

Southern California wildfires burning unchecked

October 12 2019, by Jocelyne Zablit



A firefighter walks near flames during the Saddleridge fire in southern California

Gusting winds fueling a fast-moving wildfire in southern California showed no signs of abating Saturday as a blaze that forced the evacuation of some 100,000 people kept burning out of control.

A red flag warning of critical [fire](#) danger—[strong winds](#) and very low humidity—has been extended into the weekend, the National Weather Service said.

Firefighters said people have taken evacuation orders seriously in the so-called Saddleridge fire burning in the San Fernando Valley area of greater Los Angeles.

"The fact that [community members](#) heeded evacuation warnings early made a huge difference, allowing firefighters to enter those communities and protect properties," Los Angeles County Fire Chief Deputy Dave Richardson said Friday evening.

Still, some homeowners were seen using garden hoses to try to put out flames on their property, officials said.

As of Friday night, the Saddleridge Fire, the strongest of several burning in southern California, had consumed 7,552 acres (3,056 hectares) in areas of the valley, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of downtown Los Angeles, fire officials said.

They added that it had damaged or destroyed at least 31 structures and was 19 percent contained.

One man in his 50s died of a heart attack as he struggled to save his home, fire officials said.



Firefighters watch a helicopter drop water on a burning hillside in Porter Ranch, California on October 11, 2019

The fire broke out Thursday night and quickly grew out of control for unknown reasons in the city of Sylmar, driven by low humidity and gusts known as the Santa Ana winds.

"This is a very dynamic fire," Los Angeles Fire Department Chief Ralph Terrazas told a news conference.

"Do not wait to leave," he urged residents. "If we ask you to evacuate, please evacuate."

He said some 1,000 firefighters, backed by water-dropping helicopters

and planes releasing fire retardants, were battling the blaze that forced the shutdown of several major highways. The metro line in the area was also closed as were schools and businesses.

"We've calculated that the fire is moving at a rate of 800 acres per hour," Terrazas said, adding that it would probably take days to get it under control.

Some 200 firefighters were meanwhile battling several other blazes in Riverside County, east of Los Angeles, including one that tore through a trailer park and was started by burning trash.

That blaze, dubbed the Sandalwood fire, destroyed 76 homes and buildings and killed an 89-year-old woman who was unable to escape the flames.

There were no immediate reports of injuries, but authorities ordered several hundred homes in the area be evacuated.

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