



NEWS



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'It's crushing': California cleans up mudslide damage; Rescuers are searching for a person missing in a mudslide that swept boulders down fire-scarred slopes and damaged or destroyed 30 homes in Southern California mountains

AMY TAXIN and BRIAN MELLEY, Associated Press

September 14, 2022



Paul Burgess, with the California Geological Survey, examines the damage in the aftermath of a mudslide Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2022, in Oak Glen, Calif. Cleanup efforts and damage assessments are underway east of Los Angeles after heavy rains unleashed mudslides in a mountain area scorched by a wildfire two years ago. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

OAK GLEN, Calif. -- Rescuers searched Wednesday for a person missing in a mudslide that swept boulders down fire-scarred slopes and damaged or destroyed 30 homes in the Southern California mountains as firefighters in the northern part of the state tried to contain an explosive week-old blaze.

Dogs aided the hunt for a person missing in a heavily damaged area of the San Bernardino Mountains east of Los Angeles where thunderstorms unleashed rocks, trees and earth that washed away cars, buried homes and affected 3,000 residents in two remote communities.

The force of mud barreling down the mountain late Monday drove a dumpster through the walls of the Oak Glen Steakhouse and Saloon. A massive tree lodged in the dining room, muck was waist-deep in the kitchen and wine bottles were slathered in mud.

"We have trees in there ... 30 feet long that came straight through our building," said Brandon Gallegos, whose family owns the restaurant. "It's crushing."

As the search, cleanup and damage assessment continued, firefighters in Northern California tried to tamp down a fire that flared up Tuesday and jumped a fork of the American River and on Wednesday became the largest blaze in the state this year. Evacuations were increased to more than 11,000 people as the fire threatened over 9,000 structures.

The muddy damage in Oak Glen and Forest Falls served as a powerful warning to residents of areas that have burned or are facing high fire danger of the damage wildfires can cause months or even years after flames are extinguished and the smoke clears.

An intense amount of rain even over a short period of time can have catastrophic effects on hillsides where fire has stripped vegetation that once held the ground intact.

In January 2018, mudslides thundered down a steep mountainside that burned a month earlier and killed more than 20 people in the tony beachside town of Montecito near Santa Barbara. The worst of the rain fell in a 15-minute span with Montecito getting little more than a half-inch (1.25 centimeter) in five minutes.

Jim Topoleski, a **San Bernardino County fire** chief, said mudslides had been a concern in the area burned by the deadly El Dorado Fire that was sparked two years ago when a couple used a smoke device to reveal their baby's gender. The couple was charged with involuntary manslaughter in the death of a firefighter.

On Monday, nearly 2 inches (5 centimeters) of rain fell top Yucaipa Ridge between Oak Glen, home to apple orchards that are a fall tourist destination, and Forest Falls, once a summer getaway for cabin owners that has become a bedroom community.

"The mud and debris flow came down through the high steep terrain," Topoleski said. "This entire area is blanketed with up to 6 feet (1.83 meters) of mud, debris, large boulders."

Mudflows had washed into Forest Falls a month ago, closing roads, but damaging no homes.

Residents in the area had been warned of the danger lurking above them, so they were dismayed but not surprised, Gallegos said.

"We were just hoping and praying that it wouldn't happen, but it did happen," he said.

A video captured the spectacle of mud flowing like lava past the sign for Gallegos' restaurant under sunny skies. It was followed seconds later by a faster-moving and deeper surge of sludge carrying logs and sweeping across a road.

Out of view in the video was the damage being done as tons of mud poured into the tavern.

Evacuation orders remained in two areas over possible mudslides as well as to help workers clear roads buried in muck and restore water and power.

The burst of rain followed a rare tropical storm that ended a lengthy statewide heat wave last week that had pushed electrical supplies to the brink of power outages.

While the temporary relief was welcome in the drought-stricken West, a spate of flash floods that followed have wreaked havoc in many places.

Cars were marooned over the weekend in Death Valley National Park and new flooding again Tuesday closed all entrances into the park. Only the east entrance was open Wednesday and the western entrance is closed indefinitely because of extensive road damage.

In a desert area outside Las Vegas, a stranded truck driver and two people in a van had to be rescued after thunderstorms dumped more than 2 inches (5.1 centimeters) of rain within three hours early Wednesday and washed basketball-sized rocks onto roads in Valley of Fire State Park.

It was a different story in Northern California, where the Mosquito Fire burned more buildings Tuesday afternoon, just hours after officials reported making “great strides.” The blaze on Wednesday surpassed the size of the previous largest fire in 2022, the McKinney Fire, although this season has seen a fraction of last year’s fire activity so far.

Stronger winds pushed out a smoke inversion layer Tuesday that had been stifling the blaze and gave fresh oxygen to the flames, McLean said. The area is full of extremely dry vegetation that was rapidly igniting, challenging both firefighters on the ground and air.

Scientists say climate change has made the West warmer and drier over the last three decades and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive. In the last five years, California has experienced the largest and most destructive fires in its history.

Firefighters were able to keep flames from crossing a key road and entering the town of Foresthill and cooler temperatures overnight helped keep it in check, fire spokesperson Scott McLean said Wednesday. He said some buildings burned, but the exact number won’t be known until damage assessment teams were able to canvas the area.

Breezes were calmer on Wednesday afternoon and crews and helicopters knocked down hotspots.

“It’s trying to come back to life,” McLean said from his perch overlooking the fire. “But nothing like yesterday.”

He said evacuations remain in place because of the unpredictable nature of the winds, which typically blow in the direction of several canyons in the area, which could rapidly spread flames if gusts pick up.

The blaze 110 miles (177 kilometers) northeast of San Francisco was one of three large fires in the state and had grown to roughly 100 square miles (258 square kilometers), with 20% containment Wednesday, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire. At least 64 homes and other buildings have been destroyed.

The Fairview Fire was burning about 75 miles (121 kilometers) southeast of Los Angeles. The 44-square-mile (114-square-kilometer) blaze was 75% contained by Wednesday night. Two people died fleeing the fire, which destroyed at least 35 homes and other structures in Riverside County.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/california-cleans-mudslides-fire-gains-strength-89891888>

Person still missing, 30 homes destroyed or damaged by mudslides in Forest Falls, Oak Glen

Nathaniel Percy and Quinn Wilson, SBSUN.COM

September 14, 2022 at 12:08 p.m. | UPDATED: September 14, 2022 at 4:25 p.m.



A home sits damaged on Prospect Drive in Forest Falls on Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2022, after heavy mud flows hit the area Monday afternoon. (Photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

Firefighters and search-and-rescue teams continued their search on Wednesday, Sept. 14, two days after a person was unaccounted for after mud and debris flowed through Forest Falls and Oak Glen following an intense thunderstorm.

An estimated 30 homes were damaged or destroyed in the debris flows, and 3,000 residents were affected in some fashion, San Bernardino County Supervisor Dawn Rowe said at a Wednesday press conference at the Yucaipa Community Center.

“We are going to do everything we can to help the community recover from this disaster,” she said.

A dog was found alive in a void spot inside of the home damaged by mud and debris in which they were searching for the missing person, according to Eric Sherwin, spokesman for the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**. By 4 p.m., the missing person had not yet been located, Sherwin said.

120 people were involved in the search, according to Sherwin.

Fire officials said the mud and debris flows stemmed from the El Dorado fire, which erupted in September 2020 and burned nearly 23,000 acres.

“This event actually started two years and nine days ago,” Fire Department Division Chief Jim Topoleski said. “The hillsides were denuded of vegetation that held back the watershed and prevented water, over the years, from flowing in a high-capacity manner.”

Since then, fire crews and public works officials prepared for the possibility of mud and debris flows by consulting hydrologists and an emergency watershed response team that went out and tested the soil and

looked at the vegetation in order to give county officials an “educated instruction on what’s going to happen if we get a heavy rain,” Cal Fire Chief Grant Malinowski said.

That heavy rain came Monday, bringing an extremely large downpour that led to the mud and debris flows, Topoleski said.

“The system was overwhelmed,” he said.

San Bernardino County officials were preparing to seek federal and state assistance, Rowe said.

For now, the biggest concern is the missing person.

“That is our focus,” Topoleski said. “That is our mission for today.”

Evacuation orders were lifted, but some roadways remained open only to local residents.

Malinowski warned residents that even after the cleanup, the threat of mudslides and debris flows will remain.

“The takeaway from this is the only thing that will heal the hillsides is time,” he said. “We can’t go plant 35,000 acres of grass and debris and brush that the fire burned.

“The danger is very much there,” the fire chief said. “If you evacuate, you will be safe, but it’s very hard to get through 6 to 8 feet of mud ... to try to rescue you.”

<https://www.sbsun.com/2022/09/14/1-still-missing-30-homes-destroyed-or-damaged-by-flooding-in-forest-falls-oak-glen/>

Year's top first responders honored by Elks

Staff Writer, HIDESERTSTAR.COM

September 14, 2022



First responders hold up their certificates at the public safety appreciation dinner hosted by the Yucca Valley Elks Lodge. With them are their department leaders and county Supervisor Dawn Rowe.

YUCCA VALLEY — The Yucca Valley Elks Lodge honored first responders at its annual public safety appreciation dinner Saturday

The following people were recognized.

- Deputy of the Year Javier Lopez, from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department Morongo Basin station.
- Volunteer of the Year Renee Recker, a search and rescue volunteer with the Morongo Basin sheriff's station.
- Officer of the Year Joan Griffin from the California Highway Patrol Morongo Basin area.
- Firefighter of the Year Cody Underwood from the **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District.
- Paramedic of the Year Will Cummings from the county fire district.
- Firefighter of the Year Christopher Chavez from the Morongo Valley Fire Department.
- Paramedic of the Year Steven Savacool from Morongo Basin Ambulance.
- Emergency Medical Technician of the Year Jack Trotter from Morongo Basin Ambulance.

They all received plaques from the Elks that were presented to them by leaders of their agencies.

Third District county Supervisor Dawn Rowe was in attendance and presented them all with certificates of recognition. The keynote speaker for the evening was **San Bernardino County Fire** Chief Dan Munsey.

Dinner included spaghetti and dessert.

<https://hidesertstar.com/news/183140/years-top-first-responders-honored-by-elks/>

Southern California Hit With 3 Natural Disasters in Just 2 Days

Anna Skinner, NEWSWEEK.COM

September 14, 2022



Three natural disasters have hit Southern California in only two days. Miraculously, no injuries were reported in any of the disasters, although one person is still missing following flash floods.

On Sunday, mudslides trapped dozens of cars near Los Angeles. The following day, a 2.6-magnitude earthquake rumbled through Canoga Park, also in Southern California, and later that afternoon, San Bernardino police rescued a mother and her children from flash floods. A National Weather Service meteorologist told Newsweek the earthquake was unrelated, but the mudslides and flash floods resulted from Hurricane Kay storms as the hurricane pulled offshore.

The Mudslides

On Sunday night, drivers had to be rescued from their vehicles after the cars became trapped in mud and debris on Pine Canyon Road near Lake Hughes, 65 miles north of Los Angeles. The Los Angeles County Fire Department deployed two Firehawk helicopters to assist in rescues, according to a tweet from the agency. The helicopters utilized night vision technology to rescue eight adults and six children across five sites affected by the mudslides.

It is estimated the mudslides trapped 24 vehicles and 53 people, but no injuries were reported.

The Earthquake

An earthquake hit Canoga Park, California, on Monday. Ranked a 2.6 magnitude, it had a depth of roughly 2 and a half miles. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) said earthquakes usually aren't felt if they're less than a 2 magnitude on the Richter scale. A quake is considered "small" when its magnitude is between 3 and 3.9. USGS said earthquakes typically don't cause damage until they have a 4 or 5 magnitude. Earthquakes can trigger mudslides and flash floods, but Monday's quake was unrelated to the other disasters.

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Flash Floods

A woman called police for an unrelated problem Monday afternoon and, after hanging up and heading back to her car, a flash flood caused a sudden river roaring in her direction. It took three officers to help the mother, who fell while trying to cross the flood. A video, which was tweeted by SoCal News Outlet, shows officers then helping two children and other people who were stranded on one side of the flash flood. No injuries were reported.

"Our officers do not encounter swift-water floods often, however it doesn't stop them from jumping into action and saving lives," San Bernardino police wrote on Twitter.

Flash floods also affected other parts of San Bernardino County. **San Bernardino County Fire** posted on Facebook that floods were so severe, there were multiple reports of missing persons. One person is still missing, according to Fox Weather. Search teams are still combing the area looking for the missing person.

<https://www.newsweek.com/southern-california-natural-disasters-flash-flood-mudslides-earthquake-1743020>