



NEWS



News Headlines 03/07/2023

- Several dead in San Bernardino Mountains after storm, residents fear more
- San Diego firefighters help snowed-in mountain community
- Snow siege in California's San Bernardino Mountains sows desperation as crews struggle to clear roads
- 'Quite catastrophic': California mountain residents plead for more help as feet of snow remain

Several dead in San Bernardino Mountains after storm, residents fear more

By Staff Writer, FOX 11

March 7, 2023



San Bernardino County Fire has confirmed at least two people have been found dead in the mountains, both of whom were in hospice care. But one community member says she worries there may be more.

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, Calif. - It's been nearly two weeks since massive storms buried the San Bernardino Mountains in several feet of snow.

In the days since the storms, residents have begged for help, whether in the form of street plowing, food or even life-saving medication. Progress is being made, but for some, it's too little too late. **San Bernardino County Fire** officials confirmed to FOX 11 that they've found two people dead on the mountain, both of whom were in hospice care.

Kristy Baltezare, who lives on the mountain, said she's also lost a close friend in the snow, and fears for other residents as the long road to recovery in the storms' aftermath continues.

"We went to check on her, and she was dead in her home," said Baltezare. "She was not ill, she was not disabled. She was a very active, vibrant person. But there's, in my mind, no other explanation for her death except that she froze."

Baltezare's concern for other mountain residents led her to start a database for people on the mountain, that lets residents submit information about where they are and what they need. The information is then presented on a map.

The result has been hundreds of residents asking for help.

"We are asphyxiating because the heat sources up here are mostly gas and there's so much snow on the roofs that the exhaust pipes are blocked," Baltezare said.

Baltezare said she's offered the data to San Bernardino County agencies, but none have accepted it.

"None of us are first responders," Baltezare said. "We're just neighbors that care about our neighbors and want to see them again, and we don't want to see them come out here in body bags."

Baltezare said that Los Angeles County's Urban Search and Rescue team reached out to her after seeing her post. San Bernardino County Fire confirmed to FOX 11's Cristy Fajardo that they did receive an offer of aid

from that department, but turned them down, saying they already have enough people with that expertise on the mountain.

<https://www.foxla.com/news/several-dead-in-san-bernardino-mountains-after-storm-residents-fear-more>

San Diego firefighters help snowed-in mountain community

By Kitty Alvarado and Mike Daron, KPBS

March 6, 2023



Cal Fire San Diego crews help dig out snowed in residents in the San Bernardino mountains.

Dozens of firefighters from San Diego County are in the San Bernardino mountains, helping people dig out from a series of powerful storms that hit nearly two weeks ago, covering some areas with over 8 feet of snow.

Capt. Brent Pascua of Cal Fire-San Diego County Fire said they were answering a call for help from the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department.

"They requested our assistance Wednesday night of last week. We were on the road first thing Thursday morning," he said.

Pascua said they did not hesitate to gather as many people as they could spare.

"We sent eight engines, some battalion chiefs and two hand crews," he said.

That's 56 people who are working wherever they are needed. But Pascua noted these are crews that are used to working with fire, not ice. "It's very different," he said. "We are using a lot of our hand tools that we use on fires, but this time we're digging and chunking out snow with it instead of cutting fire line."

Those hand tools are helping to clear paths through driveways and helping people get out of the houses they've been trapped in since the storms hit on Feb. 22.

Pascua said the situation is growing more desperate as days go on and people are running out of food. He said when they see Cal Fire San Diego crews, they breathe in a sigh of relief and are very thankful.

"A lot of them are very elderly, so any help they can get goes a long way," he said. "They are just so thankful to see somebody after all this time."

Pascua said the story that hits closest to home for him is about how one of their crews helped a trapped family with a baby.

"(Firefighters) had to hike in diapers and baby formula, and food and water to a family they could not get the roadway cleared ... so, they had to backpack in supplies to the family," he said. "Having kids myself, I couldn't imagine being stuck in the snow like that."

Pascua said firefighters in San Diego are working overtime to fill in for those who are in the mountains. He also noted that after nearly two weeks, the rescuers know they're at the point when the situation may turn tragic, but he said they will stay there until the job is done.

"You don't want to lose hope, because then you don't feel like you're giving it your all," he said. "You have to have that little bit of hope somewhere. That's where you dig deep and that's where you find that miracle. That's what we hang on to."

<https://www.kpbs.org/news/local/2023/03/06/san-diego-firefighters-help-snowed-in-mountain-community>

Snow siege in California's San Bernardino Mountains sows desperation as crews struggle to clear roads

By Nathan Solis, Summer Lin and Robert J. Lopez, The Brunswick News

March 6, 2023



Emergency vehicles and residents navigate through the snow-covered downtown area of Crestline on Friday, March 3, 2023, following heavy snowfall in the region. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

LOS ANGELES — As crews hustled to clear snow-covered roads in the San Bernardino Mountains, many residents remained stranded Monday amid growing frustration over the dayslong delays to help locals who have been cut off for more than 10 days and are running low on food and medicine.

The San Bernardino Mountains received more than 100 inches of snow over the past several days, stranding an unknown number of residents in the mountain communities.

Now state and local agencies are working to clear out the mounds of snow using heavy machinery, including road graders, front-end loaders, dump trucks, snowplows and snow blowers. Officials from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the Office of Emergency Management, the California Highway Patrol and the California National Guard are in the mountain communities helping local agencies dig residents out of their homes and clear the roads, according to the governor's office.

Nearly 60 Caltrans employees had removed more than 7.2 million cubic yards of snow off state highways in San Bernardino County as of Saturday, according to Gov. Gavin Newsom's office. Private contractors have removed an additional 970,000 cubic yards of snow from State Routes 18 and 330, the statement added.

Since Sunday, 51 miles of roads have been cleared, out of a total of more than 400 miles of roads that have been serviced, according to the county. The county estimates that there are nearly 90 miles of roads left to be cleared.

The slow pace of clearing roads has become a source of growing anger in mountain communities. Making matters worse, residents have endured gas leaks, fires and roof cave-ins due to the snow, and authorities have struggled to give aid.

Firefighters have used snowmobiles they typically deploy for back-country rescues to respond to emergency calls in residential neighborhoods.

Volunteer crews on land and in the air have tried to help by dropping in supplies by helicopter.

The intensity of the snow — which sparked rare blizzard warnings — caught emergency crews off guard.

Snowplows that usually clear the mountain roads were ineffective, forcing crews to work around the clock using front-end loaders and hand shovels to clear snow berms to reach the communities that were still snowed in as of Friday.

“When it comes to clearing the roads, I’d say we learned some valuable lessons,” **San Bernardino County Fire Chief Dan Munsey** said during a joint news conference with state and local officials.

“Unfortunately, the snow came down so quickly and stacked up so quickly those front-end plows that we’re so used to using on a routine basis became ineffective.”

Fire crews have had to lug their equipment through the snow and dig to access fire hydrants, draining precious time to respond to the emergencies, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**.

At least two people were injured in a house fire Wednesday afternoon in the community of Blue Jay, about a mile from Lake Arrowhead Village.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, and Southern California Gas Co. is working with emergency responders to address reports of gas leaks, said **San Bernardino County Fire Battalion Chief Michael McClintock**.

Newsom on Wednesday declared a state of emergency for San Bernardino County and a dozen other counties hit by severe storms, freeing up state resources such as the National Guard to assist.

With some many areas cut off, volunteers have stepped in to help.

Crestline resident Max Strawn, 30, was among dozens of local volunteers who offered to help their neighbors.

He said Saturday he waded through waist-high snow to deliver boxes of groceries to people with disabilities and elderly residents in the area.

“These are only the ones we know about,” he said. “I know there’s people we’re missing.”

Dawn Diggle, 42, who lives in the Valley of Enchantment in Crestline, said streets in her neighborhood were finally cleared Saturday of about 6 feet of snow that had piled up for more than a week.

She said that about 1,000 people showed up at a store Friday for food boxes that never arrived.

“Everyone left empty-handed,” Diggle said. “All this bureaucracy is really slowing things down.”

The situation improved Saturday, when she and other volunteers handed out boxes of milk, pasta, beans, rice and canned goods that had arrived from the state to about 500 people. She said a restaurant also delivered cheeses, fresh peppers and deli meats that she and other volunteers divided into freezer bags for residents.

“Everybody is desperate,” she said.

https://thebrunswicknews.com/news/business/snow-siege-in-californias-san-bernardino-mountains-sows-desperation-as-crews-struggle-to-clear-roads/article_88a34bc9-154e-5d0a-a990-503890ac6c0f.html

'Quite catastrophic': California mountain residents plead for more help as feet of snow remain

By Scott Sistik, FOX Weather

March 6, 2023



CRESTLINE, Calif. – The intense winter storms have pummeled the mountains up and down the spine of California with heavy snows for weeks. While all the Sierra Nevada and Southern California mountains have had experience with heavy snows before, the amount of snow in these storms has been overwhelming rescue responses, leaving many trapped inside their homes for days with dwindling supplies.

"The mountains outside of Los Angeles in Ventura and Santa Bernardino Counties — these are mountains that do get some snow, but they've been hit with multiple storms that have brought in 5-8 feet of snow," said FOX Weather Meteorologist Britta Merwin. "So, this historic snow is leaving many cut off from civilization."

More than 500 emergency personnel, including firefighters, law enforcement and utility workers, have made their way into the buried communities in Southern California's San Bernardino County mountains, according to Eric Sherwin with **San Bernardino County Fire**.

"We are at day 11 since the storm first made its appearance here in San Bernardino County," he told FOX Weather on Monday, adding that the San Bernardino National Forest is home to the largest resident population of any national forest in the U.S., making for extreme logistical challenges.

"Over the past week and a half, we have performed over 100 rescues of residents within these mountain communities," he said. "During the first parts of storm, the roads received so much snow that fire trucks, ambulances and patrol cars could not make access into these communities."

Instead, fire officials have been using specially equipped snow cats to deliver emergency services. As help and supplies have struggled to reach some snowed-in communities, it left neighbors to rely on each other.

"It's gotten quite catastrophic," said Nathan Hazard, who lives in Crestline.

Hazard said that aside from firefighters that have made it to his community, they have not seen an outside response. What's worse, one of the town's main grocery stores collapsed due to the weight of heavy snow.

"Which is mortifying for everyone who relies on them for food," he said.

To get by, his community created interactive maps, "that show who needs help and where they are so people can literally hike to them with food or medication or baby supplies," he told FOX Weather. "It's gotten to a

point that we realize we have to do this by ourselves as no one is coming really to help us."

He said what the region badly needs is a national emergency declaration from President Joe Biden to get federal help involved.

For Cindy Powers, a special education teacher who lives in Running Springs but commutes down the hill for work, the snow has left her unable to work for 11 days. Monday was the first day that she was going to be able to venture down the mountain for class, but she has to leave her husband and kids at home with no guarantee conditions will allow her to drive home after work.

"As a mother, it's kind of heartbreaking you have to do these things in (the) middle of a crisis," she said.

Sherwin said the communities and their residents are well-equipped for snow, but with these storms, even the most well-equipped residents are becoming stressed. Meanwhile, heavy machinery has arrived to help clear snow in some towns, but even then, where do you put it?

"(On highways), CalTrans can go in and literally throw that snow off the side of the mountain," Sherwin said. "In our residential communities, it's not quite as easy; we're still forced to load snow into dump trucks and send those dump trucks out, so it's a much slower process."

Sierra Nevada communities stuck in the snow too

Even those farther north in the usually snowier Sierra haven't been spared. Some mountain areas near Lake Tahoe received 10 to 12 feet of snow in just seven days, topped by an estimated 144-inch new snow total at China Peak and 114 inches at Soda Springs.

In Placer County, which is home to a chunk of the Sierra Nevada and the higher elevations of Interstate 80 in central California, people in nearby communities have been stuck inside for at least five days, according to Chief Brian Estes with the Placer County Fire Department. He said Donner Pass, which is just about 45 minutes east of their headquarters along the summit of Interstate 80, had as much as 300 inches of snow currently on the ground.

"Our snow amounts across the Sierras right now are of historic proportions," Estes told FOX Weather on Monday.

CAL Fire has been averaging about 150 calls for help per day last week.

"We're seeing a host of really dynamic type of rescue environments, requiring a lot of specialized equipment," Estes said. "(It's) ranging from stranded people in homes that have been cut off by heavy snow to trees across roadways, power lines, etc., and getting to those people to provide warmth and food and/or getting them out for medical reasons."

The medical rescues have been particularly challenging.

"Just getting in for a medical emergency, we've had to go in on foot and bring them out either on snow machines or on sleds of some sort," Estes said.

And it's not just the local communities with grave travel impacts.

"Interstate 80 is one of busiest in the nation," Estes said. "It's been closed for 3 or 4 days over the last two weeks – which is very much unheard of – and when it has been open, we've seen a tremendous increase in serious motor vehicle accidents across the area."

Even those expecting snow got more than they could handle. Three snow surveyors from Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks ventured out on Feb. 28 to take measurements, then became stranded in the snow for three days before rescue by the California Highway Patrol. They were not hurt.

Estes said the mountain communities are no strangers to snow and are usually quite resilient.

"For the most part, they are prepared," he said. "But none of these communities are prepared for the massive amounts of downed trees, inaccessibility on roads, and power line issues."

More snow on the way

The last thing the residents want to hear is more storms are on the way, but the relentless stormy pattern is not done with the Golden State just yet.

Snow showers are likely in the mountains through the middle of the week before [another atmospheric river takes aim](#) Thursday and Friday. Snow may yet again be measured in feet in higher elevations, but heavy rains could exacerbate snow melt and lead to flooding in the lower hills.

<https://www.foxweather.com/weather-news/san-bernardino-sierra-nevada-california-mountain-residents-plead-more-help>