

As wildfires, power outages spread throughout California, tens of thousands ordered to evacuate

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High winds and extremely low humidity resulted in massive wildfires throughout the Los Angeles and Riverside county areas in Southern California on Friday.

The Los Angeles fire, known as the Saddleridge fire, has burned through more than 7,500 acres of the San Fernando Valley and has charred or destroyed at least 25 homes.

The fire, which broke out Thursday night, moved at a rate of 800 acres an hour at its peak intensity and is currently only 13 percent contained. Mandatory evacuations were issued to roughly 23,000 homes in an area covering more than 100,000 residents.

Weather forecasts predict that while conditions are steadily improving, winds up to 50 miles per hour and low humidity still pose a significant challenge for firefighters. Officials expect that it will take at least several days to get the blaze completely under control.

The fires in both Los Angeles and Riverside have been intense enough to prompt a state of emergency declaration by California governor Gavin Newsom.

In Riverside, 89-year-old Lois Arvickson died in the Sandalwood Fire, which has destroyed more than 76 structures as of this writing, including a number of homes. Neighbors reported seeing Arvickson get in her car to leave; however, the car was found still in the driveway when investigators arrived after the fire passed through the area. The Sandalwood Fire has grown to more than 820 acres and was only 10 percent contained as of Friday evening.

The blaze has led to the evacuation of more than 500 residences. A significant portion of the destroyed homes were located in the Calimesa Mobile Home Park, which was completely obliterated as a result of

the fire and which was also where the deceased Arvickson lived. Two other Calimesa residents have also been reported missing.

Another two fires are also currently moving through the Riverside Area including the 75-acre Wolf Fire and the 450-acre Reche Fire. The two are at 25 and 40 percent containment respectively.

“We’re being challenged with weather and wind,” Riverside County Fire Chief Todd Hopkins told reporters. “And we’re competing with resources right now due to all the other fire activity going on in Southern California.”

While the Saddleridge Fire has not yet led to any direct loss of life, at least one man in his 50s died of cardiac arrest after fighting the flames in front of his home. Numerous businesses and schools in the surrounding San Fernando Valley, with a population of 1.3 million people, were closed.

They are currently being ravaged by the Saddleridge Fire, which abuts this second most populous city in the country that has seen numerous wildfires over the past several years, all the result of insufficient funding to combat and prevent the fires along with increasing temperatures caused by man-made climate change.

Eleven years ago, the Sayre Fire destroyed 600 structures in the worst fire damage in Los Angeles’ history. That fire was propelled by hurricane-force winds leading to the grounding of water-dropping aircraft, only intensifying the damage and leading to the complete obliteration of the Oakridge mobile home park in which 480 residences, primarily owned or rented by workers and retirees, were completely burned to the ground.

Over the past ten years, such disasters have become

increasingly commonplace, culminating in last year's Camp Fire in Northern California. In an unprecedented incident of devastation, the Camp Fire completely destroyed the town of Paradise with a population of 26,000. Overall, the fire resulted in the destruction of more than 18,800 structures and led to 85 deaths.

The Camp Fire was in fact the most destructive wildfire in state history and was joined last year by the Ranch Fire which became the largest wildfire in state history in terms of area burned. More than 450,000 acres burned as a result of the Ranch Fire, which took nearly two months to fully contain.

Two years ago, California saw the 280,000-acre Thomas Fire, the second largest in state history along with the Tubbs Fire, which was the second most destructive in terms of buildings destroyed, second only to the Camp Fire.

Significant and decisive in causing the fires were the state's two largest electrical utility companies, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and Southern California Edison. In order to drive up shareholder value, the companies have deliberately refused to modernize outdated infrastructure and thereby reduce fire hazards.

Such modernization would include the burying of power lines, erecting steel power poles and more frequent maintenance activities, which they have steadfastly refused to do in spite of the fact that California residents pay almost double the national average on utilities as a result of the utility deregulation of the 1990s and 2000s.

After a number of independent investigations found PG&E responsible for a significant number of California wildfires, a large number of California residents sued the company for damages.

Rather than take steps to modernize infrastructure and take necessary steps to avert future disasters, PG&E instead filed for bankruptcy and has begun implementing deliberate power outages during peak fire conditions. The most recent outage that began earlier this week has left more than a million Northern California residents in the dark and threatened the lives of thousands of elderly and disabled residents who rely on constant sources of power to operate various medical devices.

For its part, Southern California Edison began cutting power to 13,000 customers in San Bernardino, Ventura, Kern and Los Angeles counties on Thursday. The

company says that the outages could be expanded to more than 173,000 customers in the nine counties it serves.



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