

WINE COUNTRY FIRES

23

deaths from fires throughout Northern California

285

people still reported missing in Sonoma County

3,500

homes and businesses destroyed

22

active wildfires statewide

170,000

acres burned in active California fires

CALAMITY IS WIDENING



Leah Millis / The Chronicle

Family members embrace at a destroyed home containing the remains, they believe, of a relative at Journey's End mobile home park in Santa Rosa.

Evacuations: Thousands more flee as untouched cities now are threatened

By Jill Tucker, Jenna Lyons and Peter Fimrite

The ferocious fires in the Wine Country and beyond destroyed new territory on multiple fronts Wednesday, threatening communities untouched by the previous onslaught — including the cities of Sonoma, Napa, Calistoga and Fairfield — and prompting evacuations of thousands more people. Fires raked across the state, but the primary battlefields were in Napa, Sonoma and Solano counties where wind gusts topping 30 mph were giving out-of-control fires new life and sending firefighters from across California and Nevada scrambling to save lives and property. The danger intensified Wednesday when flames fueled by the high winds prompted authorities to warn residents of tourist destinations in the heart of the Napa Valley Wine Country to prepare for evacuations. Among those warned were a large swath of Napa and Boyes Hot Springs. But there were also mandatory evacuations, including for Geyserville, Calistoga and in a hilly neighborhood just 1 mile from the historic Sonoma Plaza and a famous Spanish mission. The threat of ruin to Mission San Francisco

Fires continues on A12

Calistoga: Popular destination becomes a virtual ghost town as residents and tourists heed orders to leave

By Marissa Lang, Trisha Thadani, Hamed Aleaziz and Steve Rubenstein

Calistoga, where people go to get away, seems to have gone away itself. The mud and mineral baths and the Merlot are still there. But the people who traffic in it, by and large, aren't. Before most of California had awakened Wednesday, police and firefighters were telling residents and tourists to pack up and hit Highway 29, due south, fast. An evacuation advisory for much of the town came down about 3:30 a.m., and residents north of Grant Street woke to knocks at their doors. The winds are shifting, officers said. The Tubbs Fire, which had killed at least 13 people since starting Sunday night, could be on its way. About half of the city's 5,000 residents left quickly, while others stayed behind, hoping the fire would continue to

Calistoga continues on A10

Wireless warning: As the fires began Sunday, officials considered sending a mass cell phone alert, but didn't

By Joaquin Palomino and Kimberly Veklerov

As fires that would prove devastating burned across the North Bay late Sunday, Sonoma County considered sending a mass alert to cell phones in the region to warn of the rapidly spreading flames. But county officials decided against it, worried that doing so might create widespread panic and hinder the ability of first responders to combat the blazes. It's unclear how much that decision might have affected area residents' responses to the deadly wildfires, particularly since many cell phone towers were destroyed in the blaze, making such messages undeliverable. But it adds to concerns that some in the fires' paths were not alerted about the danger, leaving them little time to flee. As of Wednesday evening, 13 people were con-

Warnings continues on A12



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