

# Southern California wildfires continue to burn as high wind warning takes effect

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*The WSWS asks all our readers in the Los Angeles area to write to us here or comment below about their experiences with the fires.*

The ongoing Palisades and Eaton fires in the Los Angeles area, which have already destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 25 people, threaten the further devastation of lives and livelihoods as more violent winds are forecast across Southern California this week.

The National Weather Service has declared a high-wind warning between 4 a.m. Tuesday through noon Wednesday for the northern San Fernando Valley and eastern Ventura County.

“It’s a heightened state of alert,” James Brotherton, meteorologist for the National Weather Service stated. “That’s basically very dry conditions in the air and very dry conditions on the ground combined with very strong winds. All three of those critical ingredients are at extreme levels.”

The high winds could reach up to 35 mph for areas affected by the Palisades and Eaton fires although winds up to about 70 mph are also possible for the surrounding areas. The danger is that strong winds could carry hot embers miles ahead of any fire, landing on dry brush near houses or buildings, which then ignite even more fires across the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

The scope of the destruction has surpassed any natural disaster in recent US history, including Hurricane Katrina, with Accuweather currently projecting up to \$275 billion in damage and economic losses. It has been reported that two new fires have started in Riverside County, near the cities of Jurupa Valley and Hemet, prompting more evacuation orders for that area.

Ignited last week by record-breaking 100-mph Santa Ana winds, the fires have destroyed over 12,000 structures as well as key infrastructure such as gas stations, pipelines, roads, bridges and power lines, amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars. Schools,

businesses and houses of worship have been destroyed, creating a mass of unemployed and homeless workers virtually overnight.

One section of the working class that has been especially hit are teachers. According to the Pasadena Unified School District, 300 of their 1,500 teachers and staff have lost their homes in the disaster and are scrambling to find housing in time for the resumption of classes next week.

To compound the disaster, rental and utility prices are skyrocketing in the aftermath of this climate-change fueled disaster. The Los Angeles area has been facing a cost-of-living crisis for decades, but the recent wildfires turned the situation from worse to untenable, as landlords have begun to charge rents for new tenants as high as \$35,000 to \$40,000 a month to those who are desperate or wealthy enough to pay.

At the same time, the fires are being used to further the anti-immigrant agenda of President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office in less than seven days. In a recent post on his TruthSocial account, the fascist and would-be dictator blamed the California fires on “illegal immigrants.”

“An illegal immigrant comes and sets your house on fire and the fire department doesn’t have the resources to put it out. The home owner paid for their own destruction,” the incoming president frothed.

Trump continued, falsely posing as on the side of those who have lost everything, “On top of that, the government is so inept that the insurance companies won’t insure houses here anymore, so the home owner is left with nothing.”

House Speaker Mike Johnson and other Republicans declared Monday that they supported placing conditions on federal relief aid to victims of the fire because voters in the state have elected Democrats.

California Governor Gavin Newsom's recent invitation

to Donald Trump to visit the state and discuss the wildfire response highlights the Democrats' willingness to collaborate, even as the incoming president's threats persist.

Numerous scientific studies have shown that the increasingly intense wildfires and extended wildfire season faced by California are the direct result of capitalist-induced climate change. The inability of fire departments to properly respond, and the fact that homes and other buildings are vulnerable to fires in the first place, are the result of the subjugation of public health and safety to private profit through repeated budget cuts by Democratic and Republican administrations.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several evacuees at the Pasadena Convention Center as they waited in line for access to donations and other aid.

Larry Livingston, who works for the University of Southern California (USC) school of music, read the leaflet passed out to workers by the WSWs and exclaimed to reporters, "Everybody in this line should read this leaflet. It's true!" He explained that his house survived and that his family was "very lucky."

"Our house still stands, but across the street, that house is gone," he said. "Two houses to the left and to the right are okay, but the houses after that are gone. The fire somehow, maybe thanks to the firefighters, came up the canyon and made a 'Y' around our house."

Larry stated that the problems facing workers are on a more "fundamental level."

"Why are we facing this? We have a whole bunch of people, including the moron who is going to be president, who does not believe in climate change. Actually, we don't know what he thinks, because he only wants to think about him[self] and be rich."

Esther Espinoza and her husband Kevin Bartholow lost their RV in Altadena. Esther said, "We had an RV. That was our home. It was completely burned.

"I'm actually not working right now. I was working for a family-owned business. I have an interview tomorrow at the airport."

Kevin, who works as a tattoo artist, explained to reporters about the time he spent as a firefighter while incarcerated in the state of Oregon.

"Yeah, so when I was incarcerated in Oregon, they had a work program out there that allows inmates to get time off their sentences and stuff like that.

"We would be on the chain out there for two weeks straight, and then come back and we make less than \$20 a month. And that's for over nine hours a day. We got

showers once a week. We got no visitation, no phone calls, I couldn't make calls to my wife."

"We worked nonstop, nonstop," he added. "And we were on call. It didn't matter. So when the firefighters went home, they put us out to run the lines. You know when firefighters get tired they would send us back on the field to run lines."

"Yeah it's pretty much in every state and that's how it works, and it's supposed to be an incentive thing, like you're glad to have that happen but it's absolutely not."

Shirley Peneleu, a senior at John Muir High School, was in line with her mother, whose family has lived in the area for about 20 years. They informed the WSWs that their home was lost in the fire.

"We saw the fire, but it didn't look close at all," Peneleu said. "So we weren't really worried about it, but then the night started and we could smell the smoke coming closer and closer. And then we started getting scared.

"We then heard the police knocking on the doors, so we went to a friend's house in Pasadena and then by 3 a.m. the house was already burned down. It was very crazy. There was nothing. The cars burned down, our house, just everything."

Peneleu then spoke on the use of private firefighters used by oligarchs such as billionaire businessman Rick Caruso.

"I think that's very crazy," Shirley said, "and I have no words for it because it's very sad how they are hiring private firefighters for their houses while other people's houses, like ours, have no protection.

"So I think that's very unfair and the use of prison labor is very unfair because they are prisoners. They shouldn't be risking their lives to help with the fire."



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