

# High temperatures and drought cause multiple wildfires in Southern California

**Kevin Martinez****16 May 2014**

A series of severe wildfires have erupted in San Diego County, California this week, burning more than 10,000 acres. High winds, unusually high temperatures and a historic drought have all contributed to one of the worst and earliest fire seasons in recent years.

As of this writing, a fire in San Marcos is only five percent contained and still burning, after growing quickly on Thursday afternoon. A total of nine fires are presently in different stages of containment throughout Southern California.

The current fires are more proof that drought conditions have created a year-round fire season for California. Cal Fire has already put out 1,400 wildfires since the start of the year, according to spokesman Daniel Berlant. This is double the average number for this time of year.

“It starts with the drought,” Berlant told the *Los Angeles Times*. “The grass, the brush and the trees—not only in San Diego County, really across California—are really dry.” The drought and the ongoing fires have prompted Cal Fire to maintain the number of firefighters and equipment usually reserved for the fall fire season.

Temperatures reached 105 degrees Fahrenheit at John Wayne Airport in Orange County on Wednesday, far higher than the average temperature of 72 degrees. National Weather Service meteorologist Mark Moede said, “This is very unusual for the middle of May in Santa Ana. Usually we have a marine layer, the typical May gray.”

At least three homes have been destroyed, one damaged and 800 acres have burned from the San Marcos fire. A fire in Carlsbad burned 400 acres, a business, an 18-unit apartment complex, and 4 homes.

Fires were also reported in Camp Pendleton, Bonsall, and Bernardo, which saw 1,500 acres burn. The

Bernardo fire is 75 percent contained according to Cal Fire officials.

Evacuation orders are in effect in Carlsbad, where a fire has been 60 percent contained. Notices to evacuate were sent to 23,000 homes, businesses, and cell phones. Damages are so far estimated at \$22.5 million in Carlsbad alone. Authorities in San Marcos, where fires are still raging, said families in about 21,000 homes were asked to evacuate.

The record heat in Southern California is part of a broader warming trend throughout the country and internationally. Last month was the second hottest April worldwide since scientists began recording temperature data, according to a preliminary report from NASA.

This April was also the 350th month in a row that the planet experienced above average temperatures, which scientists largely attribute to man-made greenhouse gases changing the earth’s atmosphere—i.e., global warming.

Last month was also the first time in recorded human history where average carbon dioxide levels reached above 400 parts per million, according to the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Association’s Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii. Carbon dioxide is one of the principal greenhouse gasses.

High temperatures have contributed to the drought conditions. A quarter of the state is currently experiencing “exceptional” drought, the worst category of the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The national budget for fighting wildfires is inadequate. According to the Department of Agriculture, government spending on fire fighting in 2014 will outpace the money budgeted by Congress by about \$400 million. The US Forest Service and the Department of the Interior will have to spend an

estimated \$1.8 billion in the next year to fight fires, even though Congress only allocated \$1.4 billion.

The lack of funds will force fire departments to forgo the regular thinning of brush and forest through controlled burns, which help reduce the number and severity of wildfires.

Fire seasons have lengthened considerably since the 1980s, and the amount of acres burned every year has doubled to more than 7 million. Over 1,000 homes were burned last year as more homes are being built where wildfires would normally break out.



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