

## WINE COUNTRY FIRES

## BATTLING TO HALT MARCH OF DISASTER

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## Helping and getting help

found, Sheriff Rob Giordano said a team of law enforcement officers began the grim task of excavating ruins to search for human remains.

"This is a very active situation that is still developing," he said.

Authorities estimated that fires destroyed between 1,500 and 3,000 buildings, and on Tuesday night another 20,000 were threatened, including homes in the Green Valley area of Solano County where the fire spread from Napa County.

Thousands of firefighters from around the state and Nevada struggled to build containment lines and block the paths of the fires, which state officials are calling a "siege event."

Fire crews used helicopters and air tankers to drop hundreds of thousands of gallons of fire retardant on the southern ends of the blazes, which firefighters were struggling to keep away from undamaged parts of heavily populated areas, including Green Valley in Solano County, American Canyon, Napa and Santa Rosa.

The scramble began when as many as seven blazes started almost simultaneously Sunday night amid powerful winds, with gusts of up to 70 mph.

"Literally, in a two-to-three-hour period, we had seven different counties affected by fire all at once," said Deputy Chief Bret Gouvea of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, also known as Cal Fire. "And not just ordinary fires. Because of those wind conditions, these fires got out of hand very quickly."

Entire neighborhoods were turned to ash, forcing many people to run or drive for their lives late Sunday night and Monday morning. Entire mobile home parks were flattened. Among the businesses that were consumed were Signorello Estate Winery in Napa, a Hilton hotel in Santa Rosa and a nearby Kmart. Cardinal Newman High School in Santa Rosa suffered heavy damage.

Of the deaths, 11 were in Sonoma County, two in Napa County, three in Mendocino County and one in Yuba County.

Flames continued to crackle through dry grass Tuesday, but the wind and dry weather conditions had subsided somewhat, minimizing the kind of dangerous hopscotching that occurred Sunday and Monday, with blowing embers igniting spot fires seemingly in every direction.

Still, officials said, winds were expected to pick up Wednesday and Thursday.

"We are far from out of the woods," said Ken Pimlott, the Cal Fire chief. "We have several days of fire weather conditions to come."

The dire situation was clear as the U.S. Forest Service was called in to help exhausted state firefighters battle 17 active wildfires, which have blackened more than 115,000 acres statewide, and, Pimlott said, the number is expected to keep rising. Conflagrations extended from Clear Lake almost all the way to San Pablo Bay.

"This is just pure devastation and it is going to take us a while to get out of this. This could be days. It could be weeks for some folks," Pimlott said. "When we look at the destruction it's literally like an explosion. These people ran out of their homes with minutes left wearing literally the clothes on their backs."

The three biggest fires were the Atlas Fire, which had burned 25,000 acres east of Napa and into Solano County; the Nuns Fire, which had blackened 5,000 acres, including the communities of Glen Ellen and Kenwood, causing significant damage to wineries and other commercial structures; and the Tubbs Fire,

Two of the victims of the Atlas Fire in the heart of the Napa Valley winemaking region were identified Tuesday as Charles and Sarah Rippey. Charles was 100 years old, his wife 98. Napa County Sheriff John Robertson said they died while trying to escape their home on the 100 block of Westgate Circle, in an area that was ravaged by flames and suffered heavy damage.

Meanwhile, the search for the missing took on an urgent air in Sonoma County, where a massive array of emergency shelters had been set up for the 25,000 people who were evacuated.

It was unclear when evacuated areas might reopen, but the California National Guard was called in to prevent looters from paying visits to properties that had survived the flames. Mendocino County reported one looting arrest in the fire zone on Monday, and there were reports of suspicious activity near burned homes in Sonoma County.

More than 200 officers from neighboring agencies are helping patrol Sonoma County to prevent looting. While Santa Rosa will continue to enforce a curfew, one is not in place countywide. "It's a very dynamic situation," Pimlott said.

Giordano said the fire was one of the fastest-growing he had ever seen. At one point, nearly 40 residents waited out the fire in an open field in the Mark West area with a deputy as flames licked around them.

"It was so fast, there wasn't a lot of time to do much," he said. "We are mobilizing as best we can."

Four people were hospitalized after suffering major burn injuries, and about two dozen others had less severe burns, state officials said. Dozens of people have been treated in hospitals for other problems such as smoke inhalation.

Some 75,000 people were without power Tuesday in the North Bay, down from a peak of 114,000 on Monday. Cell phone service was also spotty throughout the region after flames damaged 77 cellular transmission sites, officials said. In addition, gas service has been cut off to 32,000 customers whose homes or businesses lay close to the fire lines.

Vice President Mike Pence said Tuesday that the White House had approved a major disaster declaration for California, pledging federal assistance for wildfire assistance.

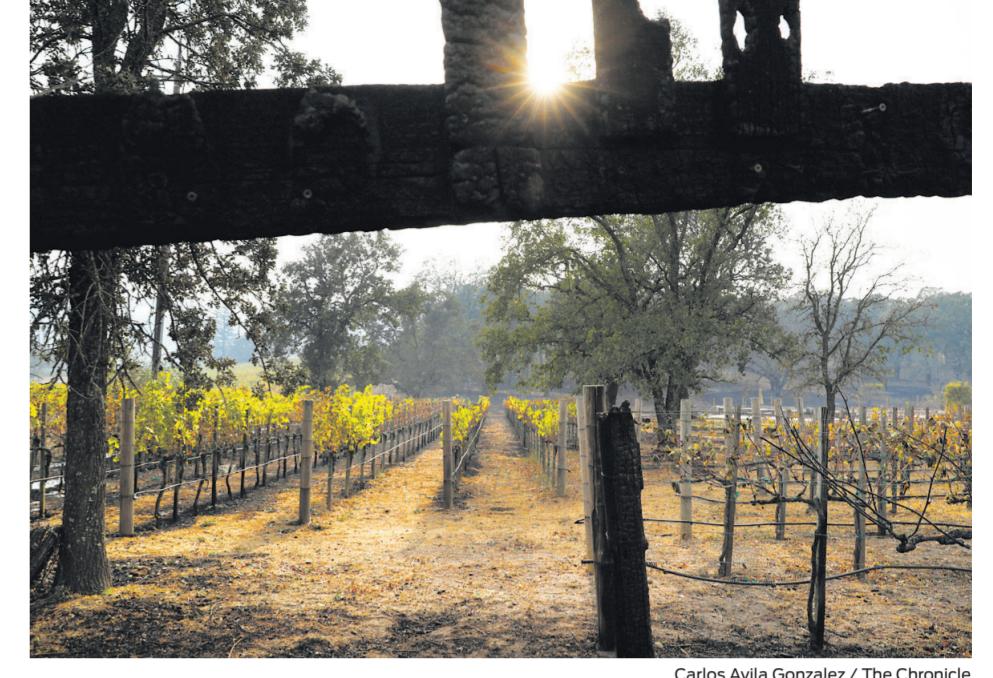
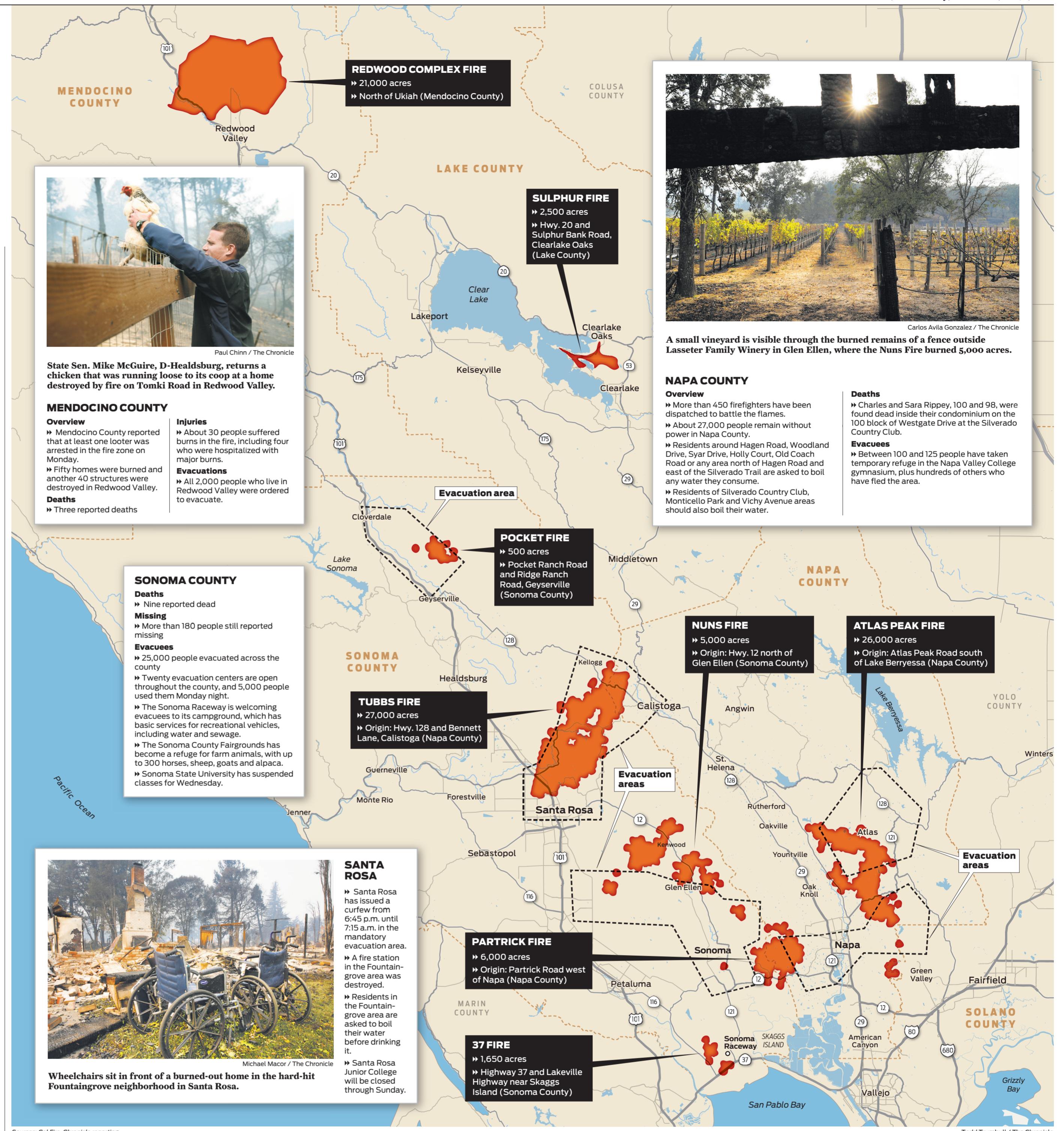
"To California, we say through this declaration, we are with you, our prayers are with you and we will be with you every day until we put the fires out," Pence said.

Emotions were running high Tuesday as some residents saw for the first time that they had lost everything and others clamored to be allowed back home. Janet Upton, deputy director of Cal Fire, said five Cal Fire Academy fire cadets lost their homes.

"People were waking up from a dead sleep and running for their lives with nothing but the clothes on their backs, so the emotional toll can't be underestimated," Upton said. "My family has been evacuated. My daughter and her wife and my sister and her husband and two children have been evacuated."

Even in areas where the danger has passed, the skies remained eerily dark. Gray ash and smoke cast a pall over the skeletons of trees, gutted buildings and burned-out cars that lined many roadways as wispy flames burst out in odd places where fire had passed, including highway guardrail posts.

Lizzie Johnson, Trisha Thadani, Melody Gutierrez and Peter Finnrite are San Francisco Chronicle staff writers. Email: ljohnson@sfchronicle.com; tthadani@sfchronicle.com; mgutierrez@sfchronicle.com; pfinnrite@sfchronicle.com



A small vineyard is visible through the burned remains of a fence outside Lasseter Family Winery in Glen Ellen, where the Nuns Fire burned 5,000 acres. Carlos Avila Gonzalez / The Chronicle

Sources: Cal Fire, Chronicle reporting  
Michael Macor / The Chronicle

## Pence visits, Trump approves emergency relief funds

By Joe Garofoli and Melody Gutierrez

RANCHO CORDOVA, Sacramento County — As President Trump approved federal disaster relief funds Tuesday for areas of California destroyed by wildfires, Vice President Mike Pence was in Sacramento promising that the federal government will stand with the state "until the job is done."

"Every fire that starts has the potential to grow into a very large fire very quickly," with the winds, he said. "We can't let our guard down."

Cal Fire said the Mendocino victims died Sunday night and Monday when the Redwood Complex Fire tore through Redwood Valley, a town of 2,000 people. Roughly 50 homes were destroyed in the town, located 8 miles north of Ukiah on Highway 101.

Pence said legislation will be considered in Congress next week

to provide \$576 million for wildfire suppression to support California.

The major disaster declaration Tuesday allows for immediate support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, including additional equipment, shelters, food, crisis counseling and support services, and personnel, including for search and rescue.

Pence said the federal government has already been working with the state emergency services operation, providing "five firefighting crews, four dozers, two Strike Teams (of) Type-III engines, and more assets are on the way."

Mark Ghilarducci, director of the state's Office of Emergency Services, said the major disaster declaration also provides a "tremendous amount of funding on

the reconstruction side." With so many homes lost, Ghilarducci said the federal funding will help with longer-term housing for the displaced.

"We may have to put large mobile homes in place in the interim as we get people out of shelters," Ghilarducci said. "We have winter around the corner, and they can't stay in shelters for longer than a couple weeks. We are moving at light speed to address that."

FEMA Administrator Brock Long on Tuesday named William Roche, director of the agency's western region recovery division that includes California, as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected areas in the state.

Gov. Jerry Brown asked for the federal disaster declaration on Monday. Brown had declared a state of emergency Monday in Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Sonoma and Yuba counties as large fires ripped through neighborhoods. By Tuesday afternoon, 17 large fires across the state had swallowed 115,000 acres in 24 hours, said Cal Fire Chief Ken Pimlott.

"I appreciate the fast response from the president," Brown said Tuesday.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, said in a statement that the disaster declaration was "an appreciated first step to combat this disaster, but more must be done to help the people of California heal, recover and rebuild. (House Speaker Paul) Ryan and Republicans must work with Democrats to update federal relief estimates and adjust the supplemental disaster package so that we can make available

all necessary resources for those devastated by these wildfires."

From the state's Office of Emergency Operations in Rancho Cordova, state and federal officials coordinated the emergency response. An estimated 4,000 people are working on the response, including firefighters, law enforcement, public health officials and military, Pimlott said.

"Our focus continues to be on life safety, getting people out and then engaging in perimeter control to contain these fires," Pimlott said.

Pence, appearing with House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, and Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Turlock (Stanislaus County), said "all of America" is "proud" of the work being done by the state emergency services

agency and all the first responders in the fire areas. He offered his prayers to those that died and pledged that the federal government would support the state until the recovery work was done.

"To California, we say through this declaration: We are with you, our prayers are with you, and we will be with you every day until we put the fires out and stand with these families to rebuild these communities," Pence said. "That's our pledge to each one of you today."

Joe Garofoli and Melody Gutierrez are San Francisco Chronicle staff writers. Email: jgarofoli@sfchronicle.com; mgutierrez@sfchronicle.com Twitter: Twitter: @joeigarofoli @MelodyGutierrez