

New wildfires cause mass evacuations in California's Napa Valley

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28 September 2020

Warmer weather and wind gusts accelerated and sparked new fires across Central and Northern California on Sunday and Monday.

Early Monday morning, three fires erupted in Napa and Sonoma Counties, the Shady, Boysen and Glass fires. They quickly merged into one, the Glass Fire, which has burned more than 11,000 acres by Monday morning, including several structures, wineries and an inn. It is burning uncontrolled.

Areas east of the city of Santa Rosa (population 177,000), were quickly overtaken by flames. More than 53,000 people were evacuated in the northern counties of Napa, Sonoma, Butte and Shasta—26,000 in Santa Rosa. Many others have been warned to prepare to flee on short notice, as fire fighters confront new blazes.

Shortly after 2 a.m. on Monday morning, Santa Rosa city buses were sent to the Oakmont Village retirement community in eastern Santa Rosa, population 4,500, in order to evacuate hundreds of elderly residents as flames from the Sandy and Glass fires moved west from Napa County and consumed homes in the outer neighborhoods of Santa Rosa.

CBS News described how residents of the Oakmont Gardens, a senior living center within Oakmont Village, lined up early Monday morning, many of them in wheelchairs and walkers, with the few belongings that they were able to carry, as the advancing flames lit up the sky: “The buses drove through clouds of embers as they escaped to an evacuation center at the Santa Rosa Veteran Auditorium. But by 3:11 a.m., the elderly residents were on the move again as officials—‘out of an abundance of caution’—the Veterans building and the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds were closing as shelters and evacuees were moved to the safer confines of Petaluma.”

In addition to the evacuations in Oakmont Village,

residents of other eastern Santa Rosa neighborhoods (Pythian, Calistoga, Melita, Stonebridge and Skyhawk) were ordered to evacuate by the Santa Rosa police. A still undetermined number of homes have burned in Skyhawk and Oakmont. The main road through these neighborhoods was gridlocked, as residents evacuated the area.

As the flames spread, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), the electricity monopoly that serves Northern California, announced the cut-off of services for 37,000 households near the Glass Fire. These cut-offs are in addition to the 90,000 households that had already been blacked out by the so-called Public Safety Power Shutoff initiated by PG&E on Sunday evening in response to the wind gusts.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Safety (Cal Fire) confronted high winds in the entire region through Monday night. Over 8,000 structures, mostly homes, were under direct threat.

North of Santa Rosa, the gigantic August Fire (45 percent contained) in the Mendocino National Forest has grown to 878,000 acres and continued to expand to the west over the weekend, prompting evacuations in Trinity and Humboldt Counties.

In Butte County, northeast of Santa Rosa and north of Sacramento, households in the towns of Paradise and Magalia were asked to voluntarily evacuate. Both of those towns were destroyed by the Camp Fire in 2018, as high winds accelerated the uncontrolled northern edge of the North Complex fire.

Both towns are once again at the mercy of extreme wind conditions. The latest fire, which began on August 17, has burned more than 306,000 acres and is 78 percent contained, but northeast winds throughout the weekend helped spark new blazes.

About 80 miles north of the North Complex Fire, and

only a few miles west of Redding California (pop. 92,000) in Shasta County, a new conflagration, the Zogg Fire, began on Sunday afternoon, and is now burning uncontrolled; by Monday morning, it had consumed 15,000 acres.

According to Cal-Fire the cause of the most recent series of wild-fires is critical fire weather—extremely low humidity across the state combined by high wind gusts and high temperatures. These critical fire weather conditions are igniting new fires, caused by wind-driven embers.

The latest rash of wildfires adds to what has already been a historic and devastating fire season in California. So far this year, more than 8,100 wildfires have ignited statewide—burning more than 3.7 million acres, killing 26 people and consuming over 7,000 structures.

Red Flag Warning remains in effect through today throughout much of Northern California. A Red Flag Warning has also been declared for the chain of mountains that surround Los Angeles and stretch to San Diego County and the US-Mexico border.

There's more than a parallel between the wildfires crisis in the western US and the coronavirus pandemic: just like all other problems of contemporary society, by ignoring or neglecting science and refusing to address social needs, the profit system has created literally incendiary conditions in which the working class suffers the deadliest consequences and the most vulnerable layers of society, such as the elderly, have their lives put at risk on a daily basis.



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