

Colorado wildfires burn hundreds of homes and force evacuations

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Structures burn as a wind-driven wildfire forced evacuation of the Superior suburb of Boulder, Colorado, on Thursday [Trevor Hughes/USA Today via Reuters]

Denver, January 1 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of residents in two communities in the U.S. state of Colorado have been ordered to evacuate following wind-fueled wildfires that engulfed parts of the area in smoky, orangish skies and destroyed hundreds of homes.

Louisville's 21,000 residents were told to evacuate on Thursday after the 13,000 people in Superior were ordered to leave. The neighbouring towns are roughly 32 km (20 miles) northwest of the state capital,

Denver, a city of more than 715,000 people.

A towering plume of smoke from the wildfires was visible in Denver. A Reuters news agency photo also showed several buildings burning in Superior, a suburb of Boulder. A state sheriff was quoted as saying that 580 homes, a hotel and a shopping center have burned.

Governor Jared Polis declared a state of emergency to allow the use of disaster funding to support emergency response efforts and the mobilisation of the Colorado National Guard and other state resources as needed. A nearby portion of the U.S. highway also was reported shut down because of a fire.

A blaze northwest of Superior was one of several that started in the area as winds gusted up to 169 kilometres per hour (105 miles per hour).

The National Weather Service (NWS) said in a social media post that smaller fires were also reported in at least two areas. The weather agency warned that the fast-moving fires were creating a “life-threatening situation” in some areas.

A mandatory evacuation has been ordered in all areas of Louisville except for two districts, according to the police department.

Six people who were reported injured in the fires were being treated at UC Health Broomfield Hospital, the Associated Press news agency quoted a hospital spokesperson as saying. The extent of property losses was not immediately known, but a news station aired footage of at least one home engulfed in flames near Louisville.

The fires on the outskirts of the Denver metropolitan area, left bone dry from an extreme drought gripping eastern Colorado, followed several days of heavy snow in the Rocky Mountains to the west.

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