
“The Unstoppable Fires: The California Wildfires”

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7,597 Fires. 1,667,855 Acres Burned. Thousands of Homes Destroyed. Countless Displaced. Over 80 Dead¹. These are the statistics from the Fall 2018 California Wildfires; to date, they were some of the most destructive and deadly wildfires in the state’s history.



This year, California has already accumulated many wildfires, including the Carr and Mendocino fires earlier in August, each having catastrophic results. The cycle continued in early November when “the Camp Fire” in the Sierra Nevada Mountains began to burn and spread throughout Northern California.² In total, Vox³ exemplifies that the fierce fire torched more than 150,000 acres, took almost 80 lives, and destroyed over 10,000 residences.

One of the most devastating areas affected was in Paradise, CA – near Chico. The sky turned dark and black from the smoke, and along with the thousands of homes burned, the entire community was turned to ash. SF Gate⁴ reveals quotes from key witnesses,

“There’s pretty much complete devastation in that community — entire streets where houses are wiped out,” said Lynne Tolmachoff, spokeswoman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. *“It’s not looking very good at all.”*

“We were engulfed in flames,” said Butte County Supervisor Doug Teeter. *“I don’t know what we are coming back to after this. Probably a moonscape. As we drove out, homes were burnt to the ground.”*

Areas throughout Northern California had significant effects as well. Many places had air quality indexes of over 200, reaching the level of very unhealthy. I live in Los Altos, CA – about 200

¹ California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection & National Interagency Fire Center

² Time, INC 2018

³ Irfan, VOX 2018

⁴ SF Gate 2018

miles away from the fires, yet my community was affected as well. On Thursday, November 15th, I woke up to the smell of smoke. *I thought my mother had a kitchen mishap.* However, that wasn't the case. I looked outside and noticed a very vibrant and foggy orange color in the sky. And like any teenage girl, I checked twitter to see what had happened. *The Camp Fire had begun.* By the evening, the air quality had reached toxic levels, in Los Altos, it was in the 220s, and in San Jose, it was in 230s. With this concern, many school districts began to close and cancel school on Friday. Of these, my district – Mountain View/Los Altos – was canceled as well after receiving emails and calls from concerned students and parents. It was shocking to realize that even though the fire was hundreds of miles away, its effects were still prominent.

Air Quality Index - Particulate Matter	
301 – 500	Hazardous
201 – 300	Very Unhealthy
151 – 200	Unhealthy
101 – 150	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups
51 – 100	Moderate
0 – 50	Good

Soon, along with NorCal, Southern California also was torched with a wildfire. The Woolsey Fire in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties – especially Malibu – had burned almost 100,000 acres, and the death toll rose to 3.⁵

How did all this happen? So suddenly? So vastly? Was it due to chance? Was it due to a minor mistake that went wrong? Or is this part of a larger trend of global warming/climate change effects?

The trend of the occurrence of California wildfires is one of concern. The fires in the Fall of 2018 aren't out-of-nowhere nor are they by chance. In fact, data shows that a majority of the 10 largest and most dangerous wildfires in CA took place in just the past few years. And it's getting worse as the years pass. For example, the 2017 Santa Barbara fire held the record for the largest fire, but it was surpassed when the Mendocino Complex Fire occurred in August of 2018, and that fire was exceeded by the Camp Fire in November. The 2018 fires have been 30% larger than average in the past decades.

The cause of the increase in the devastation of these fires are not due to careless mistakes of individuals – such as accidentally lighting a match in the forest – but it is one that is much broader, the ignorance towards the threat of climate change and global warming. Stanford Professor Noah Diffenbaugh explains,

⁵ Irfan, VOX 2018

"what we're seeing over the last few years in terms of the wildfire season in California [is] very consistent with the historical trends in terms of increasing temperatures, increasing dryness, and increasing wildfire risk."

Global warming leads to higher temperatures and less rain, with these insights it's no wonder that these drier and hotter landscapes, along with factors of large population and others, are creating environments where fires are more likely to spread and burn not only longer but stronger⁶.

With these understandings, it's important for us, and legislation makers to view climate change as a imminent threat, as its effects are already being demonstrated in countless scenarios, especially in these fires. So VOTE for propositions and leaders that align with this perspective. Help prevent the loss of countless lives, homes, and others – they can be prevented but only if effective action is taken.

While the fires have been mostly contained by the long-awaited rains, the effects have not ceased, the lucky survivors must spend the holiday season in tents. Homes are still in ashes, people are still missing, and the traumas and impacts of the 2018 fall fires in CA will continue to be felt in the devastated communities.

Help out and learn how you can take action [here](#).

⁶ The Independent, 2018