

California wildfires: Governor brands fires 'new normal'

2 hours ago



Image copyright

NASA/EPA

Image caption

Satellite imagery shows the vast Thomas Fire, north of Los Angeles, which has spread as far as the Pacific coast

Devastating wildfires fuelled by climate change are "the new normal", California's governor has said.

Jerry Brown said vast fires, such as the ones that have ravaged southern California in recent days, "could happen every year or every few years".

"We're facing a new reality in this state," he said. Mr Brown made the comments after surveying the damage in Ventura County, north of Los Angeles.

Thousands of firefighters have been battling the fires since Monday.

Mr Brown, a Democrat who has attacked the Trump administration's stance on climate change, said: "We're facing a new reality in this state, where fires threaten people's lives, their properties, their neighbourhoods, and of course billions and billions of dollars.

"With climate change, some scientists are saying southern California is literally burning up."

The largest wildfire - known as the Thomas Fire - burned close to 150,000 acres, an area of land roughly the size of Chicago, Reuters reported.

On Saturday, firefighters began to make progress in containing the blaze.

What happened?



Media caption

Large parts of southern California have been affected

Six large wildfires, and some smaller blazes, erupted on Monday night in southern California. Fanned by high winds, they swept through tens of thousands of acres in a matter of hours.

The fires have been driven by extreme weather, including low humidity and parched ground.

Authorities issued a purple alert - the highest level warning - amid what it called "extremely critical fire weather".

The largest of the blazes, the Thomas fire in Ventura County, spread as far as the Pacific coast and swept across 180 square miles (466 sq km).

About 5,700 firefighters were brought in to battle the brushfires, with some drafted in from neighbouring states to help.

US President Donald Trump issued a state of emergency to "help alleviate the hardship and suffering that the emergency may inflict."



Image copyright

AFP

Image caption

The Thomas fire in Ventura County swept across 180 square miles (466 sq km)

How much damage is there?

Hundreds of buildings have been destroyed and vast areas of land have been badly scorched.

Three firefighters were injured and one death was reported after a 70-year-old woman was found dead in her car on an evacuation route.

Nearly 200,000 residents were evacuated from their homes, with many forced to flee in the middle of the night as the flames rapidly spread.

There are fears the blaze will seriously hit California's multi-million dollar agricultural industry.

About 90% of US avocados are grown in California, and much of the state's crop has been wiped out.

What next?



Media caption

Drivers filmed the flames from their cars near Bel Air

The strong winds subsided on Saturday and firefighters finally made some progress in containing the fires.

But forecasters expect the winds to pick up again on Sunday meaning they are under pressure to extinguish them quickly.

"We continue to make real good progress on all of these fires. But we're far from being out of the woods on any of them," fire department director Ken Pimlott said. Elsewhere, several evacuation orders have been lifted and residents are beginning to return home to assess the damage.

California fires rage into second week as massive blazes are

‘expected to spread’

By Rob Kuznia, [Mark Berman](#), Max Ufberg and Soo Youn
December 10 at 10:31 AM

1:34

‘It’s not done.’ Calif. residents weigh options as fires continue

VENTURA, Calif. — Raging wildfires continued to burn through Southern California on Sunday, stretching into a second week as authorities warned that the blazes could still spread and pose new dangers.

The fires have been blamed for one death, and the flames have destroyed more than 800 buildings and threatened thousands more. Officials have stressed that the weather could trigger still more hazards.

Much of Los Angeles and Ventura counties were under “red flag warnings” of increased fire risk through Sunday evening as the winds that fanned the flames were

expected to strengthen. Any new blaze could see a “very rapid spread of wildfire ... and extreme fire behavior that could lead to a threat to life and property,” the National Weather Service **warned**.

[Apocalyptic images show the devastation caused by raging Southern California fires]

Officials lamented a brutal fire season that has ravaged the state this year, tearing mercilessly through the northern and southern parts of California alike.

3:26

Residents return to destroyed homes in Southern California

“This is kind of the new normal,” Gov. Jerry Brown (D) said at a news conference Saturday in Ventura County. “We’re facing a new reality in this state, where fires threaten people’s lives, their property, their neighborhoods and, of course, billions and billions of dollars.”

Brown said climate change means residents should expect such extreme fire activity for decades.

“I know that’s maybe a little remote, but it’s real, and we’re experiencing what it’s going to look like on a very regular basis,” he said.

[How Santa Ana winds spread wildfires]

New evacuations orders were issued Sunday as the Thomas Fire — the state’s biggest active blaze, roaring across 155,000 acres in coastal Ventura County northwest of Los Angeles — was “expected to spread” toward neighboring Santa Barbara County, authorities warned in an alert Sunday morning.

Although officials had lifted evacuation orders in Ventura, south of the fire, residents of enclaves in Santa Barbara were urged to leave. People in parts of the county, including the city of Carpinteria, “need to be prepared to leave in a moment’s notice,” the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office warned, urging residents to gather relatives, pets and anything irreplaceable.

The Thomas Fire has moved quickly since erupting Monday in Ventura County, officials said, and has destroyed more than 500 structures and threatened 15,000. By Sunday morning, it was just 15 percent contained.



Medical examiners in Ventura reported the only fire-related death known so far, identifying a body found Wednesday as that of Virginia Pesola, 70, of Santa Paula. Pesola died of “blunt-force injuries with terminal smoke inhalation and thermal injuries,” officials said.

The destroyed buildings included housing for low-income families who have few other options. Ventura County Supervisor Steve Bennett, speaking during a town hall that drew hundreds of people Saturday, said his board is planning to unveil a rental assistance plan to help those in need.

“There are a number of low-income people who have been burned out,” Bennett said. “Many of us are going to have to open up our homes.”



The Thomas Fire burns in the Los Padres National Forest on Saturday. The fire has burned more than 155,000 acres and was 15 percent contained Sunday morning. (Stuart Palley for The Washington Post)

There are 4,000 firefighters trying to contain the blaze, and authorities said the firefighting costs have reached nearly \$17.5 million.

Some positive signs were reported in Los Angeles County to the south. Officials said Saturday that the Creek and Skirball fires were 80 percent and 50 percent contained. But winds could peak Sunday at about 50 mph, and that could combine with extremely low humidity to create severe fire conditions helped along by the blaze's fuel — dry vegetation and trees.

In San Diego County, firefighters continued to battle the Lilac Fire, which started Thursday morning and spread quickly to more than 4,000 acres. It had been 50 percent contained by Saturday night.

[View image on Twitter](#)



SBCFireInfo

@EllasonMike

#ThomasFire - FF's knock down flames as they advance on homes atop Shepherd Mesa Road in Carpinteria at 6 am Sunday morning.

3:39 AM - Dec 11, 2017

22 Replies

3333 Retweets

3939 likes

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

Residents who fled described rapidly moving flames.

“Oh, my God, the heat, the heat,” said Clifford Sise, a horse trainer who had to evacuate while trying to get his horses out of San Luis Rey Downs, a racehorse facility in San Diego County where it is believed that dozens of horses died in the blaze. “One of my fillies wouldn’t leave. She burned to death in, like, one minute. I had them all out, and then when I went back after. I must’ve had two little babies run back in their stalls and they died.”

The streets of downtown Carpinteria were empty Saturday as a smoke-filled haze continued to hang over the city. Yet Esau’s Cafe, which sits in the heart of downtown on Linden Avenue, remained open — and busy at that — while most businesses are still closed.

“We kept it open and served those that needed help, the firemen and those that lost their homes,” said Taylor Stanley, 30, the manager at Esau’s. “We gave out free meals to them. We have good air circulation in here, so

we stayed open just so people could get out from under the smoke.”

For residents of Carpinteria, the smoke presents nearly as much of a risk as the fire; authorities have reported dangerous air quality in the area, describing it as “off the charts.”

“I have five stents in my chest,” said Christina Garcia, 55. “I had three heart attacks last year. I’m just trying to make sure this doesn’t get into my filtration.”



A plane drops fire retardant Friday in Fallbrook, Calif. The windswept blazes have forced tens of thousands of evacuations and destroyed hundreds of homes. (Gregory Bull/Associated

Press)

On Saturday, face masks were in high demand throughout Ventura County. An employee at Home Depot in Oxnard said that the store had ordered them in bulk and had 12 pallets of masks on hand — far more than the usual two — and that they were selling briskly. An employee at Lowe’s Home Improvement in Ventura said the store had sold out of face masks Saturday morning.

Ventura residents Christie and Mark Evans, both 35, were forced to evacuate on short notice. The couple had received the keys to their newly purchased home on Colina Vista Street on Dec. 1, and they started the process of moving in last weekend.

[Meet the driver who stopped to rescue a rabbit from a California wildfire]

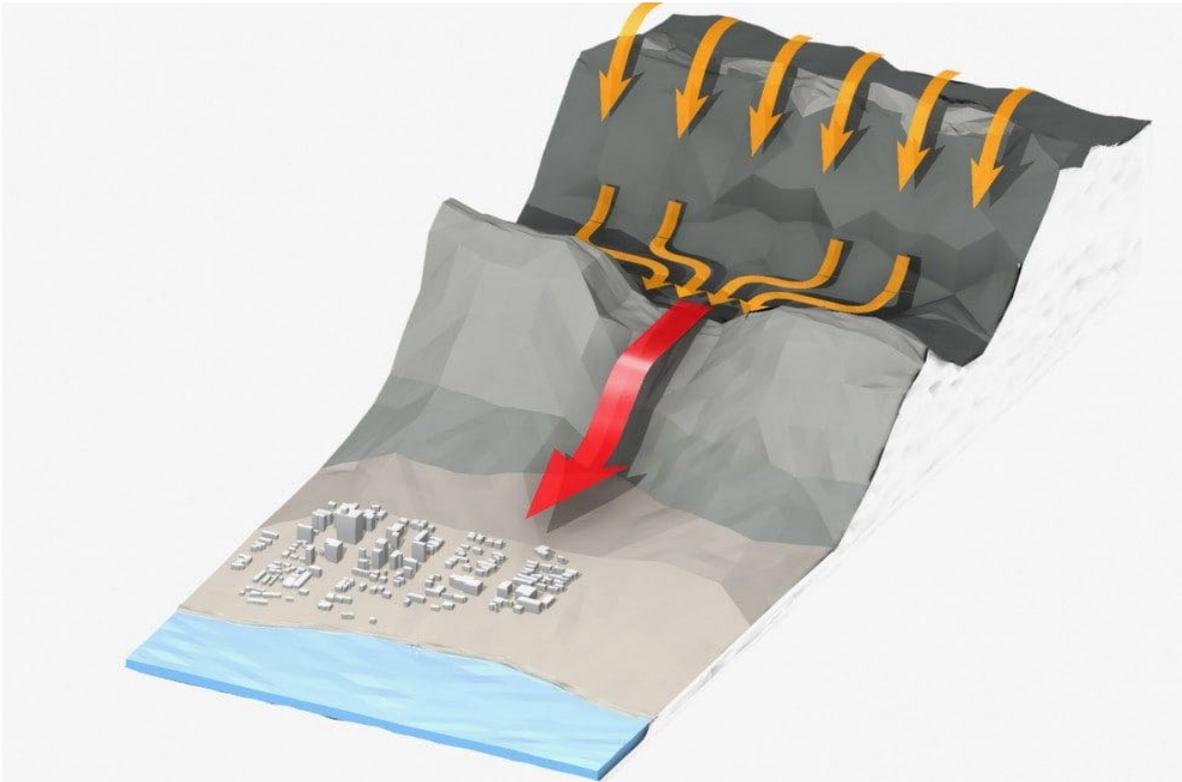
Christie Evans — who is 8½ months pregnant with her second child — spent Monday readying the new home, locking up around 6:30 p.m. before returning to her

recently sold house.

Mark Evans decided to head to the house to retrieve the family pet, a 35-year-old rescue tortoise named Sheldon, who was hibernating in the garage. Once inside, he hurriedly grabbed a wedding album, some important paperwork and the tortoise.

On Tuesday, while at her parents' house with her 17-month-old son, **Christie Evans** watched the news with her mom and sister. What she saw stunned her.

“There was my driveway — and there was no house,” she said.



How Santa Ana winds spread wildfires VIEW GRAPHIC

Ufberg reported from Carpinteria, and Berman reported from Washington. Noah Smith in Ventura and Angela Fritz and Amy B Wang in Washington contributed to this report.