt warnings
- El Dorado Fire: Live maps and evacuation information
- Gender Reveal Event Sparks California Wildfire That Burns Through More Than 7,000 Acres
- Officials answer questions on El Dorado Fire at community meeting
- Coroner ID's man killed in Phelan crash Sunday morning
- CHP investigates after Bloomington man is killed in accident
- El Dorado Fire Caused by Pyrotechnic Device Used During Gender Reveal Party

## Evacuations for El Dorado fire spread into Riverside County; coming Santa Ana winds prompt warnings

Jason Henry, the Sun

Brian Rokos, Pasadena Star News

Posted: September 7, 2020



The El Dorado wildfire above Yucaipa on Monday, Sept. 7, 2020 was caused by a pyrotechnic device used to generate smoke during a party, authorities said. It has burned more than 7,000 acres. (Photo by Cindy Yamanaka, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

More than 20,000 people were evacuated due to the El Dorado fire, a 9,671-acre blaze ignited by a baby gender reveal stunt at El Dorado Ranch Park in Yucaipa, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said on Monday, Sept. 7, the third day of the blaze.

The fire rapidly doubled in size to 7,050 acres Sunday, then briefly slowed down overnight before picking up again about 3:30 a.m. It jumped to 8,600 acres by noon Monday, causing evacuation orders to spread into Riverside County. By Monday evening the fire was measured at 9,671 acres.

Forecast winds Tuesday night and Wednesday could worsen the situation.

Santa Ana winds of up to 50 mph could blow the flames to the south and southwest and prompt additional evacuation advisories for Yucaipa; and similar advisories for Mentone, fire officials said Monday evening.

“This is a dangerous situation. Be prepared,” Kurt Van Speybroeck, a fire behavior analyst, said during a Facebook town hall. The video can be viewed on the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department Facebook page.

Officials said evacuations would be announced through calls to home and cell phones. Residents can sign up for the alerts on the county fire website.

Santa Ana winds blow from the east and pick up speed as they pass over canyons. They dry out vegetation and rapidly spread flames. Van Speybroeck called this a “moderate” Santa Ana wind event.

An important goal in the next 24 hours will be to prevent the fire from jumping Oak Glen Road to the west.

Officials were upbeat about the prospects of preventing the flames from spreading into Mountain Home Village and Forest Falls on the north side of Yucaipa Ridge.

The southwest flank of the fire has been largely stopped, officials said.

The 619 firefighters working the blaze managed to reach 7% containment as of Monday afternoon. Containment does not mean how much of a fire has been put out. Rather, it represents a border firefighters

have created around the perimeter of a blaze to keep it from spreading. Natural barriers can also be part of the border. That means a border has been created around 7% of the El Dorado Fire.

Investigators determined a smoke-generating pyrotechnic device at a gender reveal photo shoot Saturday morning started the fire. Initially described as a party, a Cal Fire spokesperson later said the photo shoot only involved immediate family members. During the shoot, a small cylindrical device that burns chemicals to produce colored smoke ignited grass at the park, according to Bennet Milloy, a captain specialist with Cal Fire.

The unidentified couple chose the location to reveal their baby's gender. They were accompanied by their young children and had someone videoing on a cell phone, said Milloy.

The family went into a field and fired off the device, which quickly ignited 4-foot grasses, Milloy said. Conditions were perfect for a fire to spread quickly — triple-digit temperatures, low humidity, dry vegetation and a stiff breeze.

Surveillance video showed the couple frantically race to their vehicle to retrieve water bottles to try to extinguish the flames. It was futile and they called 911.

“You can't fight a fire like this with a water bottle,” Milloy said. “They had no chance after it started.”

Firefighters arrived within minutes and the distraught couple told them what happened and provided their own photos and video to aid the investigation, Milloy said.

“It's a pretty tragic situation,” he said. “Obviously this was supposed to be a happy event.”

The couple could be liable for the cost of fighting the fire and criminally charged with misdemeanor or felony counts.

Cal Fire has yet to determine if the device qualifies as a “safe and sane” firework under California law, but such fireworks are not legal in Yucaipa regardless, Milloy said. The individual responsible for lighting the device had not been arrested. Investigators will send a report to the district attorney's office and charges will be filed at a later date, Milloy said.

The violations likely will include several charges that qualify as “wobblers,” laws that could be charged as misdemeanors or felonies depending on the severity.

“Our investigation is ongoing,” Milloy said. “The fire has to play out for us to figure what laws were broken.”

The flames initially spread from the park onto Yucaipa Ridge, then split. A more active fire dropped toward the Pine Bench Area near Oak Glen Road, while a slower fire continued to burn above the communities of Mountain Home Village and Forest Falls, officials said.

Firefighters staged near at-risk communities to stop the flames. A crew from the San Bernardino County Fire Department fought back flames overnight Sunday to protect Oak Tree Village in Oak Glen. Working on three hours of sleep in nearly two days, the crew was able to protect residences, businesses and a petting zoo, according to the fire department.

Chris George, a spokesperson for the California Interagency Incident Management Team 11, said crews started controlled burns near Riley's Farm on Oak Glen Monday afternoon in an attempt to direct the El Dorado fire toward areas already scarred from the Apple Fire, which burned through most of August and consumed more than 33,400 acres, including four homes.

The fire caused damage elsewhere, though the extent was not immediately known.

"There is structure damage, they have an assessment team going out there, so we don't know how many structures have been lost," George said. It could take several days to calculate those totals, he said.

There have been no reported injuries, he said.

The weather and the topography make it hard to predict how the fire might move, he said.

Firefighting aircraft assisted crews on the ground, though officials warned Monday afternoon that heavy winds could ground those efforts. Firefighters worried the winds could also create a fire plume buildup, according to the San Bernardino National Forest.

While temperatures cooled Monday, an excessive heat warning remained in effect until 8 p.m. A Fire Weather Watch will take its place Tuesday and Wednesday. There's a possibility of Santa Ana conditions later in the week.

Mandatory evacuation orders were in place for residents in the following area as of Monday afternoon: east of Bryant Street from Carter Street south to Yucaipa Boulevard, then east on Yucaipa from Bryant intersection to Fremont Street, then south to Grande View Drive, then along Avenue E southeast to the intersection of Mesa Grande, east to Wildwood Canyon Road, including all portions of Hidden Meadows, and east to Edgar Canyon Road.

An evacuation order was also in place in Mountain Home Village and Forest Falls.

Shortly before noon Monday, evacuation orders spread to Riverside County, that county's Emergency Management Department said. The evacuation orders are for the Cherry Valley area, north of Cherry Street to the county line.

The American Red Cross had set up an evacuation center at the Yucaipa Community Center, 34900 Oak Glen Road. Volunteers were following safety protocols and providing services while maintaining social distancing, according to the Red Cross. Anyone evacuating animals was directed to the Devore Animal Shelter, 19777 Shelter Way in Devore, or Big Bear Animal Shelter at North Shore Drive and Stanfield Cutoff.

The Red Cross said it provided hotel rooms for 53 families — 118 people total — on Sunday night and will continue assessing shelter needs.

With thousands of residents prompted to evacuate, many are finding difficulty locating hotel rooms — particularly if they have pets.

Ricardo Tomboc, a shelter supervisor at the American Red Cross evacuation center at Yucaipa Community Center, estimated Monday that 95% of evacuees had the financial wherewithal to rent hotel rooms themselves or were staying with family or friends.

Tomboc estimated that 50 families were given vouchers Sunday but that others remained on a waiting list. And seeking a hotel that accepts pets “makes it a lot harder,” he said.

That left people such as the Scalf and Myers families sitting in the park, outside in the smoky 90-degree heat, Monday as they waited for word on a room. As with the Apple Fire, the Red Cross was not putting out cots because of concerns about spreading the coronavirus. Snacks and water were available, though. There were about a dozen people inside the center about 2 p.m. Monday and another dozen outside.

The Scalfs, of Mountain Home Village, sat on a picnic bench and prayed over a lunch of In-N-Out burgers. Philip Scalf, 35, asked God to protect the community and firefighters.

“Please let everyone survive,” he prayed.

His family, which includes his wife, Candace, 36; three children; and three dogs and a cat fled Saturday as the flames crested the mountain and a helicopter crew announced mandatory evacuations.

They were prepared with a bag that included clothes, pet food and bath items. Philip Scalf and son Gunnar, 13, also grabbed their skateboards and guitars.

“We’re going to be doing a lot of skating and playing,” Philip Scalf said, anticipating a lengthy evacuation.

This has been a stressful couple of months for the Scalfs and other Mountain Home residents, with voluntary evacuations orders issued during the nearby Apple Fire.

Still, “I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else,” Candace Scalf said. “Once you live on the mountain, you don’t want to move off. We have a strong community and we take care of each other.”

Richard and Winter Myers, and their young son and daughter, sat on the concrete just outside the center Monday. They played a card game while their dog lounged nearby. They also hoped for a hotel voucher after evacuating their mountain home when the fire crested the mountain.

“We love it up there but we just wish people were more respectful,” Richard Myers, 42, said. “Because they don’t live here, they don’t have anything to lose. We have everything to lose.”

Both families were disappointed that the fire that roused them out of their homes was started by people carelessly using a pyrotechnic to mark a baby’s gender reveal on a scorching-hot day next to tinder-dry brush.

“I know those people feel really bad, but they should not have done it,” said Philip Scalf.

About 3 p.m., the Myers family got good news: A hotel room was found for them and they were looking forward to taking baths. The Scalf family and their menagerie were still waiting.

The evacuation center was later moved to Redlands East Valley High School, the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department said.

The Southern California Air Quality Management District issued a smoke advisory that ran from Sunday through to Monday afternoon. The forecast indicated winds would send smoke through the San Gorgonio Pass and into the San Jacinto Mountains. Idyllwild, Banning and the Western Coachella Valley.

The following roads were closed Monday.

Highway 38 at Bryant Street and at Angelus Oaks;  
Bryant Street between Highway 38 and Carter Street;  
Oak Glen Road between Pine Bench Road and Cherry Croft Drive;  
Cross streets east of Bryant Street, between Yucaipa Boulevard and Carter Street.  
All of the San Gorgonio Wilderness, except for the Pacific Crest Trail, was also closed to the public.

Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency Sunday for San Bernardino County due to the El Dorado fire. The governor's proclamation noted that because of the magnitude of fires throughout the state, local governments will require "the combined forces of a mutual aid region or regions to appropriately respond."

And the Governor's Office of Emergency Services said it secured a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help cover the firefighting costs.

Under the grant, local, state and tribal agencies responding to the fire can apply for 75-percent reimbursement of their eligible fire suppression costs.

In response to the fires, the U.S. Forest Service announced the closure of a number of its forests, beginning at 5 p.m. Monday and continuing indefinitely until dangerous conditions lessened. A combination of extreme heat, significant wind, dry conditions and overstretched firefighting resources prompted the decision. Rules put in place state-wide also banned campfires and closed developed campgrounds and day-sites.

Saturday's gender reveal-caused fire was the latest in what has become a lengthy list of tragedies at events where typically smoke, confetti, balloons or other colored objects are used to reveal the soon-to-be-born child's biological sex — pink for girls and blue for boys. Sometimes the made-for-social-media gatherings are spectacles and include explosives and even guns, and at least one had deadly consequences.

In 2017, a massive Arizona wildfire was accidentally started by an off-duty Border Patrol agent who shot a target filled with an explosive blue powder. The fire burned 47,000 acres and caused \$8 million in damage, Agent Dennis Dickey was charged with a misdemeanor and sentenced to probation.

Last year, a homemade explosive used to reveal a baby's gender killed 56-year-old Pamela Kreimeyer in Knoxville, Iowa. The device was meant to spray powder but instead blew up like a pipe bomb. Kreimeyer, who was standing 45 feet away, died instantly when debris struck her head.

Milloy said some devices used to reveal genders are harmless but others contain chemicals that produce heat and can spark fires.

Milloy didn't know the color Saturday's device emitted.

<https://www.sbsun.com/2020/09/07/el-dorado-fire-in-yucaipa-reaches-7386-acres-overnight/>

## El Dorado Fire: Live maps and evacuation information

Staff Writer, ABC10

Posted: September 7, 2020



YUCAIPA, Calif. — A wildfire is burning in San Bernadino County, California.

The El Dorado Fire burning in Yucaipa, Calif., has burned about 11,000 acres since it started on Saturday, Sept. 5. Cal Fire believes the wildfire was caused by a "smoke-generating pyrotechnic device used during a gender-reveal party" on Saturday morning.

El Dorado Fire: Live maps and evacuation information

Cal Fire believes the wildfire was caused by a "smoke-generating pyrotechnic device used during a gender-reveal party" on Saturday morning.

### WILDFIRE

El Dorado Fire: Live maps and evacuation information

Cal Fire believes the wildfire was caused by a "smoke-generating pyrotechnic device used during a gender-reveal party" on Saturday morning.

Click [HERE for the latest information from the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District.](#)

Click [HERE for the latest information from the Cal Fire San Bernardino Unit](#)

Click [HERE for the latest information from the San Bernadino National Forest](#)

### WILDFIRE PREPS

According to Cal Fire, in 2019, California wildfires burned just under 260,000 acres from 7,860 incidents. Over 700 structures were damaged or destroyed and three people were killed. This follows two years of some of the "deadliest and most destructive wildfires" in California history.

If you live in a wildfire-prone zone, Cal Fire suggests creating a defensible space around your home. A defensible space is an area around a building in which vegetation and other debris is completely cleared. At least 100 feet is recommended.

The Department of Homeland Security suggests assembling an emergency kit that has important documents, N95 respirator masks, supplies to grab with you if you're forced to leave at a moment's notice. The agency

also suggests signing up for local warning system notifications and know your community's evacuation plans to best prepare yourself and your family in cases of wildfires.

<https://www.abc10.com/article/news/local/wildfire/el-dorado-fire-live-maps-and-evacuation-information/103-5eeb5fa5-b661-47b3-9d44-05162789f4ac>



## Gender Reveal Event Sparks California Wildfire That Burns Through More Than 7,000 Acres

Sanya Mansoor, Time

Posted: September 7, 2020 at 1:28PM



A firefighter douses flames as they push towards homes during the Creek fire in the Cascadel Woods area of unincorporated Madera County, California on Sept. 7, 2020. JOSH EDELSON—AFP/Getty Images

A gender reveal event sparked a wildfire in San Bernardino County, Calif. that burned through more than 7,000 acres as of Monday morning, officials said. Evacuation orders are in place in nearby residential areas.

The El Dorado Fire, which has grown rapidly, was “caused by a smoke generating pyrotechnic device, used during a gender reveal” and began just before 10:30 a.m. Saturday, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) said in a statement issued on Sunday. The fire started in the El Dorado Ranch Park in Yucaipa and has since expanded northwards to Yucaipa Ridge, according to the statement.

As of Monday morning, the fire has spread across 7,386 acres and is 7% contained, a spokesperson with Cal Fire tells TIME. No injuries have currently been reported. More than 500 personnel and four helicopters have been battling the blaze since it first began.

Several wildfires have been burning throughout California in recent weeks. The El Dorado fire is one of more than a dozen wildfires that Cal Fire lists as an “active incident” as of Monday morning.

An evacuation order is in place for residents of Oak Glen, Yucaipa Ridge, Mountain Home Village and Forest Falls for the El Dorado Fire. An evacuation warning is in place for the Yucaipa bench area. By Monday afternoon, the evacuation order map expanded to include Riverside County.

Cal Fire said in its statement that “with the dry conditions and critical fire weather, it doesn’t take much to start a wildfire.”

“Those responsible for starting fires due to negligence or illegal activity can be held financially and criminally responsible,” the statement said.

Cal Fire Capt. Bennet Milloy told The Desert Sun that no arrests have been made so far, although a district attorney could file charges depending on the extent of property damage and injuries caused by the fire. Milloy added that the family behind the gender reveal has “absolutely been cooperating” with officials and clarified that the event was not a party but a group of immediate family members gathering for a selfie as the device exploded.

Milloy told the Associated Press that a couple had chosen the park for the gender reveal, accompanied by their young children and another person taking video on a cell phone. The device ultimately led to a fire in the 4-foot grass, he said.

San Bernardino National Forest said Sunday night that “the weather will remain dry and hot throughout the night with an elevated temperature and relative humidity at 20 percent”—resulting in “active fire behavior throughout the night.” The Cal Fire spokesperson says damage assessment teams are still evaluating the extent of property damage.

“Due to the number of fires across California and the West, firefighting resources are in short supply,” an official incident report stated.

This isn’t the first time a gender reveal party has started a wildfire. In 2017, a US Border Patrol agent in Arizona fired a rifle at an explosive target that led to blue smoke—to indicate that the child would be a boy—and also sparked a wildfire that tore through more than 45,000 acres, causing more than \$8 million in damage. Dennis Dickey pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor violation of U.S. Forest Service rules and agreed to pay close to \$8.2 million in restitution.

In one gender reveal, a life was lost. An Iowa woman died last October after being struck by debris from a homemade pipe bomb that was part of a gender reveal party, the New York Times reported.

<https://time.com/5886598/gender-reveal-california-wildfire/>

## Officials answer questions on El Dorado Fire at community meeting

Jesus Reyes, kesq.com

Posted: September 7, 2020



The **San Bernardino County Fire** Department is hosting a virtual community meeting tonight at 6 p.m. with an update on the El Dorado Fire.

The El Dorado Fire has burned 8,600 acres since it first started on Saturday morning. Officials said the blaze was sparked by a smoke-emitting firework used at a gender-reveal gathering at El Dorado Ranch Park.

Record heat and dry conditions helped the fire quickly spread north to the Yucaipa Ridge, fire officials said.

Thousands of residents have been forced from their homes after mandatory evacuations were issued for parts of Oak Glen, Yucaipa, Forest Falls, Cherry Valley, and Mountain Home Village.

Meanwhile, the South Coast Air Quality Management District issued a smoke advisory for some parts of Riverside County due to the fire.

Residents who see ash or smell smoke were urged to limit their exposure by remaining indoors with windows and doors closed or seeking alternate shelter, and avoiding vigorous physical activity.

<https://kesq.com/news/2020/09/07/live-at-6-officials-hold-community-meeting-on-el-dorado-fire/>

## Coroner ID's man killed in Phelan crash Sunday morning

Staff Writer, Victor Valley News Group

Posted: September 7, 2020



PHELAN, Calif. (VVNG.com) — A man killed in a single-vehicle rollover crash Sunday morning has been identified as a 30-year-old Bloomington resident.

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department Coroner's Division officials said Mario Rodriguez died in the crash, which occurred west of Sheep Creek Road and south of Sandstone Road in Phelan.

A 911 call was received reporting a vehicle in a dirt field at 6:32 am, September 6, 2020, officials said.

Following an investigation, CHP officials said it appeared that Rodriguez was traveling north on Sheep Creek Road, when for an unknown reason, he veered off the roadway and into the dirt field, causing his vehicle to roll over multiple times.

Rodriguez was ejected during the crash and was pronounced deceased at 6:46 am by **San Bernardino County Fire** Department paramedics.

The California Highway Patrol is investigating the incident.

<https://www.vvng.com/coroner-ids-man-killed-in-phelan-crash-sunday-morning/>

## CHP investigates after Bloomington man is killed in accident

Staff Writer, Fontana Herald News

Posted: September 7, 2020



A Bloomington man died in a vehicle accident on Sept. 6, according to the San Bernardino County Sheriff Coroner's Division.

At 6:32 a.m., a 911 call was received reporting a vehicle in a dirt field, west of Sheep Creek Road and south of Sandstone Road in Phelan.

The vehicle, which was occupied by a single person, appeared to be traveling north on Sheep Creek and veered off the roadway into the dirt field and rolled over multiple times, ejecting the driver from the vehicle.

The driver was identified as Mario Rodriguez, 30.

**San Bernardino County Fire** Department paramedics pronounced Rodriguez deceased at 6:46 a.m.

[https://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/news/inland\\_empire\\_news/chp-investigates-after-bloomington-man-is-killed-in-accident/article\\_4836e6b4-f11c-11ea-84d4-23f895930f46.html](https://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/news/inland_empire_news/chp-investigates-after-bloomington-man-is-killed-in-accident/article_4836e6b4-f11c-11ea-84d4-23f895930f46.html)

## El Dorado Fire Caused by Pyrotechnic Device Used During Gender Reveal Party

Tribby Beresford, Hollywood Reporter

Posted: September 7, 2020 at 10:10AM



The fire is currently 59 percent contained, with the San Bernardino County Fire department providing planning structure defense for impacted communities as they battle the blaze.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection has determined that the El Dorado Fire, currently burning over 22,000 acres near Oak Glen in San Bernardino County, was caused by a smoke generating pyrotechnic device used in a gender reveal party.

According to the Cal Fire San Bernardino Unit, which shared the update via a press release posted to its official Instagram account, the incident first began at 10:23 a.m. on Sept. 5 in the El Dorado Ranch Park in Yucaipa and soon spread north from the park.

No charges have been filed, though Cal Fire warned in its press release, "Those responsible for starting fires due to negligence or illegal activity can be held financially and criminally responsible."

As of Sept. 19, the fire was currently 59 percent contained, with over 600 firefighters from the **San Bernardino County Fire** department and others providing structure defense for impacted communities as they battle the blaze.

Yucaipa Police and local fire departments have ordered evacuations for the communities including Oak Glen and Yupaica Ridge, with a Red Cross reception center set up at Yupaica Community Center.

California is experiencing an extreme heatwave, with Gov. Gavin Newsom sharing warnings via his Twitter account of areas where there is high fire danger and how residents can be fully prepared.

A red flag warning was in effect throughout the state until Wednesday, due to gusty winds and low humidity.

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/el-dorado-fire-caused-by-pyrotechnic-device-used-during-gender-reveal-party>