



VENTURA
COUNTY
Recovers

**The Thomas Fire
Six-Month Review**
June 2018

THE THOMAS FIRE

At 6:30 p.m. on Monday, December 4, 2017, fire broke out in two locations north of Santa Paula. They quickly merged to become the Thomas Fire, named due to the proximity of Thomas Aquinas College. The Thomas Fire would become the largest fire in California state history.

Driven to the west by fierce Santa Ana winds at an unprecedented rate, the Thomas Fire was an immediate threat to life and property. Advancing down the north side of the Santa Clara River Valley, the fire reached the city of Ventura during the late evening hours and the early morning hours of December 5, destroying hundreds of homes and other structures along its path.

The fire would burn for about 40 days, threatening the cities of Ventura, Santa Paula, Ojai and Fillmore, as well as many unincorporated communities, before moving into Santa Barbara County. One firefighter and one civilian lost their lives in the fire. It was declared 100 percent controlled on January 12, 2018.

At one point, nearly 9,000 emergency personnel were working the fire. They came from across the western United States. The recovery effort has been collaborative as well.

On December 5, the County's Environmental Health Department requested an emergency declaration from the State. By requesting the declaration so early in the emergency, it allowed recovery processes such as the initial removal of hazardous fire debris to begin very rapidly. The Recovery Program was also implemented on the second day of the fire. By Day Four, a Joint Recovery Team had been formed to include the County and the four cities affected by the fire.

The County's recovery website, www.venturacountyrecovers.org, gave residents a single source for verified information and resources to aid in the recovery process. It also allowed fire victims to register to receive announcements of official information on debris; aid- and assistance-related programs; community meetings; and important deadlines.



The Thomas Fire BY THE NUMBERS

Acres

281,893

(440 square miles)

Ventura County
structures destroyed

1,063

(777 homes)

Ventura County
structures damaged

280

(210 homes)

Emergency Personnel (peak)

>8,500

Emergency Hotline Calls Answered

14,000

(English & Spanish)

Spanish-Language Emergency
Information Website Established

December 15, 2017

Number of People Evacuated

>94,000

Residents Receiving
"VC Alert" Emergency Notifications

165,284

Animals Cared For By
Ventura County Animal Services

2,300

REPOPULATION, DEBRIS REMOVAL AND RECOVERY

As the fire continued to move, repopulation and recovery efforts followed immediately behind it. The Joint Recovery Team, in cooperation with Fire Command, organized a series of community meetings across the areas affected by the fire to help residents understand when they could return to their homes safely and the challenges they would face when they arrived.

These included danger from power and gas lines, hazardous materials, ash and poor air quality. County staff also provided information on housing and rental assistance programs, and available medical and behavioral health services. As neighborhoods repopulated, residents became aware of the magnitude of their losses. Many had lost everything.

Understanding there was no guarantee that state or federal assistance would be available for victims, or how long it might be before it was available, eight days into the fire the County expanded its local housing and rental assistance program to provide direct aid to fire victims. The program was the first of its kind in the state and was the only source of government-provided monetary assistance for several weeks.

Just nine days after the fire started, the Joint Recovery Team opened a Local Assistance Center (LAC) in Ventura. The LAC was staffed by more than 40 agencies, departments and organizations. Local, state and federal government agencies were on hand to assist with counseling, housing, driver's licenses, finances, food and many other services. Satellite LACs were opened within days in Ojai, Santa Paula and Fillmore.

A critical phase in the recovery process is debris removal. After a fire, much of the ash and debris is hazardous material, and all of it must be safely removed prior to rebuilding. Additional community meetings were held related to debris removal and a Mud and Debris Flow Symposium was held to warn and prepare residents for those possibilities because of the fire. That threat became a reality in Santa Barbara County when a debris flow swept through Montecito in January, killing more than 20 people.



Recovery Efforts BY THE NUMBERS

Community Meetings Held
13

Number of Facemasks Distributed
>750,000

Number of Contacts Made By the
Behavioral Health Department
4,000

Recover Website Launched
December 10, 2017
(English/Spanish)

Local Assistance Center Opened
December 13, 2017

Families Served by
Local Assistance Centers
1,950

Properties Registered for
CalRecycle Debris Removal Program
665

Properties Cleared of
Hazardous Debris
987

Tons of Debris Removed
224,019

CalFresh Disaster-Related
Food Benefits Issued
\$4.2 million

Recovery Efforts CONTINUED

FEMA Individual and Housing
Assistance Referrals
1,660

FEMA Individual Assistance Aid
\$1,715,194

SBA Home Loan Dollars Approved
\$25,645,700

SBA Business Loan Dollars Approved
\$2,390,100

COUNTY HOUSING & RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Households Funded with Assistance
52

Households Permanently Housed
37

Households in Interim Housing
23

NOTE: The figures used in this brochure are a snapshot as of May 21, 2018. The numbers will change as the recovery and rebuilding processes continue.



The Department of Toxic Substances Control cleared 987 properties of hazardous materials. A program offered through the California Office of Emergency Services – CalRecycle – cleared debris from homeowner’s properties for no charge other than what their insurance might cover.



More than 600 homeowners signed up for the program and all the work was completed by June 1. CalRecycle left them with clean, safe properties ready for the rebuilding process to begin. To assist in that process, the County waived certain permit fees and implemented an expedited plan and permit review process for Thomas Fire victims.

A Presidential disaster declaration resulted in both public and individual federal assistance being made available for County residents affected by the fire. The Federal Emergency Management Agency and Small Business Administration both set up temporary offices in Ventura to aid victims.

Every County agency was involved in either the emergency response to the Thomas Fire or the recovery from it. A few examples are document replacement services by the County Clerk and Recorder; more than 2,000 fire-damaged properties surveyed by the Assessor’s Office and many fees were waived for fire victims by the Treasurer-Tax Collector’s Office. And finally, to address the threat of debris flows, the County ordered 65,000 sandbags and sent 20,000 mailings regarding debris and mudflows.



To find out more about the ongoing recovery efforts, please visit
www.venturacountyrecovers.org

