



NEWS



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Most 15 Freeway lanes reopen after 25-acre brush fire erupts in Cajon Pass

Staff Writer, ABC7

Posted: August 29, 2021



A brush fire erupted Sunday afternoon in the Cajon Pass, prompting the closure of the 15 Freeway in both directions, officials said.

Firefighters from the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**, Cal Fire and the U.S. Forest Service responded to the scene near Cleghorn Road shortly before 1 p.m.

San Bernardino National Forest officials announced the closure of all lanes on 15 Freeway at about 2 p.m. Less than an hour later, California Highway Patrol began escorting southbound traffic through the area while the northbound side of the freeway remained shut down.

By 3 p.m., all northbound lanes reopened, except for one which remained closed, according to Caltrans.

The forward progress of the so-called Railroad Fire was stopped after it burned about 25 acres, officials said. No injuries or structural damage were immediately reported.

The cause of the blaze is under investigation.

<https://abc7.com/15-freeway-fire-closed-cajon-pass/10985550/>

Roadside Fire Scorches San Bernardino; Evacuations Lifted

Digital Staff, CBSLA

Posted: August 28, 2021



SAN BERNARDINO (CBSLA) — Mandatory evacuations orders and road closures were lifted on Saturday in San Bernardino for a wildfire they were calling an immediate threat to life and property.

The San Bernardino National Forest Service said the Roadside Fire was at 50 acres with 30% containment.

Mandatory evacuations were in effect for all homes and businesses off Cajon Boulevard, between Keenbrook Road and Swarthout Canyon Road, firefighters said.

Firefighters with the National Forest teamed up with the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** to fight the flames.

No injuries have been reported.

The cause of the fire has not yet been determined.

<https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2021/08/28/roadside-fire-san-bernardino-evacuations-lifted/>

High Desert air quality faces harmful pollutants from two sides as South Fire adds to ongoing leak of northern wildfire smoke

Charlie McGee, Victorville Daily Press

Posted: August 26, 2021



The High Desert's air quality currently sits between a rock and a hard place with wildfires now scorching regions to both its north and south, leaking smoke into the region from both directions.

The Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District on Thursday extended an Air Quality Advisory until further notice. The agency initially issued the warning on Tuesday, and later extended it until Thursday before updating it again.

The original cause for the warning was the expanded reach of fires that have devastated much of the northwestern U.S. all summer. Then, late Wednesday afternoon, the South Fire erupted in unincorporated Lytle Creek, burning roughly 300 acres in two hours and prompting the agency to stretch its advisory.

By Thursday morning, the South Fire was 0% contained despite extensive firefighting efforts and had burned roughly 680 acres in the area west of Interstate 15 and east of Sierra Avenue, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**.

Air quality experts said while rain could hit the High Desert next week, the trend of wildfire-fueled pollutants is likely to persist beyond the advisory's expiration, potentially even picking up steam this coming Friday.

The MDAQMD advisory warns of dangerous amounts of PM2.5 — a pollutant whose sources include wildfire smoke — and ground-level ozone in the air. Recommendations include keeping windows and doors closed, avoiding “any vigorous outdoor or indoor exertion,” and avoiding the use of swamp coolers or whole-house fans to prevent outside pollution from entering homes..

“Strong winds were pushing smoke and ash from (the South Fire) into the High Desert in San Bernardino County,” the updated advisory states. “The increase in PM2.5 levels prior to the start of the South fire is attributable to smoke drifting from massive wildfires burning in Northern California over the last several weeks.”

Air quality has already taken a noticeable hit in the High Desert this week, more intensely for some communities than others.

Adelanto took the brunt statistically on Wednesday. Victorville felt the effects from its position just southeast to a lesser, though still noteworthy, degree. North of those hot-spots, Barstow's air experienced wildfire-related pollution nearly as pronounced as Adelanto.

According to government-run [airnow.gov](https://www.airnow.gov), the air-quality index in each of these areas hovered throughout the day between “unhealthy for sensitive groups” — which occurs when harmful pollutants reach 100 to 150 parts-per-million — and “unhealthy” — which occurs at 150 to 200 ppm.

The former level is dangerous for children, teens, older adults, and people with a heart or lung disease. The latter can harm everyone, according to AirNow.

The northern and western areas of the High Desert are where these impacts are most prominent. This reflects the fact that, while the South Fire creates yet another problem, the historic fires to the north are still the primary driver of air-quality issues in the region.

Not every community in the High Desert is suffering to the same degree. Hesperia and Lucerne Valley were among the local pockets that stayed between “satisfactory” and “moderate” for most of Wednesday, the air-quality index showed.

Ashley Nickerson, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service’s Las Vegas office, said some parts of the High Desert occupied “a nice little gap area” that shielded them from the worst effects of fires from both the north and south. Mountains and other geographical obstructions absorbed the pollutants before it reached them, according to Nickerson.

“That’s pretty nice for anybody who has outdoor plans tomorrow,” Nickerson told the Daily Press.

She added, though, that the wind direction that has carried these pollutants in the air are likely to persist for the rest of the week. Heading into the weekend, smoke from the northern fires could stretch further into Barstow, she said, which would likely add to the existing air pollution.

Contrary to a grim outlook of dry, smoky air to close this week, Nickerson said “we are watching the potential for some rain” sometime early next week. She added, however, that it’s too early to be certain but that enough indicators exist to take it seriously.

As with other monsoons that soaked areas of the High Desert in recent months, Nickerson said locals could see more of the same soon.

“I would say we have higher confidence that a monsoonal pattern will return, but exactly how and where, that’s what we’re sort of low-confidence on at the moment,” she said. “A weather pattern change is likely. Exactly how it all sets up? Still unsure.”

<https://www.vvdailynews.com/story/weather/2021/08/25/high-desert-air-quality-faces-harmful-pollutants-two-fronts-south-fire-adds-new-threat-ongoing-leak/5597495001/>

More burned homes discovered as progress made on South fire burning in Lytle Creek

Brian Rokos & Caitlin Antonios, The Press Enterprise

Posted: August 27, 2021



A firefighter pulls a hose line as he prepares to put out hot spots on a property along Lytle Creek Road during the South fire near Lytle Creek on Thursday, Aug. 26, 2021. (Photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

The South fire burning in Lytle Creek grew to 900 acres overnight but for the first time Friday, Aug. 27, fire officials say they have been able to build a portion of a containment line.

The fire was 10% contained, the San Bernardino County Fire Department said. Also Friday, more burned structures were located. By Friday evening, acreage was down to 819, but containment remained the same.

The fire's size had been reported at 680 acres Thursday night.

"It's pretty calm this morning," said Lisa Cox, a spokeswoman for the San Bernardino National Forest. "There's been no forward spread since (reaching 900 acres) last night."

The area of most concern Friday is along the ridgeline where the fire made a run Thursday afternoon in grass and chaparral and where the slope heats up in the afternoon. That ridgeline is a corridor to the community of Lytle Creek, where many of the area's 1,000 residents live. The flames are a few miles away, Cox said.

The flames were burning into what is mostly federal land, with popular camping spots, Cox said, so a forest closure order was issued that restricts access to that area.

Friday's goal was to beef up the containment lines, said Battalion Chief Mike McClintock, a **San Bernardino County Fire Department** spokesman. High temperatures were expected to keep humidity low, at 10% to 15%. The National Weather Service forecasted winds from the north for Friday.

Erratic winds over the weekend could further complicate the direction of where the fire will flair up, Cox said Friday evening. Areas burning with thicker shrub caused pockets of darker smoke and higher flames, prompting 911 calls from nearby residents.

All evacuations remained in place Friday. The San Bernardino National Forest urged motorists not to drive around road closures.

"Road closed signs and traffic cones are not a suggestion," a statement said.

Some 400 firefighters were on the lines.

More burned properties were discovered Friday as damage-assessment teams moved into the fire zone. Nine homes, an increase from four, have been counted as destroyed, and four were damaged. Sixteen outbuildings have been reported damaged or destroyed.

As residents return home, more stories of loss and heartache are being told.

Flames that swept over the property of Ryan and DeAnna Barnes and their five children spared their home but destroyed a machine shop that provided the family's livelihood, said a close family friend, Kirsten Grady.

Grady described the Barneses as active in their church and always lending a hand to community service projects.

"They're like a second family to me. They've helped me through hard times. I'm heartbroken," said Grady, who established a GoFundMe fundraising page.

The mobile home where Jose Llamas and Maria Covarrubias lived for 11 years was one of several structures that were destroyed when flames raced through a property. They lost paperwork, money and wedding photos.

"All the memories are just gone," said their daughter, Astrid Covarrubias. "(My dad's) starting all over again."

Her mother was able to grab a few items before evacuating. Her father was not home at the time.

The car that Llamas purchased for his grandson's upcoming 15th birthday was destroyed as well.

The family has established a GoFundMe page.

The home of the property owner was saved, however, Astrid Covarrubias said.

Orders for evacuations were in place Friday for residents from Lytle Creek Road north and south of the ranger station, west of Sierra Avenue, north of the 15 Freeway and east of Duncan Canyon Road. That covers 1,000 residents and 600 homes.

Warnings that residents should be prepared to leave were in place for those living north of Glen Helen Parkway, east of Sierra Avenue and Lytle Creek Road, and west of the 15.

The Lytle Creek post office is closed. Post office box mail can be picked up at the post office at 8282 Sierra Ave., Fontana.

<https://www.ocreger.com/2021/08/27/firefighters-make-progress-on-south-fire-burning-in-lytle-creek-containment-at-10/>

South Fire evacuation orders lifted Sunday; blaze near Lytle Creek 30% contained

Charlie McGee, Victorville Daily Press

Posted: August 29, 2021



After four days of threats from the South Fire, roughly 1,000 people in and around Lytle Creek were allowed to return home Sunday as San Bernardino County downgraded an evacuation order to a warning.

Officials said Sunday the blaze was still burning and had grown to about 820 acres, but was 30% contained and the forward rate of spread had been stopped.

Emergency personnel decided they could manage an inflow of returning residents, according to San Bernardino National Forest spokesperson Lisa Fox. People started returning home around noon.

Residents were forced to evacuate soon after the wildfire began rapidly spreading around 1:30 p.m. Wednesday in the area of Lytle Creek Road and Sierra Avenue just north of Interstate 15.

The South Fire has destroyed nine homes and eight "non-housing" structures, damaged a dozen other buildings and disrupted basic utilities such as electricity and water, according to officials from Cal Fire and San Bernardino National Forest.

Before the evacuation order was downgraded Sunday, it had applied to all structures along Lytle Creek Road, including side roads, from Duncan Canyon Road to its termination at Stockton Flats Road.

“We don’t remove mandatory evacuation orders until safety hazards that pose a threat to the public, or firefighters when they’re working in the area, are eliminated,” Cox said. “And that’s — it’s a plethora of things, but mainly, it’s equipment working out of that narrow canyon road.”

Traffic can impede the movement of crews, she said, “and there’s always potential for car accidents when you go around those blind corners and you don’t see the big equipment.”

She added that if strong winds come in with a changing weather pattern over the next day, that could combine with the intense, dry heat currently present in the area to spark a new forward movement for the flames.

Cox said authorities were also lifting a South Fire-related evacuation warning, which doesn’t require occupants to leave, that previously applied to all structures north of Glen Helen Parkway between Lytle Creek Rd. and Interstate 15.

In tandem with allowing people to return home, numerous road closures that have been in place around the area were lifted.

An evacuation center set up by the American Red Cross at the Jessie Turner Center in Fontana for residents affected by the South Fire will remain open until about noon Monday, the sheriff's department said on Facebook.

The emergency response to the South Fire has included 600 personnel from Cal Fire, **San Bernardino County Fire** and San Bernardino National Forest, along with five helicopters, 32 fire engines and seven water-tenders.

It wasn't the only fire this week that required extensive firefighting power from those agencies.

A fire began near Cajon Junction on Sunday afternoon, soon after the Lytle Creek order was lifted, and temporarily closed Interstate 15 in both directions from Highway 38 to Oak Hill Road.

The blaze, referred to as the Railroad Fire, had covered 25 acres and was uncontained as of 2:30 p.m., according to San Bernardino National Forest authorities. But the fire's forward spread had been stopped.

The northbound lane of Interstate 15, as well as the nearby railroad, remained closed as of 2:30 p.m., while the southbound lane had reopened. Both Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad and Union Pacific Railroad were affected by the fire.

A wildfire dubbed the Roadside Fire broke out on Saturday in a different area of the Cajon Pass. Residents and businesses off Cajon Boulevard between Keenbrook Road and Swarthout Canyon Road were asked to evacuate in response.

Zach Behrens, a San Bernardino National Forest spokesperson, told the Daily Press the Roadside Fire remained at 50 acres and 30% containment on Sunday afternoon, and that all road closures and evacuations had been lifted Saturday evening.

He said Southern California Edison was replacing power lines that were damaged by the Roadside Fire, adding that the fire complicated evacuation efforts for the nearby South Fire.

Cox said one fire staff member was almost hit Saturday when a car jumped precautionary cones put up by fire authorities at the South Fire response area.

When the public does not heed road closures or evacuation orders, she said, "it endangers officer safety, it makes all of our jobs harder, and it could make everything take longer."

<https://www.vvdailynews.com/story/news/2021/08/29/south-fire-evacuees-can-return-home-firefighting-fleets-grapple-wave-wildfires-around-high-desert/5645177001/>

Firefighters respond to blaze near Cajon Pass; portion of Interstate 15 closed Sunday

Tom Coulter & Charlie McGee, Palm Springs Desert Sun

Posted: August 29, 2021



Firefighters responded to a 25-acre fire near Cajon Junction on Sunday afternoon that temporarily closed Interstate 15 in both directions from Highway 38 to Oak Hill Road.

The blaze, referred to as the Railroad Fire, had covered 25 acres and was uncontained as of 2:30 p.m., according to a tweet from San Bernardino National Forest authorities. The blaze's forward spread had been stopped.

The northbound lane of Interstate 15, as well as the nearby railroad, remained closed as of 2:30 p.m., while the southbound lane had reopened.

San Bernardino National Forest spokesperson Lisa Cox told the Daily Press the cause of the Railroad Fire is under investigation

SoCal Air Operations, a non-government group that assists in firefights requiring air support, tweeted about the fire soon after it began around 1:00 p.m. Sunday. The group said authorities were suggesting 10 acres had burned to that point. An image it shared showed large black smoke-clouds quickly billowing into the sky of the new inferno

The group gave an upbeat outlook on the firefighting efforts by CalFire, **San Bernardino County Fire** and San Bernardino National Forest roughly half an hour later.

“Air Attack advising they are making good progress, fire is holding inside retardant lines, ‘three more tanker drops and this will be a done deal.’ Crews will remain on scene through the night mopping up and increasing containment,” the group tweeted regarding communication it was gathering from emergency respondents.

The new Railroad Fire adds to a string of other wildfires that have popped up in the area over the last week, most prominently the ongoing South Fire in the area of Lytle Creek and the Roadside Fire in a nearby area of Cajon Pass.

This is a developing story and will be updated.

<https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/local/2021/08/29/blaze-near-cajon-pass-closes-portion-interstate-15-15-sunday/5644518001/>