

California's fire spreads uncontained, forces thousands to evacuate



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Sacramento, July 25 (RHC)-- Thousands have been evacuated as a fierce wildfire in California burns several thousand hectares and forces evacuations as it spreads to Yosemite National Park.

The Oak Fire, which started on Friday, had consumed 15,603 acres (6,314 hectares), more than half the size of Paris, by Sunday evening, and was zero percent contained, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire).

The blaze was moving east up into the sierra, toward the town of Mariposa Pines and in the direction of Yosemite on Sunday, said Justin Macomb, a Cal Fire operations section chief. "The fire quickly outflanked us. We couldn't even attack it with the resources that we had on hand," Macomb said. "In my career, I haven't seen fire behavior like that."

Firefighters deployed air tankers, bulldozers and hand crews to battle the fast-moving wildfire on Sunday, but according to Cal Fire officials, the fire progressed atypically and overran their best efforts.

The Oak Fire left a trail of destroyed property in its wake. "Extreme drought conditions have led to critical fuel moisture levels," the CAL FIRE's report warned.

Described as "explosive" by officials, the blaze has left ashes, gutted vehicles and twisted remains of properties in its wake, as emergency personnel worked to evacuate residents and protect structures in its path.

More than 6,000 people had been evacuated, said Hector Vasquez, a CAL FIRE official. The blaze has destroyed 10 properties and damaged five others, with thousands more threatened.

California Governor Gavin Newsom on Saturday declared a state of emergency in Mariposa County, citing "conditions of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property." In recent years, California and other parts of the western United States have been ravaged by huge and fast-moving wildfires, driven by years of drought and global warming, evidently.

Also the evidence of global warming could be seen in a dozen US states which are under a heat advisory. The high temperatures have already caused an uptick in emergency calls for heat-related illnesses.

American cities have been forced to open cooling stations and increase outreach to at-risk communities such as the homeless and those without access to air conditioning.

In countries across the globe, other regions have been hit by extreme heatwaves in recent months, such as Western Europe in July and India in March to April, incidents that scientists say are an unmistakable sign of climate change.

Five separate high-pressure weather systems across the northern hemisphere, which are linked by atmospheric waves, have led to unprecedented temperatures on multiple continents.

The World Health Organization's European office on Friday called on world countries and governments to cooperate closely with each other in order to implement the Paris Agreement and try to reduce the temperature of the earth.

Climate scientists say the next decade will be defined by greater weather extremes but the fear is it will also be shaped by humanity's collective failure to do more.

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