

# California declares emergency as wildfires spread

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Associated Press



An air tanker drops fire retardant chemicals on the Lockheed wildfire which burns out of control in a rugged region of the Santa Cruz Mountains in Bonny Doon, Calif., on Thursday, Aug. 13, forcing the evacuation of more than a thousand residents.  
AP Photo by San Francisco Chronicle, Paul Chin

DAVENPORT, Calif. — Fire crews fanned out Friday across a parched California where wind-whipped wildfires have forced hundreds of people to flee their homes and led to an emergency declaration in Santa Cruz County.

In the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Lockheed Fire has prompted officials to issue mandatory evacuation orders for the mountain communities of Swanton and Bonny Doon, which have about 2,400 residents and several wineries.

The blaze, which started Wednesday night, has blackened 6.5 square miles of remote wilderness and was only about 5 percent contained, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said.

In Davenport, a coastal town near the Lockheed Fire, Lt. Gov. John Garamendi declared a state of emergency for Santa Cruz County as a step toward getting federal assistance for local governments and private property owners.

Garamendi was acting at the request of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors while Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger was out of state attending the funeral of his mother-in-law, Eunice Shriver.

"We're entering the height of fire season in California," he said. "We need to prepare." The governor was expected to tour the fire zone on Saturday.

The fire, about 10 miles north of the coastal city of Santa Cruz, has damaged only two small structures but was threatening more than 1,000 other homes and buildings. There have been no reports of injuries. The cause is under investigation.

Six helicopters and six fixed-wing aircraft were expected to join the firefighting effort, along with another 300 firefighters to help the roughly 700 already on the scene.

The steep, rugged terrain and dense vegetation has made it difficult to contain the blaze, so firefighters are focused on keeping flames away from homes, said Jim Stunkel, a battalion chief from San Jose.

"As the brush ignites, it's like a fireworks explosion, and the sparks rain down where the ranch houses are," he said. "As it comes toward us, we'll put hose lines down, dig a line and try to push the fire back. That's all we can do right now."

Smoke plumes extended over 50 miles from Santa Cruz to Monterey, but winds were blowing the smoke out toward the Pacific Ocean, said Richard Stedman, director of the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District. Officials were monitoring air quality but do not believe it has reached unhealthy levels.

At the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds in Watsonville, animal care workers were assisting more than 100 animals rescued from the fire zone, including goats, pigs, chickens, ducks, alpacas, llamas and horses.

Hannah Good, a veterinarian who lives in Bonny Doon, said the workers had helped her evacuate her birds, cats, donkey, pony and dog.

"It was quite a scramble getting the animals

and our family out of there," said Hannah Good, a veterinarian who lives in Bonny Doon with her partner and two children. "Once I smelled the smoke, I knew we had problems."

Farther down the coast, more than 1,800 firefighters were battling a wildfire around Los Padres National Forest that had grown to nearly 105 square miles, said US Forest Service spokeswoman Valerie Baca.

More than 230 homes and ranches in canyons and ridges near the La Brea Fire were under evacuation orders as the week-old blaze kept growing in northern Santa Barbara County. Hot, dry conditions were expected Friday.

In Alameda County, more than 300 firefighters were struggling to control a wind-driven grass fire that had grown to about 16 square miles near Tracy, said Aisha Knowles, a spokeswoman for the Alameda County Fire Department.

The Corral Fire was not threatening any structures but was moving toward the juncture of Interstate 5 and Interstate 580, where officials worried that smoke could impact visibility and traffic. It was about 20 percent contained, Knowles said.

In far northern California, firefighters lifted evacuation orders issued in connection with a nearly two-square-mile fire burning near Lewiston, about 200 miles north of Sacramento.

The Coffin Fire was expected to be fully contained later Friday.

Trinity County District Attorney Michael Harper charged 60-year-old Brenda Eitzen of Los Molinos with two felonies and two misdemeanors alleging she negligently sparked the blaze by throwing away a lit cigarette Wednesday. The charges could bring a maximum four-year prison term.

Eitzen did not enter a plea at her arraignment. Her bail was set at \$100,000. Her attorney, Derrick Riske, did not return repeated telephone messages Friday.

Eitzen has no criminal history, Harper said. She was staying at a drug rehabilitation shelter at the time of the fire, he said.

To the east, 10 rural homes remained evacuated as wind spread a fire in steep terrain near Burney. Firefighters were using bulldozers to cut fire lines around the nearly 11-square-mile blaze about 200 miles north of Sacramento. ■

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