

## Fire-ravaged Southern California braces for gusty winds and heightened wildfire risk

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Firefighters battle the Palisades Fire as it burns multiple structures in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles, on Jan. 7, 2025. (AP Photo/Ethan Swope, File)

LOS ANGELES (AP) -- Southern Californians are bracing for gusty winds and a heightened risk of wildfires less than two weeks after deadly blazes that have killed at least 27 people and ravaged thousands of homes broke out

The National Weather Service has issued a warning of a " particularly dangerous situation " for parts of Los Angeles and Ventura counties from Monday afternoon through Tuesday morning due to low humidity and damaging Santa Ana winds. Gusts could peak at 70 mph (113 kph) along the coast and 100

mph (161 kph) in the mountains and foothills.

Windy weather and single-digit humidity are expected to linger through Thursday, said Rich Thompson, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service. He said the fire risk is also elevated because the region hasn't seen rain since April.

Critical fire weather with wind gusts up to 60 mph (97 kph) was also forecast for other Southern California communities on Monday and Tuesday stretching to San Diego, with residents urged to take steps to get ready to evacuate such as creating an emergency kit and keeping cars filled with at least a half tank of gas.

The warnings come as firefighters continue to battle two major blazes in the Los Angeles area, the Palisades and Eaton fires, which have destroyed more than 14,000 structures since they broke out during fierce winds on Jan. 7. The Palisades fire was 52% contained on Sunday and the Eaton fire 81% contained, according to fire officials.

Firefighters said they have made progress on the perimeter of the Palisades fire, which has charred more than 37 square miles (96 square kilometers) near the Pacific coast, but there are areas in the interior that continue to burn, said Dan Collins, a spokesperson for the Palisades fire incident.

"There is always a possibility in a red flag warning something hot, or some type of burning material from the interior, could be perhaps whipped up and blown across the containment lines," Collins said.

While firefighters are fairly confident the Eaton fire further inland will remain contained, there are concerns a new fire could break out with vegetation especially dry for this time of year, said Carlos Herrera, an Eaton fire spokesperson.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom has positioned 45 fire engines across the region in addition to water-dropping aircraft and hand crews to enable a quick response should a new fire break out, according to the governor's office of emergency services.

"This proactive approach has proven to be a critical component of California's wildfire response strategy, reducing response times and containing fires before they escalate," the office said.

Damage estimates have continued to climb for the Palisades and Eaton fires nearly two weeks since they began. Inspectors have fanned out to check buildings and assess damages, but Collins said it is impossible to know whether the remaining structures affected in the Palisades fire are intact.

"Our damage inspection teams have to inspect every structure within the fire perimeter," Collins said. "They're about two-thirds of the way done."

Fire officials said they were focused on repopulating evacuated areas, with residents allowed to return Sunday to the hillside area of Pacific Palisades known as the highlands.

Authorities said two people were arrested Saturday while attempting to enter an evacuation zone for the Palisades fire and are being investigated for impersonating firefighters. The pair were wearing turnout gear and claimed to be from an Oregon fire agency, but they weren't, and the truck they were driving had been bought at auction, the Los Angeles County sheriff's department said in a statement.

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