

Arizona wildfire forces evacuations

ARIZONA (AP) — As many as 4,000 people were ordered out of their homes Wednesday as a wind-whipped wildfire exploded to nearly 19,000 acres as it leaped from treetop to treetop in the mountains of eastern Arizona.

Authorities ordered the tiny towns of Linden, Pinedale and Clay Springs evacuated, said Kartha Icenhour of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest. The fire is about 110 miles northeast of Phoenix.

The news came as a federal grand jury in Colorado charged a U.S. Forest Service employee with arson in the largest fire in the state's history.

The Arizona fire had been burning on 600 acres early Wednesday before winds sent it racing through thousands of acres of juniper and pine trees. Officials feared it would soon bear down on the three hamlets, and smoke could be seen in Show Low, a community 20 miles away from the flames.

"It's smokier than you would ever believe outside," said Linda Parrish, owner of the Show Low Flower Shoppe. "It's a big, black thundercloud with red tinges to it. It's an awful, ugly looking smoke cloud."

Parrish said she and her husband had already packed their most important possessions in case they had to flee. Evacuation centers were being set up at schools in the region.

Gov. Jane Hull declared a state of emergency to free up state funds to fight the blaze, which began Tuesday and was being investigated as possible arson.

The fire was one of 16 major blazes burning across the nation Wednesday, according to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. Overall, wildfires have scorched 1.75 million acres so far this year, more than double the 10-

year average on this date.

There were also evacuations in New Mexico, where authorities went door-to-door in Pecos, southeast of Santa Fe, to clear 20 families from their homes in advance of a 2,200-acre wildfire.

In Colorado, veteran Forest Service worker Terry Barton was charged with deliberately setting the Hayman fire southwest of Denver, which has grown to 135,000 acres, destroyed at least 25 houses and forced 7,500 people from their homes since June 8.

The charges were filed after prosecutors expressed doubt in her story that the fire got out of hand as she burned a letter from her estranged husband.

The stunning news came as Colorado crews desperately looked for an edge against two huge wildfires burning out of control, taking hope from slightly lower temperatures and weaker winds. The fires — the largest in state history — have gobbled up thousands of new acres this week.

The Hayman fire ballooned by 22,000 acres on Tuesday, and it sent a yellow haze over parts of the metropolitan area again Wednesday.

"We're hoping it doesn't make the big gains today it made yesterday," fire information officer Bobby Kitchens said.

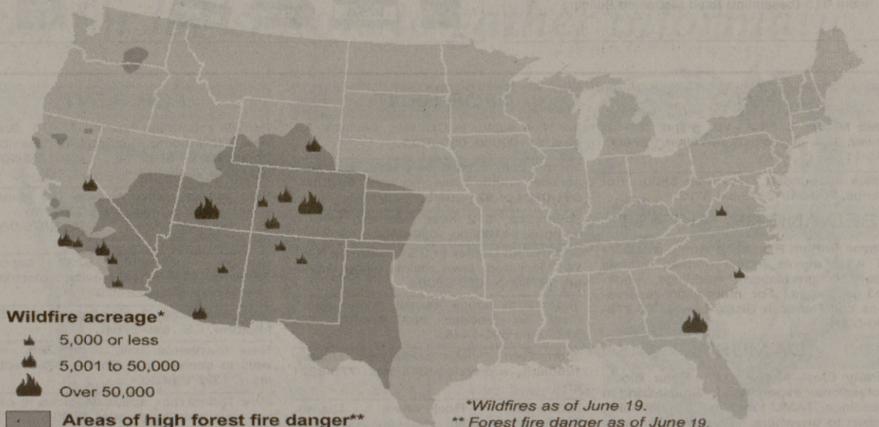
Authorities warned that a 44,320-acre fire in the state's southwestern corner could grow to more than 100,000 acres. Smoke and haze drifted over the Durango area as the fire burned in forests around two reservoirs. It has destroyed at least 10 homes and six buildings, and more than 2,400 people have been evacuated.

Crews were more focused on saving homes than battling the fire itself because it was spreading so quickly.

"We're a long way from having a handle on the fire," information officer Mark Morrow said.

Forest fires running wild across the nation

Wildfire activity continues across the country with over 1.8 million acres burned already this year, more than twice the 10-year average. The majority of active wildfires are in the Southwest, where persistent drought continues to increase the danger of new fires.



SOURCES: National Interagency Fire Center, National Forest Service

"We don't want to lose homes that have already been saved once."

Another fire erupted Wednesday about 70 miles east of Durango, forcing 300 people to flee their homes near the community of South Fork.

The situation in Colorado was so drastic that President Bush declared the two large fires a major disaster and ordered federal aid to help state and local efforts in areas hit by wildfires since April 23. Federal funding will include

disaster housing, grants, and other programs.

In California, cooler weather favored firefighters battling a half-dozen major blazes. Winds had also died down near Yosemite National Park, where nearly 15,000 acres have burned and three firefighters were killed in an air tanker crash Monday.

Federal investigators were at the scene Wednesday hoping to determine why the wings of the C-130A snapped off before the crash.

City of College Station offers online access to capital projects

By Ruth Ihde
THE BATTALION

The City of College Station is now offering access to Capital Projects online. By accessing www.ci.college-station.tx.us, citizens of College Station can now find out about all of the city's projects with a click of the mouse.

Mark Smith, director of public works for the City of College Station held a presentation Wednesday at The Utilities Department to explain the website to the media. The idea for the website was developed about a year ago at a City Council strategy retreat and was released to the public about a month ago.

"This system has always been used internally, but it is now offered to the public," Smith said.

It was developed to make it easier for the citizens to access information about the city's ongoing projects in the area, and keeps track of the improvements being made around the city, he said.

Kelly Cole, public communications and

marketing director for the City of College Station, said it is one way to contact the city.

People will be able to access the information from the City of College Station website by clicking on the Capital Improvement Projects hyperlink. From there, information about every city project is organized by their subject, and can be viewed by clicking on the project wanting to be seen. Very detailed information is given about every project. The description of each project is stated at the top of the page as well as the budget, status of the project and the managing director of the project.

Residents will be able to email the managing director instantly from the link. From the project detail screen, there are buttons that will bring up information on funding sources, milestones, change orders, and a time table which gives details about when each step of the project is to be completed.

Also included is a mapping system link which enables visitors to the site to view the area being worked on.

The city looked for outside companies to build the website, but found it was more cost efficient to hire from within College Station.

The developer of the software design for the website, Ryan Pream, systems analyst for College Station, developed the project from scratch and acquired the services of the Environmental Systems Research Institute to help with the mapping system.

"I was looking for a way to make the information presentable and easy to use," he said.

Smith said that each project is updated often, and the information should never be over one month old.

There is a date at the top of each project page which shows when the information was last revised. Some project managers update the pages themselves, and other times the information is given to someone else to update.

After each project is complete, the information will remain on the website for up to three months for residents who want to view it.

Man arrested for making biological weapons

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — A man was arrested Wednesday for allegedly building a homemade biological weapon with a lethal toxin from the castor plant, the FBI said.

FBI agent Norm Brown said there was no known connection between the man, Kenneth Olsen, and terrorists.

"In our opinion, the public has nothing to fear from this incident," Brown said.

Olsen, 47, was allegedly making ricin, a deadly extract of castor beans. Traces of ricin have been found by U.S. troops in Afghanistan at suspected al-Qaida biological weapons sites, Brown said.

The Spokane County Sheriff's Office began investigating Olsen last August and the FBI later became involved, Brown said. There was no sign of a bomb in the man's house and the FBI did not comment on any alleged motive.

Brown would not say if any ricin was found in Olsen's home or why agents believed he would be making the chemical.

Ricin is twice as deadly as cobra venom. In very small doses, it causes the human digestive tract to convulse — hence the laxative effect of castor oil. But in larger doses, ricin causes diarrhea so severe that victims can die of shock from massive fluid and electrolyte loss.

Castor beans are grown all over the world and the toxin is relatively easy to produce. During the 1990s, U.N. weapons inspectors found ricin in Iraq, where it was being developed as part of Saddam Hussein's arsenal of weapons.

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