



NEWS



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Nearly 100 rescues performed in San Bernardino County as mountain communities remain trapped in snow

By Eric Resendiz, ABC 7

March 1, 2023



Nearly 100 rescues have already been performed in San Bernardino County, where officials declared a state of emergency.

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. (KABC) -- San Bernardino County has declared a state of emergency after receiving an additional 4 to 5 feet of snow Tuesday night, leaving highways unsafe and residents in the mountain communities trapped.

The state of emergency will allow San Bernardino County to more easily request additional resources, officials said.

County officials have also said aid is on the way for residents trapped, including crucially needed food and water.

Nearly 100 rescues have already been performed in the county, including one of a sheriff's deputy.

Although there are no estimates as to how many roofs have collapsed or how much damage has been done on people's homes due to the winter storm, the county has said there have been no injuries or deaths reported so far.

With the additional snow Tuesday night, crews were out clearing roads and highways again in the badly hit county.

Once the roads are clear, the county's priority is to rescue and deliver food and fuel to the impacted residents in the mountain communities.

"This storm is unprecedented. Our National Weather Service said they issue out different levels of warnings. The highest is blizzard, and they've only issued that once. Which is this storm," said Brendon Biggs, the county's public works supervisor. "This storm covered the entire mountain range, from Wrightwood all the way over to Forest Falls with the heavy amount of snow that you see."

"That's too much for local resources to keep up with," Biggs continued. "So, a lot of primaries and secondaries and state highways were buried, and so we are in the process of digging them out right now."

Resident of Crestline Sarah Muecke is one the people still stuck in her home, and she said she has never experienced a weather event like this in all the years she has lived in the San Bernardino Mountains.

"In the 20 years that I have been here I haven't seen anything like this," said Ruecke. "Like, this much snow coming down this quickly and for this long of time. And for people not to be able to get in and out of their places. People are buried."

Officials are urging anyone who does not need to be on affected roads to stay off of them so trapped residents can be moved first.

"We are receiving lots of calls right now from those residents who need assistance," said **San Bernardino County Fire** Chief Dan Munsey. "But that assistance needs to be prioritized because the amount of resources is finite."

For emergencies and life threatening situations, people are urged to call 911. For all other storm related issues, people are urged to call the Storm Response Call Center at 909-387-3911.

<https://abc7.com/state-of-emergency-san-bernardino-county-mountain-communities-trapped/12899489/>

Gov. Gavin Newsom declares state of emergency following severe storm

By Staff Writer, CBS NEWS

March 2, 2023



Gov. Gavin Newsom has declared a state of emergency to help more than a dozen counties affected by the massive amounts of snowfall from the severe storm that passed through California last week.

The declaration frees up resources for 13 counties including San Bernardino and Los Angeles. The governor specifically addressed the massive emergency relief efforts underway in San Bernardino County.

According to the emergency proclamation, the state will coordinate with Caltrans and the county to bring in additional snow plows, road crews and personnel from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to help with the cleanup efforts. The governor has activated the California National Guard and contracted private companies to help remove snow and clear roadways.

State officials with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) are also working with investor-owned utility companies to quickly restore power.

Cal OES is working with San Bernardino County to open two shelters for residents and coordinate escorts for power companies, food and water deliveries and service providers for vulnerable populations.

The waiting period for unemployment insurance applicants is also suspended for all applicants unemployed as a direct result of these storms, who have applied for unemployment insurance benefits beginning February 21, 2023, or will apply by the close of business on August 21, 2023.

The ordeal began last week when massive amounts of snow blocked the major highways connecting the mountain communities to the outside world. In total, the severe storm brought a historic 7 feet of snow to the San Bernardino Mountains.

According to the National Weather Service, Lake Arrowhead received 99 inches of snow and Crestline recorded 91 inches after Tuesday's storm.

Because of the road conditions and the ongoing cleanup efforts, authorities have closed all of the freeways — Highways 18, 330 and 38 — leading into Crestline, Lake Arrowhead and Big Bear.

According to the county, crews still need to clear 617 miles of road.

For a few days after the storm, California Highway Patrol escorted residents back home up the mountain roads. However, the agency suspended the service on Wednesday as fog and snow created dangerous conditions on the roadways.

Officials Wednesday morning said the escorts will resume once the roads are safe.

Some residents have waited hours to days in traffic jams hoping to get back home.

"We know our residents have been shut in for some, a week," said **San Bernardino County Fire** Department Chief Dan Munsey. "It could go on another 7 to 10 days."

On Monday, the situation became so dire San Bernardino County officials declared a local emergency seeking state and federal help to clear snow from the mountain highways.

While the road access has been spotty at best over the past several days, officials have been able to escort truckers to the communities, such as Big Bear. According to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, prior to the delivery the mountain town was "critically low" on gas and groceries.

Despite the efforts, many trapped in the mountain communities have grown increasingly worried as days go by, their supplies dwindle and the roads outside their homes continue to be blocked by several feet of snow.

"We're out of everything," said Mariam Magana, whose family has been trapped in Crestline for several days. "We have six kids in the house. I don't know what to do. We need help."

Officials reported that over 100 rescues have been staged in the mountains since this storm began. Magana said she has called the county's emergency line, California Highway Patrol and Caltrans but help hasn't arrived.

County officials at a news conference Wednesday said the emphasis is clearing snow from the roads to deliver groceries, medical supplies and gas to the communities besieged by the snow.

During the press conference, Chief Munsey told anyone wanting to visit the mountain communities should stay away.

"As the roads start to open, there's a lot of people that want to go visit the snow. This is the wrong time to do that," said Munsey. "If we have a large amount of people try to visit our mountains communities, number one, they're not going to find a place to park. Number two, they're going to find out that conditions are very extreme. Number three, they're going to hamper with our emergency cleanup and recovery effort."

San Bernardino County has an emergency hotline for anyone trapped or in need of supplies: (909) 387-3911.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/gov-newsom-declares-state-of-emergency-following-severe-storm-san-bernardino/?intcid=CNM-00-10abd1h>

San Bernardino County officials vow to rescue everyone trapped by blizzard

By Rene Ray De La Cruz, Victorville Daily Press

March 2, 2023



San Bernardino County officials held a Storm Response Press Conference to update mountain communities on public safety issues such as trapped residents and unplowed roads.

Blizzard conditions and dangerous situations prompted county officials to jump into action Wednesday.

San Bernardino County officials held a Storm Response Press Conference to update the mountain communities on public safety activities since blizzard conditions arrived last week and lasted through Wednesday.

Board of Supervisors Chair Dawn Rowe, whose third district oversees the mountain communities, said the county knows there are stranded residents, and it is a “No. 1 priority.”

She said plowing the roads continues around the clock, and the county has requested additional assets from state partners and other outside sources so residents can get food, medicine, and needed access.

“We need our residents to help take care of each other, to call our hotline (909-387-3911) that we have established that will now be 24/7, seven days a week,” Rowe said.

Rowe emphasized that county fire, sheriff’s, and public work departments can deliver food and medicine to home-bound people.

Collapsed roofs caused by snow trap people

“We know that roofs started to collapse,” Rowe said. “We’ve elevated this situation into a united command.”

Rowe said emergency crews and every available resource that the county and the state can provide “will be thrown at this incident to provide a level of safety to our residents.”

Sheriff Shannon Discus said deputies had conducted 17 search and rescue operations, including Big Bear, Twin Peaks, Lytle Creek, and the Victor Valley.

Some rescues were off-roaders struck on back forestry roads and four skiers in a prohibited area.

Big Bear and Twin Peaks are particular areas of concern, with sheriff’s deputies and California Highway Patrol officials closing roads, helping residents get back to their homes, and supplying vendors of local stores and gas stations.

Dicus also mentioned that the roof of Goodwin's & Son's Market in Crestline collapsed.

The owner of Goodwin's on Wednesday said despite their best efforts to remove snow from the roof during the "historic storm," the additional 2 inches of snow from last night was too much for it to handle.

Dicus said sheriff's officials helped evacuate mountain camps over the weekend and assisted Caltrans and the CHP with snow plowing.

The roof collapsed before 4 a.m. on Wednesday when three employees were inside. The trio evacuated and immediately called the fire department and building inspector.

By late morning, when the building inspector was outside, the remainder of the roof came down.

Owner David Goodwin said they are working tirelessly to get the store open again.

Dicus said sheriff's and county fire personnel are partnering to check on residents and damaged property in mountain communities.

Multiple rescues conducted in San Bernardino County mountain communities

The **county's fire** Chief Dan Munsey told the audience that mountain roads are heavily impacted, and many residents have called for help.

Munsey said first responder assistance must be prioritized due to the finite resources. He added that most people with food, shelter, water, and heat would weather the storm.

SBC Fire has responded to over 96 different rescues using its fleet of snowcats, including one sheriff's deputy whose vehicle was stuck, he said.

He added that they assist evacuees to shelters and help others to local warming shelters.

Munsey said that on Wednesday, no storm-related injuries or deaths were reported.

Caltrans crews work around the clock to clear San Bernardino mountain roadways after snow storm

Brendon Biggs, San Bernardino County public works director, said as part of a multi-agency team, the group coordinates annually to develop a plan for the winter and monitors each storm as it approaches.

Knowing that the incoming storm would be impactful, the team contacted other agencies and pre-staged road equipment and vehicles to hit the storm as soon as it arrived.

Biggs said the historic storm covered the entire mountain range, from Forest Falls east to Wrightwood.

Of the nearly 500 miles of mountain roads under county control and 173 miles under Caltrans, there were times when snow plows gave way to snow removal vehicles.

Snow removal in the mountains is time-consuming because of the tight, winding roads and obstructions near roadways, Biggs said.

Public works have used resources to clear helicopter pads at Lake Arrowhead Airport, Red Cross warming shelter sites, and roadways to help evacuate campers.

Jim Rogers, Caltrans District 8 deputy director of maintenance, said crews placed de-icing agents on state highways last week, cleared storm drains, and inspected snow vehicles.

Additional Caltrans crews were brought up to the mountain to assist with operations. As the storm intensified, other resources were provided via a contractor, Rogers said.

Crews have worked around the clock, with staff rotating between 12, 14, and 16-hour shifts, he said.

Caltrans and the CHP have safely escorted many students in school buses back to their homes.

Escorts were also established for residents on State Route 18 from Lucerne Valley, SR-330, and SR. 18 on the mountain's south side to deliver essential goods.

On Wednesday morning, the City of Big Bear Lake announced that all mountain highways (State Routes 38, 330, and 18) to and from Big Bear were closed.

Caltrans is maintaining SR-18 via Lucerne to provide escorts with essential supplies.

Rowe thanked the animal care specialists at the Devore Animal Shelter, who are caring for 114 dogs in heated kennels at 70 degrees.

Avalanche danger in Angeles National Forest

Angeles National Forest officials on Wednesday warned of avalanche danger.

The warning comes after Mt. Baldy Resort took to Twitter on Wednesday to post, “EXTREME AVALANCHE DANGER - Multiple life-threatening avalanches reported in the Movie Slope area below the ski area parking lot.”

The Movie Slope ski run is near Snow Crest Resort at Camp Baldy on the southwest side of the resort.

The resort also said they were closed “to give the Greatest Crew Any Mountain Ever Had a break. It’s been snowing all night and is forecast to keep it up today. Tomorrow is going to be mental if everything works out.”

Forest officials said major snowfall near steep mountainsides caused dangerous avalanche areas, which could last over the next two days.

The snowstorm began Tuesday and dropped heavy snowfall in the local mountains and rain and light snow in the High Desert.

Videos posted with people begging to 'send help'

In a video shared by photographer [@FirePhotoGirl](#) on Twitter, [Lake Arrowhead](#) resident Michelle Calkins said people in her community and Running Springs and Crestline “are screaming and begging for help” from state officials.

She also claimed that the State of Emergency, declared by SBC officials on Monday, isn’t being taken seriously.

[SBC officials on Monday declared a local emergency](#) after mountain residents found themselves trapped at home or unable to reach home due to several feet of snow that fell over the weekend. The declaration seeks

state and federal assistance to clear snow from mountain highways and neighborhood streets and to support other necessary work and services in mountain areas.

Calkins claims that her area has 9 feet of accumulated snow, and residents have been “trapped in their homes” for more than five days because “the streets are not plowed.”

She said residents cannot get medicine, and mothers, who are low on baby formula, have called the emergency hotline, but “no one is taking us serious.”

Calkins said her area is unincorporated, unlike big cities like Mammoth, Tahoe, and Big Bear.

“Please, we are begging you, send help,” said a teary-eyed Calkins. “We need help. This is not a joke.”

Just before 2 p.m. on Wednesday, **San Bernardino County Fire** personnel responded to a fully involved structure fire in the 900 block of Crest Fern Drive in Blue Jay, just north of State Route 18.

Units on scene began a defensive attack, with personnel digging through feet of snow to access a hydrant. Two injured civilians at the scene were being treated by fire medics, who could only reach the incident site by snowcat.

On Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Jay Obernolte, who represents much of SBC, including the communities in the Big Bear Lake area, called on Gov. Gavin Newsom to issue a state disaster declaration in response to historic winter storms.

The official request for the governor to declare a State of Emergency for the mountain areas was signed by several, including Reps. Ken Calvert represents the Coachella Valley and other parts of Riverside County.

"Over the past few days, the state has experienced an unprecedented surge of winter storms that have engulfed Southern California, spanning the San Bernardino, Sierra Nevada, and San Gabriel Mountains.

The magnitude of these weather systems has severely strained local government’s ability to swiftly respond and protect public health and safety," the members wrote to Newsom.

The members of Congress noted that the storms had "blocked roads, stranded or trapped residents and visitors, collapsed buildings, and left thousands of homes and businesses without electricity or access to critical lifesaving resources including fuel, medications, doctors, and even basic resources such as groceries."

The unincorporated town of Crestline was singled out, with representatives saying employees were struggling to reach the wastewater treatment facility.

Spring thaw expected through the weekend

Chief Meteorologist Ben Brissey at Bensweather reported that the latest storm overnight dropped another 2 feet of snow in the San Bernardino Mountains.

Snow showers tapered off Wednesday afternoon, with a decent spring thaw expected through the weekend. More unsettled weather is possible next week, Brissey said.

<https://www.vvdailypress.com/story/weather/severe/2023/03/02/every-resource-will-be-thrown-at-this-incident-san-bernardino-county-officials/69960934007/>

Avalanche Blocks Road in Mount Baldy Area After Cold Storm Drops Several Feet of Snow

By Staff Writer, NBC Los Angeles

March 1, 2023



Authorities warn of extreme avalanche danger on Mt. Baldy. Alex Vasquez reports for the NBC4 News at 11 a.m. on Wednesday March 1, 2023.

There were reports of avalanches Wednesday following an unrelenting storm that has delivered days of snow in the San Gabriel Mountains east of Los Angeles.

Mount Baldy Resort tweeted that avalanches were reported in the Movie Slope area.

"Multiple life threatening avalanches reported in the Movie Slope area below the ski area parking lot," according to the resort.

The avalanche was below the resort area, but blocked part of Mount Baldy Road, according to the California Highway Patrol. Residents above the avalanche area cannot come down the mountain.

Crews with heavy equipment were on their way to clear the road.

The [Mount Baldy Fire Department](#) said avalanche danger is a significant concern following more overnight snow.

"Avalanches have been occurring," said Eric Sherwin, of the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**. "It's an ongoing threat. That threat will persist for the foreseeable future.

"We can expect additional accumulations through tonight."

Sherwin said snow totals are near 10 feet in some areas. No injuries were reported. The resort remains closed Wednesday.

The rapid flows of snow down a mountain kill more than 150 people worldwide each year, according to the [National Weather Service](#).

Warning signs include cracks in the snow around feet or skis; a hollow feeling to the ground underfoot; 'whumping' sounds indicating that the snow is settling; heavy snowfall or rain in a 24-hour period; rapidly increasing temperatures; and patterns on the snow created by the force of powerful winds.

Rain will taper off Wednesday, but snow will continue to fall in the mountains where a winter storm warning is in effect. A line of storms that began last week have led to power outages and school closures in mountain communities.

A [winter storm warning](#) is in effect through 10 p.m. Wednesday in the Los Angeles County mountains. Wind advisories are in effect in the mountains through 6 p.m.

Mountain communities can expect 8 to 16 inches with localized amounts reach 24 inches. The highest totals will be in the eastern San Gabriel mountains.

The Grapevine section of the 5 Freeway was closed again Wednesday morning due to snow and poor visibility.

In San Bernardino County, authorities planned to escort drivers up the mountain on the 18 Freeway, but said conditions were too hazardous Wednesday morning. San Bernardino County issued a local emergency due to the unrelenting snow.

<https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/avalanches-reported-on-mount-baldy-after-cold-storm-drops-several-feet-of-snow/3105443/>

County Fire waits for shoe to drop

By Jene Estrada, Hi-Desert Star

March 1, 2023



SAN BERNARDINO — The **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District is facing a severe funding deficit due to the possible repeal of the FP-5 tax, firefighting officials said at the county board of supervisors meeting Tuesday morning.

FP-5 is a special tax that funds about \$47 million worth of the \$260 million budget for the fire district. The fire district is a special district whose members — San Bernardino County firefighters and paramedics — respond to fires along with medical emergencies, hazardous materials spills, water rescues, aircraft crashes and other emergencies.

Fire Protection Zone 5 was first established by Helendale voters in 2006 and was expanded throughout the years.

In 2018, the zone was expanded to the entire county except certain contracted areas, but a taxpayers' group questioned the expansion's legality.

In May 2022, Measure Z, a measure to repeal the FP-5 tax, was approved by voters but was invalidated by the San Bernardino County superior court.

“Based on the judgment, Measure Z did not take effect,” said Fire Chief Dan Munsey. “The judgment is currently on appeal with oral argument, a hearing and an appellate court ruling to follow over the next year or two.”

Chief Financial Officer Matthew Erickson said that while the decision on the tax is undecided, the district will be facing substantial financial shortfalls.

“Every year that there's no decision made, that's another \$40-50 million,” Erickson said.

The board was asked to give direction on how the fire district should proceed. Board chairwoman and 3rd District Supervisor Dawn Rowe instructed Munsey to come back to the board with information on how operations of the fire district would be affected by the \$47 million shortfall.

Chief Executive Officer Leonard Hernandez was also instructed to come back to board with information on if and how the board could cover the deficit with money from the general fund.

<https://hidesertstar.com/news/183727/county-fire-waits-for-shoe-to-drop/>

San Bernardino County continues to clear roads and get supplies to residents homebound by storm

By Staff Writer, CBS News

March 1, 2023



San Bernardino County continues fighting storm conditions, with Monday's declared state of emergency escalating as more snow continues to fall into Wednesday morning.

County officials at a news conference Wednesday said the emphasis is clearing snow from the roads so they are drivable, thereby getting essentials, groceries, medical supplies, and gas to residents in the mountain areas who are homebound due to the snow.

The California Highway Patrol suspended escorts for drivers heading up Highway 18 en route to mountain communities due to fog and snow Wednesday morning. Highway 18 access has been suspended multiple times over the course of the latest winter storm.

A roadblock remained in place on California State Route 18 in San Bernardino Wednesday morning, but CHP and Caltrans were helping mountain community residents return home Tuesday evening, checking IDs and running escorts up Highway 18. Officials Wednesday morning said the escorts will resume once the roads are safe.

"As the roads start to open, there's a lot of people that want to go visit the snow. This is the wrong time to do that," said **San Bernardino County Fire** Department Chief Dan Munsey at Wednesday's news conference.

"If we have a large amount of people try to visit our mountains communities, number one, they're not going to find a place to park. Number two, they're going to find out that conditions are very extreme. Number three, they're going to hamper with our emergency cleanup and recovery effort."

Officials reported that over 100 rescues have been staged in the mountains since this storm began and residents in the mountain communities are reporting 7 feet of snow with worries of roof collapse as the snow continues to pile up.

Snowplows, grocery trucks, and other trucks with essential supplies attempt to make their way up State Route 18. Road access has been spotty over the past several days, with some residents sitting and waiting for hours — others for several days — as the snowstorm blocked roadways in and out of the area.

"We're just out here on our own and usually by now, plows have come by," said Crestline resident Dan. "It just seems like we're being forgotten about."

Dan was trapped in the mountains with his newborn and wife. The family said they were running out of baby formula and were in dire straits, with no estimate on when the roads will be back open.

"We're kind of up the creek right now," said Dan.

Big Bear resident Cat Corliss and other drivers were stranded in the mountain town, running on empty tanks and striking out on finding fuel. One driver said she went to three gas stations and had no luck.

"Letting you know there is absolutely no gas to be found up here," said Corliss.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/san-bernardino-county-continues-efforts-to-clear-roads-and-help-homebound-residents-amid-storm/?ftag=CNM-00-10aag7e>