

Over 9,000 structures, mostly homes, damaged or destroyed as Los Angeles fires continue to burn

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Fires continue to rage through communities in and around Los Angeles imperiling entire neighborhoods and choking millions of people with toxic smoke. At least six people have been confirmed dead and large swathes of previously idyllic neighborhoods in the Pacific Palisades, Altadena and Pasadena resemble a war zone.

On Thursday, local fire officials estimated that at least 9,300 but as many as 10,300 structures, mostly homes, had already been damaged or destroyed in the Palisades and Eaton fires. Early estimates of the damage are over \$50 billion, more than double the initial estimates from Wednesday, making it by far the costliest fire in the history of the United States.

Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley said on Thursday that the Palisades fire alone is “one of the most destructive natural disasters in the history of Los Angeles.” Aerial photos show hundreds of homes in the area completely obliterated by the inferno.

On Thursday night, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna revealed that “approximately 400 National Guard members” would be deploying to Los Angeles.

As of Thursday morning, one fire was fully contained: the Sunset Fire which began in the Hollywood Hills was extinguished late Wednesday night. However, as of this writing, there are at least five fires that continue to burn an area covering 45 square miles.

The largest of these fires, the Palisades Fire, has consumed nearly 20,000 acres and is so far just six percent contained. The first reported fatality from that fire was reported on Thursday.

The five deaths previously reported were all victims of the Eaton Fire which has been burning in and around

Altadena. That fire has forced the evacuation of the historic Mt. Wilson Observatory and threatened the transmitter towers that many local television stations and emergency services rely on to broadcast their signal.

Many have raised the question on social media of why dead vegetation and brush were not cleared from the vicinity of all the communication equipment prior to the eruption of the fire.

The fires have forced the evacuation of over 130,000 residents while also leaving more than 350,000 without power, 200,000 of which were in Los Angeles County which is the largest county by population in the country.

Reports of damages of \$50 billion exceed that of California’s previous costliest fire, the Camp Fire of 2018, by a factor of four. That fire saw the complete destruction of the Concow, Magalia, Butte Creek Canyon and Paradise communities, leaving 85 people dead and over 50,000 people without a home. The fire destroyed upwards of 18,000 structures, while burning 153,336 acres, resulting in \$12.5 billion in insured losses, an amount a fraction of the total of the still raging Los Angeles fires.

Thursday provided some respite as the Santa Ana winds which have helped stoke the fires have slowed, allowing firefighters to deploy from the air. However, winds were still clocked at over 40 miles per hour, actively helping to fan the flames. Current weather estimates are for 25-45 miles per hour gusts to continue throughout the weekend.

On Thursday, the WSWS spoke to John, a resident of Altadena, who was forced to evacuate after the power went out at his house at 6 p.m. on Tuesday. He said that

they gathered up the animals and clothes to stay overnight, hoping to come back the next day, but the area was blocked off by police on Wednesday.

When attempting to return home, he said, “We were lucky, our house has survived, so far, because it was behind the fire, but its amazing that its still standing because the rest of Altadena, our community, it’s just like a bomb went off...Supermarkets burned, banks burned, our veterinarian hospital burned to the ground.

“And people were very frustrated because even the next day, houses were burning and there weren’t enough firefighters. But even for the ones that showed up, there was no water pressure on the hydrants. There are various explanations for that, but there were some real problems with people getting angry because water was not being sprayed to save their houses.”

At the time of the interview, John was shopping for necessities since he was unable to return to his home. He noted that there is already a run on bottled water.

He stated that he was aware of the risk of wildfires, given that Altadena is on the edge of a National Forest, however, “What has blown me away is the devastation that it’s caused in the flatland neighborhood, in these square miles that are at the base of the mountain that are blocks or miles from the foothills themselves. And I just, you know, feel so terrible for people who had to leave in a panic and that it’s just burned to the ground.”

The area John was in was under an evacuation order. He said that the Sheriff’s department was letting people know by driving up and down the streets, telling people to leave with a megaphone.

Many now face the prospect of trying to recover and rebuild without any insurance or very limited support, with many companies cancelling policies or raising rates to unaffordable levels in recent years due to the rising risk of fire due to climate change.

According to the most recent data from the California Department of Insurance, between 2020 and 2022, insurance companies declined to renew 2.8 million homeowner policies in the state. This has forced many to use the FAIR Plan, the insurer of last resort in the state. The program is not funded by the state, but it allows insurance companies to provide a bare bones plan to homeowners at twice the normal rate.

However, even this is now being called into question, with Victoria Roach president of the FAIR Plan stating in March that, “It’s a gamble, we don’t have the

money on hand, and we have a lot of exposure out there.” And the exposure of the FAIR Plan, according to a report from KTLA channel 5 amounts to around \$500 billion.

Responding to president-elect Donald Trump’s social media posts on the fire, John remarked, “I was just infuriated by Trump making those comments, calling Newsom, Newscom like an eighth grader. Here are all these people. I mean, the degree of human suffering! You can imagine being 50, 60 years old in a community, having everything gone, raising your family there, then having to leave at three in the morning and coming back the next day and having it burned to the ground.

“Biden was here to dedicate these monuments, so he was here coincidentally, and he appeared to do something, you know, they said all the right things like we feel terrible for people, blah, blah, blah. We’re here to help. And then you have Trump trying to score political points from this degree of suffering, without showing the slightest sympathy for those suffering.

“I mean, my community, it’s destroyed. It’s gutted. It’s like a bomb went off in the middle of it. I mean just blocks of, just nothing. Blocks. Nothing. You just walk, go down these blocks. There’s nothing but chimneys standing and rubble. Smoldering trees. Stuff still smoldering as we’re speaking. I still don’t know if we will have a house to go back to.”



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