

California sent fire danger text alert to 12 million people

December 8 2017, by John Antczak And Brian Melley



Palm trees sway in a gust of wind as a firefighter carries a water hose while battling a wildfire at Faria State Beach in Ventura, Calif., Thursday, Dec. 7, 2017. The wind-swept blazes have forced tens of thousands of evacuations and destroyed dozens of homes. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

Millions of Southern Californians already dealing with a siege of destructive wildfires received an unprecedented text alert warning them to be ready for extreme fire potential early Thursday, but conditions

turned out to be less dire than predicted even though strong Santa Ana winds were blowing.

Kelly Huston, deputy director of the state Office of Emergency Services, said it was the broadest alert the office has ever sent and reached an estimated 12 million people in seven counties.

"I would rather be criticized for potentially annoying someone, than for not delivering a critical alert under these dangerous fire conditions," Huston said.

The office erred on the side of caution because conditions were similar to those that led to 44 deaths in wind-whipped fires that broke out across Northern California on Oct. 8, he said.

Many residents of the Northern California fire zones have complained they did not receive alerts, and their representatives announced Thursday they will introduce legislation to establish statewide emergency alert protocols and require all counties to adopt up-to-date systems with operators trained to implement evacuations.

The alert sent Wednesday night to Southern California only advised of dangerous conditions, not evacuations.

It said: "Strong winds overnight creating extreme fire danger. Stay alert. Listen to authorities."



A pickup truck passes a wildfire burning along the 101 Freeway in Ventura, Calif., Thursday, Dec. 7, 2017. The wind-swept blazes have forced tens of thousands of evacuations and destroyed dozens of homes. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

The alert came hours after Ken Pimlott, director of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, told reporters that a color-coded danger scale had reached purple, which was never used previously, and winds could reach 80 mph.

Purple is part of the "Santa Ana Wildfire Threat Index " produced by the U.S. Forest Service, the National Interagency Coordination Center's Predictive Services and other collaborators to categorize Santa Ana winds according to fire potential.

The threat index uses a predictive model that incorporates moisture

levels of dead and live vegetation and weather models, including wind speeds and atmospheric moisture, to produce a six-day forecast for potentially large fires. The result is then compared to climate data and the historical record of fires to create the rating.

On Thursday, the National Weather Service said there was a "burst" of winds Wednesday night that subsided and that it appeared models may have "over forecast" Thursday's [wind](#) event.

Nonetheless, parts of Southern California still were buffeted by [strong winds](#), including 88 mph (142 kph) in San Diego County and 85 mph (137 kph) in Ventura County, where the largest [fire](#) is burning.



Traffic moves along the 101 Freeway as smoke from a wildfire fills the air in Ventura, Calif., Thursday, Dec. 7, 2017. The wind-swept blazes have forced tens of thousands of evacuations and destroyed dozens of homes. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



A firefighter battles a wildfire in Ojai, Calif., on Thursday, Dec. 7, 2017. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)



In this Wednesday, Dec. 6, 2017 photo, embers fly from a tree as wind whips through a wildfire in Ojai, Calif. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)



Firefighters battle a wildfire in Ojai, Calif., on Thursday, Dec. 7, 2017. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)



Firefighter Patrick Larsen, of San Luis Obispo, battles a wildfire in Ojai, Calif., on Thursday, Dec. 7, 2017. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)



Flames consume a home as a wildfire burns in Ojai, Calif., on Thursday, Dec. 7, 2017. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)

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