

# US nuclear weapons plant says open as normal after wildfires closure

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A US nuclear weapons plant said it would be open as usual after pausing operations due to wildfires near Amarillo, Texas.

A nuclear weapons plant in the US state of Texas said it would be open as usual on Wednesday after raging wildfires caused it to pause

operations and led to evacuations in the area.

Five fires were burning uncontained early Wednesday near the northern city of Amarillo, with the largest blaze—known as the Smokehouse Creek Fire—having burnt 300,000 acres, according to the Texas A&M Forest Service.

Satellite imagery showed fires spreading southwards near Amarillo, fanned by strong winds and unseasonably warm temperatures, according to the local office of the National Weather Service.

"The Pantex Plant is open for normal day shift operations for Wednesday, February 28; all personnel are to report for duty according to their assigned schedule," plant operators said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

The Pantex facility, located 21 miles (34 kilometres) from Amarillo, assembles and disassembles the United States' nuclear stockpiles, carries out special nuclear material testing and manufactures high explosives.

The plant had earlier announced it was halting operations and had constructed a fire barrier to protect its facilities. It also said only essential staff remained at the facility overnight.

"Operations at the Pantex Plant have paused until further notice. All weapons and special materials are safe and unaffected," it said on Tuesday evening.

The plant did not specify on Wednesday whether the danger had passed.

Across Texas, 25 of 31 active fires were under control, Texas A&M Forest Service data showed.

## Evacuations

Texas governor Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration for 60 counties on Tuesday, freeing up fire response resources.



Five fires were burning uncontained early Wednesday near the northern Texas city of Amarillo.

"Texans are urged to limit activities that could create sparks and take precautions to keep their loved ones safe," Abbott said in a statement.

Amarillo's weather service warned people to stay indoors.

"Air quality remains poor in the Amarillo area... as smoke continues to stream southward," it said in a post on X.

Several towns, some up to 100 miles (160 kilometres) from Amarillo, issued evacuation orders, closing roads and ordering citizens to take shelter at home or in public facilities.

Fires reportedly caused serious damage to buildings in Texas's Hutchinson county.

More than 200 people were sheltering in a church in Fritch, 35 miles from Amarillo, after fires caused them to flee their homes, media reported.

"We have a lot of people at the facility who confirmed they lost their homes," church pastor Dwight Kirksey told CNN.

"Of course, they're devastated and heartbroken."

Melanie McQuiddy, a motel manager, told CNN she had evacuated her town of Canadian as fires burned 10 miles away.

"It looks like Armageddon. All the trees are covered in white ash," she said.

More than 4,000 Texans were left without power as of early Wednesday, according to the US outage tracker PowerOutage.

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