

Reno Fire Burns Firefighter, 25 Homes Damaged

BY SCOTT SONNER
Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — A cloud of grayish-white smoke settled over upscale homes and horse pastures at Reno's edge Friday as firefighters from across Nevada came close to taming a sudden wildfire that sent 16 people to hospitals and destroyed or damaged 25 houses.

The unexplained blaze also gave a firefighter first- and second-degree burns and was blamed for the death of a 74-year-old man who had a heart attack while trying to flee, but authorities said the worst was likely over as growing snow flurries and falling temperatures stoked hopes that the remaining showers of ember and ash would die down.

Reno Fire Chief Mike Hernandez said firefighters had largely contained the blaze that sent nearly 10,000 people from their homes in the middle of the night and sent flames licking the edges of the region's mountain roads.

"We are actually backtracking and going over areas that have burned and extinguishing hot spots," Hernandez said.

The cause of the blaze wasn't known, but a downed power line or homeless encampments in the area might be to blame, Hernandez said. He said the region is also a popular area for teenagers who might have started the fire to stay warm.

At least 400 firefighters from as far as 260 miles away flocked to Reno early Friday as multiple fires roared from the Sierra Nevada foothills in northwestern Nevada and spread to the valley floor. Flames reached 50 feet high and embers pushed by the wind traveled up to a mile.

Police went house-to-house, pounding on doors and urging residents to evacuate in the dark of the night.

Hernandez said residents ran from their homes dressed in pajamas, frantically trying to grab as many possessions as possible. One elderly man dressed in his underwear ran out with a blanket wrapped around his body.

"The people are in a state of shock and are hanging in there," Gov. Brian Sandoval said.

Dick Hecht said that when he escaped from his home with his wife, "the whole mountain was on fire," and it was so windy he could barely stand.

"It was so smoky, you couldn't hardly see," Hecht said.

The couple tried to return to their home before morning, but they were turned back by high winds and erupting flames. As they made their way back down the mountain roads, flames burned less than 40 yards from their vehicle.

Gusts of up to 60 mph grounded firefighting helicopters and made it difficult for firefighters to approach Caughlin Ranch, the affluent subdivision bordering pine-forested hills where the fire likely began after 12:30 a.m.

The strong winds, combined with the area's dry terrain, helped the fire spread from 400 acres to 2,000, or more than 3 square miles. Firefighters said their efforts spared 4,000 homes but that the disaster would likely cost many millions of dollars.

The gusts were comparable to the Santa Ana winds that often aggravate and spread wildfires in the hills surrounding Los Angeles, officials said.

"The wind is horrific," said Reno spokeswoman Michele Anderson. "We just watched a semi nearly blow over on the freeway."

More than 150 people had filled two shelters set up at area high schools by midmorning.

John and Maggie Givlin were among those watching a television at Reno High School, scanning the screen for details on whether the home they left behind was safe. They already were preparing to flee when a police officer knocked on their door at about 1:30 a.m.

"I smelled smoke and got out of bed, and the electricity was out," said John Givlin, a retired civil engineer who has lived there about eight years. "I looked out the front window and saw the glow over the hill before us."

He and his wife made their way out of their home with a flashlight. Outside, flames billowed in every direction.

More than 4,000 NV Energy customers lost power as poles and electrical wires were scorched and knocked down, said spokeswoman Faye Andersen. Utility workers were not allowed into the fire area.

Roughly 100 Nevada National Guard members assisted local law enforcement in checking homes and keeping people out of the evacuated region.

"These next 24 hours, with all the power lines down and everything else, it is still a very, very dangerous area," Reno Mayor Bob Cashell said.

Evacuees could return to their homes at noon Saturday, Cashell said. A number of local hotel-casinos were also offering discounted rooms to displaced residents.

At least 90 schools were closed for the day to clear the roads of school traffic and make way for emergency workers.

The U.S. Postal Service suspended delivery to the area for the day, and the state high school athletic association moved its football playoffs from Friday night to Monday.

Protesters Vow To Erect New Tents In Oakland

BY TERRY COLLINS
Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Anti-Wall Street protesters vowed Friday to set up tents at a downtown Oakland park less than a week after police removed an encampment outside City Hall.

Occupy Oakland members said at a heated news conference that the latest encampment would be set up Saturday in the revitalized Uptown district.

Some residents condemned the plan for the camp at the site of a recently installed monument titled, "Remember Them" that features a sculpture of 25 prominent civil rights and humanitarian figures, including Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Mother Teresa and Mohandas Gandhi.

"It's strategically not a good move," said Zappa Montag, whose daughter attends a nearby school. "It doesn't make sense. This is setting up a conflict with this community."

Johannes Wallmann, who lives across the street from the park, welcomed the protesters.

"Obviously it will be an inconvenience but it all makes sense, given the monument and all. I don't want this to be a NIMBY kind of thing," he said, referring to the expression: "not in my back yard."

The planned encampment would be adjacent to the renovated Fox Theater and across the street from the Oakland School for the Arts, a charter school for 600 middle- and high-school students.

Some parents and school officials expressed concern that the encampment and any potential problems might disturb classes or pose a safety risk to students. Kate Schatz, a literary arts teacher at the school who has



IRFAN KHAN/LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT

Occupy Wall Street sympathizers take to the streets in downtown Los Angeles, California, as police stopped their progress down Broadway when they spilled off the sidewalk and into the street.

participated in Occupy Oakland, agreed.

"I don't think they did enough research," Schatz said about the protesters. "I agree with everything they are supporting, except for this choice."

Donn Harris, the school's executive director, said she would take a wait-and-see approach and keep talking with protesters.

Shon Kae, a spokesman for Occupy Oakland, said the group overwhelmingly voted for the new site.

"No matter what we do, it seems like tents are becoming the most feared thing in the United States," Kae said. "It's like they're becoming the new weapons of mass destruction."

Mayor Jean Quan said Thursday that any camping on city property is illegal and police

would have a strategy to prevent any encampment by Occupy Oakland members.

Across San Francisco Bay, the health department declared the Occupy San Francisco encampment in Justin Herman Plaza a public health nuisance. However, the demonstrators remained in the plaza.

Barbara Garcia, head of the city's public health department, toured the grassy area in the heart of the financial district and across from the city's iconic Ferry Building.

She said authorities found feces and inadequate toilet facilities. Conditions for the spread of respiratory illnesses have also been present and she noted at least one case of scabies.

Police at the University of California, Davis on Friday disman-

tled an Occupy encampment on campus and arrested 10 protesters, nine of whom were students. Student activists pitched more than a dozen tents on the UC Davis quad Thursday in defiance of a campus ban on camping.

Graduate student A.J. Morgan says dozens of police officers in riot gear used pepper spray on students who tried to protect the "Occupy UC Davis" camp.

In Los Angeles, police broke up an "Occupy UCLA" encampment on campus and arrested 14 protesters Friday morning.

University spokesman Steve Ritea says about 40 protesters left after police ordered the crowd to disperse at about 5:15 a.m. Friday. Of those arrested, 13 were UCLA students. They've been cited for failure to disperse and released.

Rise In Economic Gauge Suggests Brighter Outlook

BY MARTIN CRUTSINGER
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — The latest evidence that the economy is making steady gains emerged Friday from a gauge of future economic activity, which rose in October at the fastest pace in eight months.

A string of better-than-expected economic reports this month has led some analysts to revise up their forecasts for growth. Still, they caution that their brighter outlook remains under threat from Europe's financial crisis.

"Things are looking better than we thought they would — not great, but better," said David Wyss, former chief economist at Standard & Poor's.

The most recent sign was Friday's report by the Conference Board that its index of leading economic indicators surged 0.9 percent last month. It was the index's best showing since February. And it was far faster than the increases of 0.1 percent September and 0.3 percent in August.

The index is designed to predict economic activity. The October figure marked the sixth straight increase.

The jump reflected gains in nine of the index's 10 components. Leading the way: a surge in permits for home construc-

tion; a narrower gap between short- and long-term interest rates that suggested less concern about inflation; a recovery in stock prices; and growth in the U.S. money supply.

A longer average workweek and fewer applications for unemployment benefits also contributed to the rise in the index.

All told, the components of the index signaled that the economy is steadily, if still slowly, strengthening.

On Thursday, the government reported further improvement in the number of people seeking unemployment benefits for the first time. The number fell to 388,000, the fewest since April.

In October, the economy added a net total of 80,000 jobs. It was the 13th straight month of gains. Still, the additional jobs were fewer than the roughly 125,000 that are needed each month just to keep up with population growth.

Many economists said the October gain in the leading indicators offered further assurance that the economy is in no imminent danger of slipping back into a recession, so long as Europe doesn't fall into a severe downturn.

"This was a very positive reading for the leading indicators," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics. "The economy seems to be

holding its own."

Steven Wood, chief economist at Insight Economics, said the string of positive readings suggests "the economy should continue to experience at least moderate growth over the next six to nine months."

In the first six months of the year, the economy grew at an annual rate of just 0.9 percent. Growth expanded to a 2.5 percent rate in the July-September quarter.

Before this month, many economists had estimated that growth in the current October-December quarter would roughly match the 2.5 percent pace of the July-September period. But in recent days, based on the healthier economic news, some analysts have boosted their forecasts.

This week, the government said retail sales in October and factory production were picking up. U.S. builders started slightly fewer homes in October. But building permits, a gauge of future construction, surged nearly 11 percent. That gain was led by

a 30 percent increase in apartment permits, to their highest level in three years.

Wyss said he expected the annual growth rate in the current quarter to amount to about 3 percent, up from his earlier expectation of 2.5 percent. Economists at JPMorgan Chase & Co. are also expecting a 3 percent growth rate for the October-December period.

Wyss said one reason for his increased optimism is that he thinks a modest rebound in consumer spending will trigger companies to restock depleted shelves.

Even so, an economy growing at a 3 percent rate would still fall shy of the 4 percent to 5 percent pace that economists say is needed to significantly reduce the unemployment rate, which remains stuck at 9 percent.

And without stronger job gains, analysts say consumer spending, which accounts for about 70 percent of economic activity, will remain constrained.

Banks Closed In Iowa And Louisiana; 90 So Far In 2011

WASHINGTON (AP) — Regulators on Friday closed small banks in Iowa and Louisiana, lifting to 90 the number of bank failures in the U.S. this year.

The number of closures has fallen sharply this year as banks have worked their way through the bad debt accumulated in the recession. By this time last year, regulators had shuttered 149 banks.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. seized Polk County Bank, based in Johnston, Iowa, with \$91.6 million in assets and \$82 million in deposits. It also closed Central Progressive Bank, based in Lacombe, La., with \$383.1 million in assets and \$347.7 million in deposits.

Grinnell State Bank, based in Grinnell, Iowa, agreed to assume the deposits as well as the loans and other assets of Polk County Bank. New Orleans-based First NBC Bank agreed to acquire all the deposits and \$354.4 million of the assets of Central Progressive Bank.

The failure of Polk County Bank is expected to cost the deposit insurance fund \$12 million; that of Central Progressive Bank is expected to cost \$58.1 million.

Polk County Bank was the first bank in Iowa to fail this year, while Central Progressive Bank was the first Louisiana lender to fail this year.

In all of 2010, regulators seized 157 banks, the most in any year since the savings and loan crisis two decades ago. Those failures cost around \$23 billion. The FDIC has said 2010 likely was the high-water mark for bank failures from the Great Recession.

In 2009, there were 140 bank failures that cost the insurance fund about \$36 billion, a higher price tag than in 2010 because the banks involved were bigger on average. Twenty-five banks failed in 2008, the year the financial crisis struck with force; only three were closed in 2007.

From 2008 through 2010, bank failures cost the fund \$76.8 billion. The FDIC expects failures from 2011 through 2015 to cost \$19 billion.

The deposit insurance fund fell into the red in 2009. With failures slowing, the FDIC's fund balance turned positive in the second quarter of this year; it stood at \$3.9 billion as of June 30.

Taiwanese Official Pleads Guilty To Labor Charge

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — A Taiwanese representative has pleaded guilty to a charge accusing her of violating a federal labor law by underpaying and overworking two women hired from the Philippines to work in her suburban Kansas City home.

Hsien Hsien Liu, director general of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Kansas City, pleaded guilty Friday to fraud in foreign labor contracting as part of a plea agreement.

U.S. District Judge David Gregory Kays said he would consider whether to accept the plea agreement, which recommends Liu be sentenced to time served and then deported. It also calls for Liu to pay about \$80,000 in restitution to the women.

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My nomination for the 2011 Yankton Citizen of the Year is:

This person should be the Citizen of the Year because:

MY NAME: _____
MY ADDRESS: _____
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