

Hawk Fire threatens Reno, Nevada, forcing tens of thousands to evacuate

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The dangerous Hawk Fire continued to burn Monday outside Reno, the center of Nevada's second-largest metropolitan area, after forcing tens of thousands of people from their homes and covering large sections of the city in smoke.

By Monday afternoon, the fire had consumed 15,051 acres of grass and brush in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Officials reported that it was 27 percent contained, up from zero containment earlier in the day. The fire began Saturday near Hawk Meadow Trail, approximately one mile north of Cold Creek Trail in the Somersett area of northwest Reno.

Officials have determined that the fire was caused by human activity but have not said how it started or whether it was accidental or deliberate.

At the height of the emergency Sunday, approximately 90,000 people were living within mandatory evacuation or "Get Set" warning zones. Around 42,000 were ordered to leave their homes, while another 45,000 were warned to prepare to evacuate.

By Monday afternoon, the mandatory evacuation zone had been reduced to approximately 23,000 residents, with another 40,000 remaining under evacuation warnings. Officials cautioned that the situation remained volatile and that shifting winds could rapidly alter the fire's direction.

The city of Reno has a population of approximately 283,000, while the larger Reno-Sparks metropolitan area is home to more than half a million people.

During a Monday afternoon news conference, fire officials reported that at least 32 homes had been destroyed and six more severely damaged. The number is expected to rise as assessment teams gain access to burned neighborhoods.

At least seven people, including four civilians and three firefighters, have been injured. No fatalities had been reported as of Monday afternoon, although canine teams were still searching damaged areas.

More than 900 firefighters and support personnel were involved in the response by Monday afternoon. Crews have been drawn from 15 states as well as Australia and New Zealand. Fire engines, helicopters, bulldozers and other

heavy equipment have been deployed in an effort to prevent the flames from spreading farther into populated neighborhoods.

The international mobilization of firefighters underscores both the immense courage of the crews confronting the flames and the increasingly widespread character of the wildfire crisis. Firefighters are being moved across states and continents as simultaneous fires strain local emergency resources.

Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo declared a state of emergency and deployed elements of the Nevada National Guard. Police and Guard soldiers have been stationed throughout affected areas. Residents reported military personnel manning checkpoints to prevent people from returning to neighborhoods still covered by evacuation orders.

The fire has also severely damaged the region's electrical infrastructure. NV Energy reported Monday afternoon that nearly 10,000 customers remained without electricity, while gas service had been shut off to approximately 250 customers.

More than 100 power poles were damaged or destroyed. Two high-voltage transmission lines were de-energized after the fire threatened electrical infrastructure, producing outages across a much broader area.

NV Energy said it could not provide an estimated time for the restoration of power in areas closest to the fire. Damaged poles and power lines must be replaced before service can resume, leaving thousands of displaced residents uncertain when they will be able to return home.

Nearly all schools in the Washoe County School District canceled classes Monday, while the entire district remains closed Tuesday.

The University of Nevada, Reno, however, ordered more than 24,000 students, along with faculty and other staff, to report for the first day of fall classes Monday.

University President Brian Sandoval acknowledged in a message that "significant areas of northern Reno" remained "under direct evacuation orders or preparing for evacuation"

and that residents were confronting “anxiety and uncertainty.”

Sandoval nevertheless declared that the university campus was safe and outside the evacuation and “Get Ready” zones. Regular classes and operations proceeded at the university’s main Reno campus, Redfield campus and Lake Tahoe campus.

Sandoval’s message combined empty appeals for “patience, grace and understanding” with instructions to continue classes as thousands of students and workers were displaced, without electricity or helping family members evacuate.

Students, faculty and staff expressed outrage on social media.

“One-third of my department is out today,” one person wrote on the Reno subreddit. “I have reports from other friends’ departments that they have individuals sleeping at work. Inconsiderate and disrespectful.”

Another commenter, who identified themselves as an alumnus and former university employee, wrote:

Disappointed but not surprised. I’m alum and a previous employee. The planning for any kind of issue like this (fire, snow, covid, flooding...) has always been terrible. They drag their feet until the last possible minute on making decisions.

There’s been times when they have to call a snow day after the first classes start because so many people can’t make it in. At that point people are already stuck on campus or stuck trying to get there. I know some of it has to do with funding and program accreditation, but safety needs to come first.

The Hawk Fire is part of a summer of intensifying wildfires stretching from Canada to Washington and Oregon, and across Western Europe. Earlier this month, more than 65,000 people were evacuated from Spokane, Washington, as fires tore through working class neighborhoods. Fires have also burned across Ontario, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and Greece.

The fact that officials believe the Hawk Fire was started by a person does not diminish the role of climate change. Human activity may have supplied the initial spark, but record heat, prolonged drought, low humidity and dry vegetation created the conditions for the fire to spread rapidly toward a major urban center.

More than 50,000 wildfires have been recorded across the United States this year, the highest number in a decade. Scientists have long warned that rising global temperatures

are producing longer fire seasons and conditions in which fires spread more rapidly and burn with greater intensity.

At the same time, a powerful high-pressure system has subjected much of the Southwest and southern Plains to dangerous temperatures. The National Weather Service forecast daytime highs of between 100 and 110 degrees across the southern Plains and temperatures reaching 115 degrees in parts of the Southwest. Large sections of Nevada, Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas are experiencing triple-digit heat.

Workers in construction, agriculture, delivery, warehouses and other industries are being compelled to labor under conditions that can rapidly produce dehydration, heat exhaustion and fatal heat stroke.

These disasters are the consequences of a social order that subordinates the environment and human life to private profit. For decades, the fossil fuel corporations and the governments that serve them have blocked even limited measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, firefighting services, electrical infrastructure, public health systems and emergency planning have been starved of the resources required to protect the population.

The scientific knowledge, technology and productive capacity exist to combat climate change, modernize infrastructure and protect every worker and family threatened by fires and extreme heat. What prevents their use is the capitalist profit system and the division of the world into rival nation-states.

A serious response requires the international socialist reorganization of economic life. The energy giants and major corporations must be placed under public ownership and democratic working class control. Vast resources must be directed toward firefighting, climate-resilient infrastructure and safe housing. All displaced families must be fully compensated, while workers unable to report because of evacuation orders, toxic smoke or dangerous heat must receive their full income.



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