

Wildfires Burn Dozens Of Houses In California

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National Report

The New York Times

Wildfires Burn Dozens Of Houses In California

By Associated Press
SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — A fire that burned out of control for nearly 24 hours in the San Jose area of California Tuesday night destroyed dozens of homes and forced thousands of people to flee.

The fire, which started in a field near the town of San Jose, burned for more than 24 hours before being brought under control Tuesday night. It destroyed at least 100 homes and forced thousands of people to flee.

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Area residents looking over the remains of the house destroyed near San Luis Obispo, Calif., after a fire consumed the village. Three more houses were consumed and 100 square miles were threatened in the fire.

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Fire burned down three homes and forced thousands of people to flee in San Luis Obispo.

35 Are Injured By a Tornado In S. Carolina

A TORNADO THAT RIPPED THROUGH a residential neighborhood in South Carolina Tuesday night injured 35 people and destroyed several homes.

The tornado, which was about 100 yards wide, struck the neighborhood in the early morning hours. It destroyed several homes and injured 35 people.

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Director of N.A.A.C.P. Is Fighting for Survival

Money Woes May Force Chavis Out

By Associated Press

The rise of the white-supremacist movement in the South and the decline of the civil rights movement in the North have put the N.A.A.C.P. in a difficult position.

The N.A.A.C.P. is facing a crisis of leadership. The current director, Jesse Jackson, is facing criticism from within the organization.

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The Rev. Jesse Jackson Jr., executive director of the National Association of African American Business and Economic Development, is seen right of Rev. Jesse Jackson Jr. in front of a crowd.

A fire set by an arsonist and fueled by 100-degree heat and erratic winds raced through dry canyons in coastal Central California today, burning about 42,000 acres and forcing hundreds of people to flee.

By late afternoon, at least 37 houses were destroyed, and the fire, roaring through dry oaks and brush, was closing in on San Luis Obispo, about 150 miles northwest of Los Angeles.

Residents of this town were told to be ready to evacuate if the winds blowing southeast suddenly shifted to the northwest, as they have every evening, putting the city of 43,700 directly in harm's way.

Late today, officials said the fire was only 30 percent contained. "The fire is still certainly out of control," said Capt. Steve W. Mellow of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. "It is just as bad as they get. They don't get much worse."

The fire was set on Sunday in a rugged area near a campground in nearby Los Padres National Forest, said Bob Bergstrom, a captain in the California forestry department. There are no suspects, he said, but what he described as an ignition device was found at the site. Sudden Wind Shift

At first the fire burned west toward the ocean, but the winds suddenly shifted toward the southeast, and the flames devoured the brown hills and vineyards and jumped Highway 101, a main north-south artery in California.

A 35-mile section of the highway north from San Luis Obispo was closed, as was Highway 41, near Morro Bay.

All day, the sun was blocked by a large, dark cloud of ash, which stretched for miles inland from the coast, and 100-foot flames could be seen on the hillsides.

Officials said the fire quickly fanned out of control, consuming 5,000 acres an hour at its worst, because the thick brush in the area had not burned in 50 years. "It is a fuel-fed fire," said Gerilynn Haertsch, a Los Angeles County firefighter who is an information officer here. "It has 50-year-old chaparral in areas of steep terrain."

More than 1,600 firefighters from around the state focused their efforts primarily on saving lives and buildings. The authorities said that about 500 structures were in danger this evening. University Campus Evacuated

The California Polytechnic State University on the edge of San Luis Obispo was evacuated as the fire scorched 75 acres of campus range land. Classes at the 15,500-student university do not start until Sept. 19.

All the houses that burned were in the Tassajara area north of the town of Santa Margarita, about nine miles from here.

The blaze was set at 4 P.M. on Sunday at the 2,600-foot level off Highway 41, Mr. Bergstrom said. The steep terrain made it difficult for firefighters to reach the area, he said, and temperatures over 100 degrees the past two days combined also contributed to the rapid spread of the fire.

"This is just a big nasty fire and it is just going to take them a while to get a handle on it," said Lisa Boyd, a spokeswoman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

California's fire season is just entering its peak period, which runs from August to November, and Ms. Boyd predicted more blazes like the one here, which is the worst so far this year.

"It has been fairly bad so far," she said of the fire season so far. "If the weather pattern continues the way it is we could see conditions even worse come October."

The Mayor of San Luis Obispo, Peg Pinard, told residents to listen to their radios for instructions on whether to flee their homes.

Several residents in the area said they were aware of the fire risks. "Every year since we've lived here, there has been an arson fire on Highway 41," Karen Robles of Summit Hills told The Associated Press. "We knew what we were getting into when we built there. So you get insurance, and you take your chances."

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