

New fires break out in California as wine country fires dim

October 17 2017, by Sudhin Thanawala And Terry Chea



A fire burns atop Mount Wilson, seen from Pasadena, Calif., northeast of Los Angeles on Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2017. The fire erupted in the early morning on the 5,713-foot (1,741-meter) peak, near the region's TV and radio broadcast towers and the historic Mount Wilson Observatory. (AP Photo/John Antczak)

As crews gained on the wildfires in California wine country, new blazes broke out in other parts of the state, including a fire in the mountains above Los Angeles that threatened a historic observatory Tuesday and

more flames in the Santa Cruz mountains.

Firefighters on the ground and in the air raced to protect the Mount Wilson Observatory and nearby communications towers from a growing brush [fire](#) northeast of LA. The blaze was initially estimated at around 5 acres (2 hectares). The observatory, which has been evacuated, opened in 1917 and houses the 100-inch Hooker Telescope, one of the most advanced telescopes of the first half of the 20th century.

Farther north, a fire that sprang up late Monday in the mountains of the southern Bay Area blackened at least 150 acres and threatened 150 homes, which prompted evacuation orders. Smoke was descending into the coastal beach town of Santa Cruz.

Winds remained light, but conditions were also dry. Crews dropped water on the blaze, which started as a structure fire of some kind.

"The idea is to hit it pretty hard with aircraft and hit it with ground resources at the same time," said Rob Sherman, a division chief at the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Five firefighters suffered minor injuries, including one who slipped down a ravine.



Authorities sift through the burned area of a home as they search for victims at Coffey Park area of Santa Rosa, Calif., Monday, Oct. 16, 2017. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

In the state's wine-making region, tens of thousands of people began drifting back to their neighborhoods. Some returned to find their homes gone.

The deadliest wildfires in California history have been burning for more than a week, killing at least 41 people and destroying nearly 6,000 homes. About 34,000 people remained under evacuation Tuesday, down from 40,000 on Monday.

"It's never going to be the same," said Rob Brown, a supervisor in Mendocino County, where all 8,000 evacuees were cleared to go [home](#) Monday. "You're going to have to seek a new normal."

The thousands of calls coming from concerned residents in neighboring Sonoma County "have shifted from questions about evacuation to questions about coping," Sonoma County Supervisor Shirlee Zane said.

"Many people who call are sad and worried. The shock has worn off," and depression is setting in.



Workers at the Signorello Estate winery install new irrigation pipes to replace ones burned by wildfire Monday, Oct. 16, 2017, in Napa, Calif. State and local officials say they are trying to get people back into their homes, but they cautioned that it could take days and even weeks for neighborhoods hard hit by Northern California wildfires. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

As a former grief therapist, she advised people with a family member or loved one who has lost everything to understand they can't fix this but they can offer support.

"Provide a compassionate listening ear right now, and let them feel whatever they're feeling," Zane said.

And those who must rebuild from nothing are in for a changed life.

"You're in for decades," Brown said. "You'll see benefits within years, but you're literally in for decades of recovery."

Jennifer Kelly and her husband and three sons lost their home and everything in it to a fire in Middletown in Lake County two years ago.



Chris Alejos, left, and his wife, Brittany, get help from friend Nick Cann as they remove a bed frame from their home in the Coffey Park area of Santa Rosa, Calif. Monday, Oct. 16, 2017. The Alejos home was not damaged by the fire that destroyed homes all around theirs, but smoke damage and no power made it unlivable for now. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

With the new home 95 percent rebuilt, they get nervous when they hear distant sirens or helicopters and air tankers. Far-off plumes of smoke bring on-again, off-again evacuation orders.

"I'm pretty anxious," she said Sunday. "We wake up a few times a night. One time last week we saw red on the horizon, which was a little intimidating."

The Kellys are ready to evacuate. Since they started from scratch two years ago, there's not much to put in their van aside from their pets.

They have talked about what they will do if it happens again: "We're moving far away, to Wyoming," she said.

The return home was emotional even for those whose properties were spared.



Tyler Knapp looks over the burned remains of a pickup truck in Santa Rosa, Calif. Monday, Oct. 16, 2017.(AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

"When we came up to check on it, we were amazed it was here," said Tom Beckman. "All the trivial things we have to work on—cleaning up, replacing the stuff in the fridge and freezer—that's nothing compared to my friends who lost their homes."

In the hard-hit city of Santa Rosa, two hospitals were forced to close during the fires, leaving just one open, St. Joseph Health.

Eighty-three hospital employees and 51 doctors lost homes during the fires, though many continued to report to work.

"We expect the number to go up," said St. Joseph Health spokeswoman

Vanessa DeGier.

There was also good news to report.



A house stands intact above one that was destroyed by wildfire near Atlas Peak Road Monday, Oct. 16, 2017, in Napa, Calif. State and local officials say they are trying to get people back into their homes, but they cautioned that it could take days and even weeks for neighborhoods hard hit by Northern California wildfires. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

A total of 36 babies were born at St. Joseph during the week since wildfires started, which represents about three times the normal delivery rate.

"All of those babies are doing very well," said Vicki White, chief nursing

officer.

Improving weather, the prospect of some light rain later in the week and tightening containment of the flames were tempered by the first death from the firefighting effort—a driver who was killed when his truck overturned on a winding mountain road.

The truck driver, who had been delivering water to the fire lines, crashed before dawn Monday in Napa County on a roadway that climbs from vineyards into the mountains.

In the historic main square of the wine and tourist town of Sonoma, a statue of the community's 19th-century founder was draped with signs thanking firefighters who have saved the town from disaster.

"The love in the air is thicker than the smoke," read a sign on the bench that displays the statue of Gen. Mariano Vallejo, which was wearing a face mask.



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