

# Firefighter casualties mount from California wildfires

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Thousands of California firefighters assisted by firefighters from other states continue battling to control and extinguish 12 devastating forest and wild fires.

On Monday another firefighter, Matthew Burchett, 42, a member of forces sent in from the state of Utah, was killed at the Ranch Fire, which together with the River Fire form the massive Mendocino Complex fire, in Mendocino and Lake counties in the north central part of the state. These fires have burned over 688,000 acres (1,075 square miles) and damaged or destroyed over 2,000 structures.

In all, six firefighters have died on-duty this season in California, officially making 2018 the deadliest in the past decade.

Two firefighters, including Burchett, have been killed battling the Mendocino Complex fire and another eleven have been injured. Burchett and five of his comrades from the Draper City Fire Department had arrived from Utah on August 2. He was flown to a hospital, where he died. The exact cause of his death is still under investigation.

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) over 13,800 firefighters are on the front lines, including 2,000 inmates from the state's prisons who make \$1 per hour clearing brush as part of the efforts to stop the fires from spreading.

As of this week the Ranch fire remains active and is only about 70 percent contained. It is expected that it will not be contained until September 1. Cal Fire has now declared the Ranch Fire the largest fire in California's history.

This year's fires have hit firefighters and fire crews especially hard. In Redding, a bulldozer operator and a Pacific Gas and Electric worker were casualties of the Carr Fire in Shasta County in northern California. That

fire has destroyed over one thousand homes and continues to burn. In addition to the firefighters, four residents—including two children and their great grandmother—died in the Redding fire.

A Cal Fire mechanic who had been assigned to the Carr Fire died in a vehicle crash in Tehama County, south of Shasta.

On July 26, as the Carr Fire moved into the city of Redding, Jeremy Stoke, a fire prevention inspector, was killed as he was assisting residents in the city's western neighbor's evacuation.

The Carr fire has burnt 211,019 acres and was only 65 percent contained Tuesday night. Fire crews face extreme conditions from dense timber, dry undergrowth and strong winds. Due to its proximity to Redding, a city with a population exceeding 90,000, Carr has already destroyed 1600 buildings.

Two more firefighters fell victim to the Ferguson Fire in California's Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests, which has been burning for over a month. The fire was first reported on July 13 and has consumed over 39,100 hectares (96,600 acres), forcing the closure of parts of Yosemite National Park's campgrounds.

Braden Varney, a Cal Fire heavy-equipment operator, died on July 14 when his bulldozer overturned as he was cutting through the forest to create firebreaks.

Two weeks later, Brian Hughes, captain of the Arrowhead Interagency Hotshots, was killed when he was struck by a tree while working with his crew to set a backfire—a tactic designed to limit a fire's spread—on the east side of the blaze. He died before he could be taken to a hospital.

The wave of brush and forest fires, fueled by large quantities of dry underbrush acted on by record breaking heat, extend the length of the state from the Oregon border into southern California's Riverside and

Orange Counties.

The Natchez fire on the Oregon border has burnt 16,000 acres and is only fifty-five percent contained. The Donnel Fire in Tuolumne County, near the Nevada border, has burnt 30 thousand acres and is only 26 percent contained. The Hirz Fire in eastern Shasta County has so far destroyed 7,321 acres and is only five percent contained, while the Hat Fire, also in Shasta County has consumed 1,900 acres.

The Lions Fire, not far from the deadly Ferguson blaze and south of the Yosemite National Park, has burnt more than ten thousand acres and is seventy percent contained. The Lions fire, which began in June, has entered the Inyo National Forest on the California-Nevada border.

In the southern portion of the State, the Holy Fire which began last week has destroyed 23,000 acres in the Cleveland National Forest and threatens the city of Lake Elsinore and other communities in Orange and Riverside Counties.

The wave of fires is part of a phenomenon affecting the entire western United States, including the Pacific Northwest, Alaska and British Columbia in Canada.

Climate change has contributed to the increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires, putting ever greater pressure on inadequately funded firefighting and prevention resources across the regions. The fires are also contributing to increased air pollution in major population centers such as Seattle and San Francisco.

According to a report from the Weather Channel, wildfire smoke from the ongoing and mostly uncontained western fires has been detected in most US States, threatening a health emergency.

A blog page from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center states, "Smoke from the fires burning in British Columbia now stretches completely across Canada, with some of the plumes pushing well down into the United States (moving as far south as New Mexico, Arkansas and even northern Tennessee) and covering a large portion of the middle of the country."

The Weather Channel also indicated that "the National Weather Service has issued air quality alerts for parts of Washington, the chimney of Idaho, central California and northeastern Illinois, including Chicago, early this week because of poor air quality from the wildfire smoke." While most of the smoke is concentrated in the Pacific Northwest and British

Columbia, the most recent Goddard maps now show that the smoke has crossed the Atlantic and affects Ireland, Scotland and Southern Norway.



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