California Wildfires (Eaton)

Background. A strong high-pressure system over the Great Basin created a steep northerly pressure gradient across Southern California, triggering powerful Santa Ana winds (extremely dry katabatic winds). The Southern Coast had experienced "eight months without any measurable rainfall," and much of the region had fallen into moderate drought conditions. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted a battalion chief for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) that the conditions were "the perfect recipe for a large wildfire". The National Weather Service (NWS) issued red flag warnings on the morning of Monday, January 6, effective through the following Thursday evening, for multiple regions. The NWS predicted a "life-threatening" windstorm, and Santa Ana wind gusts were forecasted to reach speeds of 60–80 miles per hour (97–129 km/h), with some peak gusts anticipated to reach 90 mph (140 km/h) in mountainous areas. Residents were urged to "use extreme caution with anything that can spark a wildfire" and for those near forests to be prepared to evacuate.

Progression. The fire began on January 7, 2025, at around 6:18 p.m. PST on the eastern hillside above Eaton Canyon Wash, across the wash from the intersection Altadena Drive and Canyon Close Drive. By 6:26 p.m., firefighters on Canyon Close Road in Pasadena reported via radio that the fire had spread to 10 acres (4.0 ha) and was burning beneath high-tension power lines. By 6:33 p.m., firefighters there were reporting flying embers, which were setting structures on fire nearly one mile (1.6 km) distant.
Three night-flying helicopters with the Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) had received orders to head to the Eaton Fire at 6:23 p.m. and arrived at about 6:36 p.m., 18 minutes after the fire was reported. They intended to drop water on it but, buffeted by ferocious updrafts and downdrafts, aborted the operation at 6:45 p.m. One helicopter crew remained on the scene for 39 more minutes to advise ground crews on the spread of the fire. By 6:30 a.m. on January 8, the fire had grown to over 2,227 acres (901 ha), with 0% containment. In the afternoon on January 9, the fire began to approach Mount Wilson with still 0% containment until the following day. On January 18 at 6:26 a.m., CalFire announced 73% containment. The fire was finally fully contained after 24 days, on January 31.

Causes. According to CAL FIRE, the cause of the fire remains under investigation. Residents of a home abutting Eaton Canyon who were among the first people to report the fire to authorities told *Pasadena Now* that the fire began in proximity to electrical transmission towers above the canyon. It has been reported that the power lines suspected to have caused the fire were overdue for repair.

Casualties. As of January 17, 2025, the death toll from the Eaton Fire included 18 people with 24 people missing.

Evacuation and Closures. Numerous homes and cars in Altadena were destroyed; up to "90 to 95 percent" of Altadena residents had been evacuated as of 7 a.m. On January 8, the estimated number of evacuees increased to over 100,000. By the afternoon of January 8, over 100 animals had been received at the Pasadena Humane animal shelter, many of which had received burn injuries.
The fire and the resulting firefighting efforts contaminated the water supply of neighborhoods served by the Pasadena Water and Power Department and the Foothill Municipal Water District.

Flames on Mount Wilson may have affected local broadcast signals. Local broadcasters KLOS-FM, KABC-TV, and PBS SoCal temporarily lost over-the-air signals on January 9.
By January 10, a 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. curfew was implemented for the evacuated areas of Altadena and roadblocks into the area were put in place by the California National Guard.

Response. Misinformation on social media regarding the fire spread was common. For instance, CalFire reported that misinformation circulating on Facebook falsely claiming individuals could come to California to join clean-up crews.