

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

to *Picking Up The Pieces: Restoring Rural Housing and Communities After a Disaster*

2017 Southern California Wildfires Disaster Guide

Housing Assistance Council

December 11, 2017

As of December 11, Thomas Fire has destroyed 230,000 acres and is only 15% contained. Creek, Rye, Lilac, Skirball, and Liberty Fires also began last week but are largely contained. Almost 95,000 people were evacuated in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties on Sunday evening.¹ The fires have destroyed around 1000 homes and buildings and the dry, gusty winds threaten 18,000 more structures. More than 4,000 firefighters are on duty.²

To determine whether additional counties have been added, check Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) news releases online at <https://www.fema.gov/news-releases> or call FEMA's toll-free number, 1-800-621-FEMA (3362).

Resources

The following guide provides information for individuals and families affected by the fires about current and potential efforts. For more information, please see HAC's report: *Picking up the Pieces: Restoring Rural Housing and Communities After a Disaster*, available free online at http://www.ruralhome.org/storage/documents/disaster_guide_2012.pdf.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is not currently offering funds to assist residents, but that may change in coming days.

If your house is inaccessible or currently uninhabitable, a number of localities are offering temporary shelter. Information on evacuation orders and evacuation centers is available on the California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) website at http://www.fire.ca.gov/current_incidents/

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

If federal assistance becomes available for residents affected by the fires, to apply you must complete a multi-purpose application *online* at <https://www.fema.gov/apply-assistance> or *over the phone* on FEMA's toll-free helpline.

Toll-free helpline:

1-800-621-FEMA (3362)

For hearing impaired callers only:

1-800-462-7585 (TTY)

1-800-621-3362 (Video Relay Service)

¹ "California wildfires now larger than New York City and Boston combined." CNN. December 11, 2017.

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/11/us/california-wildfires/index.html>

² Dwyer, Colin and Scott Neuman. "Thomas Fire, 5th-Largest In Modern California History, Shows Few Signs Of Slowing." NPR. December 11, 2017. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/11/569801554/thomas-fire-5th-largest-in-modern-california-history-shows-few-signs-of-slowing>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

HUD offers a Disaster Recovery Toolkit and makes other related resources available:

<https://www.hud.gov/info/disasterresources>.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

To determine whether USDA has specific assistance available for fire survivors who had USDA Rural Development assistance before the fires, check for information online at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/services/rural-development-disaster-assistance>, or call the USDA Rural Development state office in California at 530-792-5830 for rental housing or 530-792-5816 for owner-occupied housing.

American Red Cross Disaster Service

For referrals and updates on Red Cross shelter services in your area, locate a local Red Cross office through: <http://www.redcross.org/find-help> or by calling the Public Inquiry Center at 1-800-214-0441.

State Housing Agencies

Each state has at least one agency that administers state and federal programs to promote decent affordable housing for low-income individuals. Typically, these agencies and authorities administer some aspects of state or federal programs.

California Department of Housing & Community Development
3220 S Higuera St # 103B
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
916-263-7400
<http://www.hcd.ca.gov/>

California Housing Finance Agency
100 Corporate Pointe # 250
Culver City, CA 90230
310-342-5400
877-9-CalHFA (877-922-5432)
<http://www.calhfa.ca.gov/>

Local Housing Authorities

Housing Authority of the City of San Buenaventura
995 Riverside St.
Ventura, CA 93001
Phone: 805-648-5008
<http://www.hacityventura.org>

Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles
6946 Van Nuys Blvd #100
Van Nuys, CA 91405
Phone: 818-756-1194
<http://www.hacla.org/>

Housing Authority County of San Bernadino
15465 Seneca Rd
Victorville, CA 92392
Phone: 760-243-1043
<http://ww2.hacsb.com/>

Evacuating and Returning Home

The Red Cross website provides suggestions on actions to prepare for evacuation and returning home after a fire:³

IF A FIRE OCCURS Listen to your local media for updates on the fire and be ready to leave quickly. Back your car into the garage or park it in an open space facing your direction of escape. You should also:

- Keep your pets in one room so you can find them quickly if you have to evacuate.
- Arrange for a temporary place to stay outside the threatened area.
- Keep your indoor air clean – close windows and doors to prevent the smoke outside from getting in your home.
- Use the recycle mode on the air conditioner in your home or car. If you don't have air conditioning and it's too hot to be inside, seek shelter somewhere else.
- If smoke levels are high, don't use anything that burns and adds to air pollution inside such as candles, fireplaces and gas stoves.

AFTER THE FIRE Don't go home until fire officials say it is safe. Be cautious entering a burned area – hazards could still exist. Avoid damaged or downed power lines, poles and wires. Other things to do include:

- Keep your animals under your direct control. Hidden embers and hot spots could burn them.
- Wet down debris to minimize breathing dust particles.
- Wear leather gloves and shoes with heavy soles.
- Throw out any food that has been exposed to heat, smoke or soot.
- Recheck for smoke or sparks throughout your home for several hours after the fire, including in your attic. Wildfire winds can blow burning embers anywhere so check for embers that could cause a fire.

If your home has experienced damage, remember to check the outside of your home before you enter. Look for loose power lines, broken or damaged gas lines, foundation cracks, missing support beams, or other damage. It may be safest to ask a building inspector or contractor to check the structure before you enter. Do not force jammed doors open, as they may be providing needed support to the rest of the home. Sniff for gas to ensure there are no natural or propane gas leaks. If you do have a propane tank system, make sure to turn off all valves and contact a propane supplier to check the system before you use it again. Check floors and ceilings to ensure they are not sagging from water damage, this can be especially hazardous. Take photographs of any damage as you may need them for insurance claims or FEMA claims later on.⁴

³ “Red Cross Shelters 1,000s as California Fires Burn out of Control,” October 20, 2017, <http://www.redcross.org/news/article/Red-Cross-Helps-as-Fires-Burn-Out-of-Control-in-California>.

⁴ Excerpted from the Red Cross's Guide on “Checking Your Home: Structural Elements” available at <http://www.redcross.org/find-help/disaster-recovery/home-structural-elements>.