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Fire prompts thousands of evacuations in California

Ali Abbas Ahmadi - BBC News

A fierce wildfire north-west of Los Angeles prompted evacuation orders for thousands of residents on Friday, as extreme heat and dry conditions fuelled its rapid spread.

The blaze, named the Canyon Fire, ignited on Thursday afternoon along the border of Ventura and Los Angeles counties. By Friday evening, it had expanded from 30 acres to nearly 5,400.

The fire has been partially contained, with 28% of its perimeter under control by Saturday morning, officials said, and evacuation orders were reduced to warnings.

On Friday evening, a firefighter suffered major injuries when his truck rolled over a ridge and down a steep hillside.

Kern County firefighter James Agee was driving a pick up truck when he was involved in a "rollover" about 18:20 local time, according to a statement issued by the county. He was airlifted to hospital with "serious injuries".

"James is a strong man with a big heart, and we know he's facing this challenge with the same strength and character he's shown throughout his career," said Kern County Fire Chief Aaron Duncan.

"We are grateful for the swift actions of our crews and partner agencies, and for the kindness being shown to James and his family."

While extreme heat and historically dry conditions had been complicating firefighting efforts, on Friday night, Ventura county said in a statement that "favourable weather conditions" had allowed firefighters to make "good progress in supressing the blaze".

By Saturday morning, officials said there were 1,148 people deployed to fight the fire.

"Crews worked through the night to improve defensive positions and further secure the fire's perimeter," said the statement from the LA County Fire Department.

"Overnight fire activity was minimal as firefighters worked to continue strengthening existing control lines."

The fire remains active and is spreading east toward Castaic in Los Angeles County, authorities said.

With the temperatures forecast to soar to 100°F (37.7°C) in the coming days, residents are being urged to stay on alert.

In the city of Santa Clarita, one of the closest to the blaze, residents have been told to stay away from fire-affected areas.

"If you're in Santa Clarita, Hasley Canyon, or Val Verde, take evacuation orders seriously - when first responders say GO, leave immediately. Keep aware - please don't risk lives," LA County Supervisor Kathryn Barger wrote on X on Friday.

The Canyon Fire is one of several active wildfires across the state, according to California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire).

The Gifford Fire, the largest active blaze in California, has engulfed almost 100,000 acres and is burning across the San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties.

Wildfires have become more frequent in California, with experts citing climate change as a key factor. Hotter, drier conditions have made fire seasons longer and more destructive.

In January this year, the Eaton Fire and Palisades Fire each tore through two neighbourhoods in Los Angeles, killing at least 31 people and destroying thousands of buildings.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2pqry4xkko>