

DAILY CLIPS

Special Edition
Southern California Fires

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DATE: NOV-09-93

2nd Southland Disaster a New Test for FEMA

By CARLA RIVERA
TIMES STAFF WRITER

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The Los Angeles riots of 1992 were the first civil disturbances in history to be declared an official disaster, triggering a massive relief effort by the Federal Emergency Management Agency that has since been clouded by accusations of incompetence and unfairness.

Eighteen months after the riots, in the wake of devastating wildfires, the federal disaster agency—which has been revamped and has a new chief—has set up shop again, prompting questions about what lessons have been learned and whether the fire victims of 1993 will fare better than the riot victims of 1992.

The two disasters could not be more different. One was a civil disturbance that obliterated entire blocks of businesses in the city's poorest neighborhoods, the other a siege of infernos that consumed mostly homes in idyllic, affluent canyons.

Likewise, the two sets of victims have different needs and will require different kinds of assistance, experts say.

But the bottom-line issue is the same: Can the government come

Please see FEMA, A3

through for its citizens in their direst need?

So far, FEMA is receiving good marks. Many local and state officials who went through the riots say the agency's performance this time is far smoother and more humane. Part of the improvement can be ascribed to lessons learned after the 1991 Oakland Hills fires and part to the more familiar problems posed by a natural disaster as compared to civil unrest.

Fire victims, for the most part, report positive experiences.

"I feel real happy with everything that has happened so far; I've been treated very nicely," said David Sabiroff, 46, a sculptor whose rented South Laguna Beach studio and home were destroyed in the first round of wildfires that struck the Southland.

Sabiroff's studio—and 12 to 15 pieces of irreplaceable artwork—went up in flames on 27; two days later he called FEMA's toll-free number to register for disaster assistance. On Tuesday, he received a \$2,400 check to pay for temporary housing for him and his wife.

"Everybody's been real super," Sabiroff said. "What's going to be hard though, is when the immediate stuff ends, when the Red Cross closes up and moves out, when everybody is back to business as usual and there are still people ragged around the edges from the fire. What's going to happen then?"

Indeed, it will take months before an accurate assessment can be

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made of the government's response to the fire disaster. Veterans of the riots say fire victims may encounter roadblocks in trying to prove their losses.

"There are still critical changes that need to occur in the regulation of policy guidelines to ensure that FEMA is always prepared to deal with a disaster," said Cynthia Robins, director of Urban Recovery Legal Assistance, a legal services program launched last year to help riot victims. "Until then, there will always be the risk of arbitrary decision-making, with different outcomes for similarly situated people."

Many residents of fire-damaged communities say they have seen little evidence of FEMA's presence, despite promises by officials that they would mount a vigorous outreach effort. And some observers doubt that FEMA programs—most designed to aid victims who have little economic means by which to recover on their own—will effectively serve the fire victims, who are generally more affluent.

Jaime Suarez is a 48-year-old Pasadena real estate broker who lost his home in the fire. He said he is underinsured for the losses he has suffered.

Suarez said he was persuaded to apply for federal aid after a chance meeting at a Red Cross shelter with Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.). Suarez said he was assured by officials that he could qualify for funds to make up the difference in his insurance coverage.

However, his visit to a disaster application center produced only disappointment and uncertainty.

"At the Red Cross, they were talking about grants being available, but after talking to officials here they seem to be saying all I'll qualify for are loans," said Suarez, after leaving the Arcadia disaster center. "That does not leave me where I was before."

With losses from fire damage expected to reach \$1 billion, federal officials still have not indicated how much money will be made available for recovery and cleanup efforts. President Clinton this week announced that \$15 million would be advanced to the state to partially cover firefighting costs.

In response to the Malibu fires, FEMA opened disaster centers this weekend at the Calabasas High School gymnasium and the Los Angeles County sheriff's station in Malibu. Centers have already opened in Arcadia, Laguna Beach, Camarillo and Murietta in Riverside County.

Fire victims are eligible for temporary housing assistance, mortgage and rental assistance, disaster unemployment insurance, low-interest loans for rebuilding homes and businesses and grants of up to \$12,200 to meet disaster-related needs not covered by other federal aid programs.

To date, the centers have received more than 1,500 applications for assistance. In some cases, checks have been dispatched to victims within two days of application.

But the agency did not have figures on how many fire victims have been approved for assistance and how many have been declined.

Local officials say such information is crucial in determining how effectively the government aid programs are working.

After last year's riot disaster, 50% to 60% of all applications for aid were denied, forming the basis for a class-action lawsuit alleging that the agency illegally denied riot victims relief.

The lawsuit claimed that FEMA "arbitrarily and restrictively interpreted eligibility requirements and required excessive verification and documentation beyond that required" by federal laws.

Betty Holiday, 51, a plaintiff in the lawsuit, applied for disaster aid after her paralegal and credit repair business near Pico Boulevard and Fairfax Avenue went up in flames on the second day of rioting.

Holiday said FEMA gave her contradictory instructions about what information was needed to support her application. Eventually, she was ruled ineligible for aid.

She struggles now to support herself and her developmentally disabled grandson. But she has been gripped by the recent wild fires.

"I watched the fires and I couldn't move from my TV set," Holiday said. "They took me back to the riots and watching my own business burn. If [FEMA] had just helped a little bit I could have gotten back up. But right now I'm

pretty fed up with the government."

FEMA officials have declined to discuss the lawsuit because it is still pending. However, FEMA Director James Lee Witt has vowed that fire victims will receive speedy relief.

But people affected by the riots say fire victims will need to be vigilant and should closely monitor the agency's performance.

"The test is going to be how they follow through," said Robbins of Urban Recovery Legal Assistance. "I'm hopeful that the new and improved FEMA can also improve the implementation process."

In many ways, the fire disasters should pose fewer problems for FEMA than did the riot emergency.

The great damage during the riots was sustained largely by businesses, many of which were small, struggling establishments with little or no insurance and often sloppy record-keeping practices.

In many cases, riot victims had difficulty proving that their losses were directly related to the riots. The civil unrest also produced far more complex emotional reactions than the fires did, said those familiar with both disasters.

"With the riots, one of the most difficult parts was the shock to the entire community, that something like that could happen," said Rich-

Please see FEMA, A22

ard Andrews, director of the state Office of Emergency Services.

"Obviously, the fires produced shock, too, but also an enormous kind of empathy and community rallying. There isn't the context of anger that both sparked the riots and that was present in the aftermath. All of this makes for a fundamental difference in how the community and government responds."

Fire victims will have their own set of obstacles to overcome, including questions of insurance claims, rebuilding permits, responsibility for debris removal and replenishment of canyon properties.

But many fire victims will start from a much better position than riot victims.

"Almost all homeowners have insurance because it is required, so there is likely to be much more in the way of insurance assistance," said Patty Lombard, executive director of the Western Insurance Information Service, an industry group that provides consumer information.

One group representing Altadena fire victims, the Eaton Canyon Recovery Alliance, is already attracting hundreds to its meetings and has won pledges from the U.S. Forest Service to consider reseeding the area and from Pacific Telephone to provide free voice mail for fire victims.

The group's aims are simple, said organizer James McDaniel.

"We want to ensure that the various agencies be held accountable to their commitments."

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10A The Fire Next Time

Give us the strength as we face the paperwork, the phone calls and the inconveniences of starting over again.

— Prayer by Rev. Anne Broyles of the Malibu United Methodist Church.

Residents of the Santa Monica Mountains area that was devastated by wildfires last week are already beginning to complain about the Federal Emergency Management Agency, but in fact all that paperwork is necessary. When the government starts giving people money or lending it to them at below-market rates, a lot of bureaucratic "I's have to be dotted and "t's crossed. Taxpayers, whose money it is, expect as much.

FEMA has a bad reputation, yet early reports from Southern California suggest it has been performing better than it did after the Midwestern floods of last spring and a whole lot better than it did after Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Many persons whose homes burned to the ground got financial assistance on the spot to help them pay for temporary housing and other needs. Many were getting cash or the assurance of cash to make up for shortfalls in their fire insurance.

The Santa Monica bill to the federal government is not yet in. Though substantial, it will be small

compared to the price taxpayers had to pay after the Mississippi overflow or Andrew's sustained 145-miles-per-hour winds. The principal reason river floods and coastal tidal surges associated with hurricanes are so costly is highlighted by the California fires. People build — and rebuild — homes in inappropriate places. They do so in part because they are subsidized when there are losses. In addition to cheap loans and grants there is federal flood insurance, which allows development in areas that everyone knows will have repeat disasters.

By one recent estimate, two percent of flood insurance policies account for 53 percent of the claims. Yet their rates remain ridiculously low — because American taxpayers are obligated to pick up the tab for excess losses. (This is something Congress can and should change.) The homes in the fire-prone mountains and canyons of Southern California are somewhat similarly subsidized by state law requiring private insurers to provide below-market protection.

The best answer to the prayers of Malibu residents is: If you must start over, adopt new zoning laws, construction codes and siting and landscaping requirements. Those could lessen the dangers to them and the cost to everyone else when fire rages through the area next time, as it surely will.

The hulls smolder, ashes blow, 'reality hits'

Victims get emotional, financial aid

by Ann Stewart
USA TODAY P-8A

MALIBU — Jonny Barrera as enough.

She's standing in the middle of a circus tent turned federal disaster center, blinking back tears after her husband napped at her.

"We're just getting on each other's nerves," says Barrera, wearing the straw cowboy hat when she and her husband, Ish, tried to beat back the flames that devoured their home of 12 years.

Now — even though the couple have decided to rebuild their multi-million-dollar hillside home with a view of the Malibu Pier — all Barrera thinks about is how much she's lost.

"The wind blew the ashes away, so we don't even have the ashes," she says, stressed and smoking again. "My husband says there's no point in crying. ... the reality hits me that isn't a dream."

Sunday, reality packed a wallop for many here, five days after Malibu burned.

Firefighters, beginning to pack up, go home, have already put out the 19,000-acre arson fire that killed three, nearly 400 buildings and caused at least \$170 million in damage. Now, victims begin the grim task of cleaning up the debris of their lives.

More than 200 people over the weekend sought emergency disaster relief — ranging from reduced property taxes to psychological counseling.

Because many of this area's most-harmed victims are middle class, they don't deserve federal assistance, says Rita Kepner, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"Even people who have insurance might be underinsured or ineligible for disaster

relief, when somebody is standing in the middle of the street with only their pajamas, we don't ask them how much money they make before we find them a place to sleep. There's plenty of time for that."

That's why Chris Whitaker, 42, went to apply for federal aid Sunday instead of cleaning up the ashes from what used to be his storage shed.

His Topanga Canyon home was spared, but Whitaker — who owns a tree-trimming and firewood business — lost a recreational vehicle, a \$1,500 log splitter and the tools he uses to make a living.

"I wanted to just shovel the whole mess into my truck and haul it away," Whitaker says. "But I just found out they have to come up and inspect and assess everything, so I won't be touching anything for a while."

The wildfire is taking an emotional toll on everyone.

Diana Armstrong, director of Carden Malibu School, today faces about 40 preschoolers whose school was damaged. She spent the weekend washing soot off books and furniture and assembling playhouses.

"When they come in, I want them to see new, fun things to lighten the situation," says Armstrong, who estimates 15 students' families lost homes.

Armstrong's lined up a psychologist to talk to her students.

"They just need to talk about what they've been through," she says. "Some of the adults can use it as much as the kids."

That was apparent at Malibu Presbyterian Church Sunday.

"It's OK to cry," said the Rev. David Worth. "We have Kleenex in the pews for you."

Worshippers made good use of it as they stood and told their stories. Like when Dan and Lisa Cislo talked about going back to their home and finding just one keepsake.

"It was a Christmas ornament from our first Christmas together. It said 'Love — Chris 1987.' We cherish it," says Lisa Cislo.

A few blocks from the firefighters' staging area, an early morning Mass drew parishioners to Our Lady of Malibu Roman Catholic Church, where fire scorched earth within a few hundred yards.

Piles of donated goods ranging from beds to bicycles lay on church grounds under a sign saying, "Fire Victims Help Yourself."

"There's mourning and celebrating. There is grieving and thanking," Monsignor John Sheridan said after Mass as people lingered in a damp chill, talking over steaming cups of coffee, exchanging stories and lessons learned.

Today, firefighters hope to completely extinguish the blaze. But because Wednesday's weather forecast calls for rain, "we could be filling sandbags in case there are mudslides," says Los Angeles County Fire Department Battalion Chief Mike Balzano.

Meanwhile, investigators from 13 agencies — headed by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms — are following up on tips phoned in to arson hot lines.

Since Oct. 26, 26 fires have raged through the Golden State, causing at least \$1 billion in damage. At least 19 are suspected arson, including the two biggest wildfires — Laguna Beach and Malibu.

"This has to be one of the biggest tragedies ever attributed to arson," says investigator Larry Cornelson. "It took such a toll in ... human misery."

Federal-aid office to stay open another week

GOVERNMENT: As of Friday, 477 people had applied for disaster relief at the temporary center in Laguna.

By GINA SHAFFER

The Orange County Register

LAGUNA BEACH — More than 470 people have applied for disaster assistance from federal and state agencies, officials said Friday, prompting them to keep the local office open another week.

The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency is coordinating financial aid for disaster victims at its makeshift office at the Laguna Beach Recreation Center. FEMA originally had planned to close the center Friday. FEMA will accept applications by phone and mail until Dec. 27.

An average of 60 people a day have shuffled among tables piled with government forms at the center. By closing time Friday, FEMA had received 969 applications; many people applied for

more than one type of aid.

Among those lining up this week were pool cleaners, gardeners and housekeepers left jobless by the fire.

Free-lance photographer Holden Clay, 29, who lost his life's work in the blaze, mulled over whether to apply for a loan or a grant.

"They're really helpful — incredibly helpful," he said.

Michael P. Shelden, 41, is applying for a \$2,000 loan to replace a trailer, tools and equipment for his recycling business.

"Given the volume of people, I

was fairly impressed with how quickly things were handled," Shelden said.

Even business owners who have experienced a downturn in sales due to the disaster may qualify for financial aid.

"If they have any inkling they'd be eligible, they should come in," said FEMA spokeswoman Cory La Bianca.

FEMA officials also are urging property owners to apply for assistance even if they think insurance will cover their losses.

"There may be a gap between their insurance coverage and

what it would cost to rebuild," said Jo Ann Darby, manager of the disaster-assistance center.

La Bianca said: "Sometimes, three or four months down the line, they realize they really need assistance. If they haven't applied by the deadline, it's really too late."

Orange Co. Registry 11/6/95

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DISASTER AID

The number of applications for federal money, by type, received as of 3 p.m. Friday at the Laguna Beach disaster-assistance center:

- ▶ Temporary housing and minor repairs: 334
- ▶ State social-services grants: 91
- ▶ Unemployment aid: 106
- ▶ SBA home loan: 291
- ▶ SBA business loan: 145

Source: U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency

Malibu begins shaking off trauma, getting on with life

by Ron Soble
Daily News Staff Writer

MALIBU — Residents staggered to their feet Saturday, hugging each other and the firefighters who risked their lives quelling the Old Topanga fire that destroyed several of the coastal community's mountainside enclaves.

Fire victims began lining up at 1 a.m. with two green and white striped tents behind the Malibu Civic Center, where government officials set up a maze of interview tables designed to speed financial help for those whose homes were lost or damaged.

"They're very stressed out," said Federal Emergency Management Agency spokeswoman Rita Kepner as she glanced at some of the faces of residents who lost everything in last week's blaze.

However, most residents interviewed at the center said they determined to stay in Malibu.

"It scared me to death, but I decided to move," said Stacey Campbell, 24, a bookkeeper whose home was burned down.

Los Angeles County fire authorities said Saturday that field inspections have uncovered 323 homes and 112 other structures destroyed by the inferno.

The damage tab was placed at \$170 million for the 18,560-acre fire, which began Tuesday morning roaring over the Santa Monica Mountains from Calabasas to Malibu.

Authorities said Saturday they were hoping the fire would be fully contained overnight. By Saturday afternoon, however, the blaze continued to be 80 percent contained.

Should the blaze be fully contained, and should a favorable weather outlook hold up, officials said they would begin disassembling the team of more than 5,400 firefighters and support personnel who remained in the Malibu area.

The fire claimed three lives: British director-screenwriter Duncan Gibbins in the area near Old Topanga Canyon Road; and an elderly couple Malibu's Carbon Canyon, whose neighbors identified as Amy and David Yarrow.

The Los Angeles County Coroner's Office, however, had not officially confirmed the identity of the

A Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department spokesman, Sgt. Ron Spear, said arson and homicide units were investigating the blaze's origin. Earlier, investigators concluded the Old Topanga fire was set by an arsonist.

In Los Angeles, city fire officials doubled patrols in hillside areas Saturday to prevent small blazes from growing out of control.

In Malibu, some residents were angry about losing their homes and vented their frustration at U.S. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, who toured the emergency center to make sure the relief effort was functioning smoothly.

Others were upset over what they said was an absence of water pressure at critical times when windswept fires were knifing through their canyon neighborhoods.

But Malibu resident Ray Berglund, 59, an artist who lost his four-decade-old Las Flores Canyon house, was philosophic.

"We're going to leave it all someday anyway," he said while waiting his turn to be interviewed at the emergency center. "So it's just a lesson in nonattachment."

Equally philosophic was former Malibu mayor Walt Keller. "Don't let anyone envy you for living out here," he said. "We pay our price, our dues."

Brown said it was encouraging to find that the emergency center was off to a fast start. "It's good to see a community pull together with a common sense of mission."

Outside, however, one Malibu resident who lost her Carbon Canyon home, Sara Wan, confronted the commerce secretary. She charged that firefighters "wrote us off."

But Brown did not lose his cool. He said federal officials were moving rapidly to provide victim assistance. He declined to give an estimate of how much federal cash would be needed to help Malibu rebuild.

"We're not here to make promises, we're here to give assistance," he said a few minutes later at a news conference outside the center.

Malibu Mayor Carolyn Van Horn said in an interview that there would be no instant solution to the devastation.

"It's not going to be a quick turnaround," she said.

Van Horn, who almost lost her house to a Malibu fire a decade ago said she had talked with Brown about meeting with President Clinton to discuss the Malibu tragedy.

Surveying the victims who showed up at the emergency center, Van Horn emphasized that they were ordinary, hard-working people, many of whom had lived in their mountainside homes for years.

Malibu has a worldwide celebrity image, she noted, but underscored that "by and large" the victims were not the wealthiest in the community.

"Let's remember, we're not as rich and famous," she said.

On a bright fall Saturday, Malibu's main artery, the Pacific Coast Highway, was open to traffic, although fire-ravaged canyons were closed to everyone but residents.

Joggers, cyclists and surfers took advantage of the favorable weather, the first day in almost a week that the renowned coastal community was able to get back into an almost normal routine.

But a quick glance at the blackened Malibu hills shrouded in white ash and the jam of fire and emergency equipment surrounding the Civic Center were stark reminders of the week's horror.

A collective sigh of relief could almost be heard throughout the community, which stretches for about 26 miles along the ocean. Signs thanking firefighters for their efforts were everywhere.

On Manzanita Park Avenue off Las Flores Canyon Road, residents threw an emotional thank-you party Saturday for the firefighters who had saved their homes from destruction.

Firefighters were thrilled by the show of gratitude. "We came out here and they're crying, and it was hard to choke back the tears," said Scott Tavalero of the U.S. Forest

Not far from the Civic Center, at Malibu Bluff County Park overlooking the Pacific Ocean, a community picnic was under way to celebrate the end of the ordeal.

The picnic scene appeared to have a touch of surrealism about it.

While large sound boxes blasted a version of "In the Mood," water-dropping helicopters, which had the bluff as a staging area, took off and landed, the buzz of their rotors booming across the picnic area.

Residents helped themselves to a smorgasbord of pasta, beans, sausage and an assortment of other food and drink provided by Malibu restaurants and shops. A few feet away, children used the soccer field for the first time in a week.

"The message for our city is to normalize," said Matt Kouba, the park supervisor.

In the park's Michael Landon Community Center, Girl Scouts from Pacific Palisades sorted donated clothes in neat piles of pants, shirts, shoes and other apparel.

"We canceled a camp-out to come here," said their leader, Eva Kurtz.

Residents mixed with firefighters at the bluff's picnic tables. Most had praise for the professionals who came from several Western states to fight the blaze.

But some locals blamed near-sighted planning for the tragedy.

Tony Shafer, 55, a Los Angeles city fireman who has lived for years in the La Costa area of Malibu, which was devastated by the fire, said the area's water mains are antiquated.

Hydrants were dry when flames swept into his neighborhood, he said, and almost every house on his block except his was gutted.

The problem, he charged, was that anti-development residents have lobbied successfully to preserve the status quo when Malibu's infrastructure needs a major overhaul.

"Malibu is a wonderful place, but people get their priorities screwed up," he said. "They think that a butterfly and a piece of chaparral is more important than family."

INFORMATION

Donation centers and other help for fire victims:

Red Cross donations: (800) 842-2200

Salvation Army donations: Food and clothing to Salvation Army stores; checks to Southland Fire Relief, Salvation Army, 900 W. 9th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

FEMA assistance: Office of Emergency Services, (800) 525-0321, or (800) 660-8005 for the hearing- or speech-impaired.

Missing pets: Call animal control at (310) 829-7533; or the United Animal Nations and Actors and Others for Animals at (818) 760-2840, Ext. 7387, or (213) 877-1936, Ext. 7387.

Pet boarding: Veterinary Centers of America, (310) 829-7533.

Horse boarding: Los Angeles Equestrian Center, (818) 873-1042. Veterinary Centers of America, (800) VCA-PETS. Jolene's Horse

Rescue, 22201 Devonshire St., in Chatsworth, (818) 349-4113. Silver Fox Ranch, Somis, (805) 386-4299. Horse owners trying to find animals lost in the fire can call an SPCA hot line set up to reunite horses with their owners at (800) 730-4226.

U.S. mail service: For information about mail that has been withheld because of the fires, call the postal customer service center at (818) 767-2100.

Crisis counseling: Call the Los Angeles County Mental Health hot line at (800) 854-7771.

Social Security checks: Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries whose November check did not arrive because their homes were damaged in the fires should check first with the Postal Service. If it is not there, then call Social Security at (800) 772-1213 to report the missing, check or change of address.

Utility bills: Southern California Edison Co. and Southern California Gas Co. will continue to waive bills for customers who lost their homes. Customers won't have to pay for service between their last bill and the fire. For information, call the electric company at (800) 843-0517 and the gas company at (800) 427-2200.

Construction: A referral network for building supplies, construction work and other rebuilding services has been set up by Valley Building Materials in Chatsworth and Marina Sash and Door in Los Angeles. For information, call (800) 696-7274, or (800) 407-3667.

Feelings mixed as fire victims line up for aid

Orange Co. Register

11/7/93

PEOPLE: Grateful residents hold a picnic for firefighters as full containment nears. Some angrily confront U.S. Secretary Ron Brown.

By E. SCOTT RECKARD
The Associated Press

MALIBU — Fire victims queued up Saturday for their first shot at federal disaster aid and held a morale-boosting picnic as the town rallied from an arsonist's deadly handiwork.

There also was frustration, as a handful of residents who lost homes in last week's firestorm vented their anger about fire protection at U.S. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown.

"Our canyon was deserted and we lost more homes. They wrote us off," said Sara Wan, whose Carbon Canyon home was destroyed.

"I can understand why the firefighters pulled out when the firestorm hit; it's their lives," she said. "But why didn't the firetrucks come back later?"

Brown, in town for a briefing by relief officials, seemed taken aback as he was confronted outside a disaster-aid clearinghouse. He said the government was doing what it could to help victims.

"You've seen a much more efficient federal government, working much more effectively with local governments," he said.

Elsewhere, anger gave way to gratitude for the firefighters who put their lives on the line. A large banner above Topanga Canyon Road read, "Fire Crews — Best."

Pacific Coast Highway was peppered with signs thanking firefighters. Most messages, spray-painted on garage doors, sheets and pieces of plywood, said simply: "Thank you." Other

At a park next to the Michael Landon Community Center, a band provided entertainment as residents held a picnic for departing firefighters.

"We're trying to get them together so they can hug each other and the firefighters," said Matt Kouba, a city Parks and Recreation Department supervisor.

The firefighters included a 19-man quick-response team, the Wounded Knee District Hotliners, from the Pine Ridge Oglala Sioux Indian Reservation in Manderson, S.D.

Crew boss C.J. Clifford noted that they had come from one of the poorest counties in the United States to one of the wealthiest. After nine days of fighting Southern California wildfires, he said, they were headed home.

"But something could come up between now and then and we are ready any time," Clifford said. "We'll stay out as long as California needs us."

Investigators from 13 agencies hunted for the person who set the 19,000-acre Malibu blaze Tuesday, and fire crews Saturday doused hot spots, cleared brush or awaited discharge orders.

More than 80 percent of the fire was contained, with full containment expected perhaps by Monday, said Los Angeles County fire Inspector Mario De Fina.

The fire killed three people, destroyed or damaged more than 360 structures, most of them homes, and caused at least \$170 million in damage. It was started by an arsonist in the Santa Monica Mountains.

Arsonists set 19 of 25 wind-fanned wildfires in Southern California since Oct. 26, according to the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. The fires charred more than 200,000 acres, destroyed more than 1,100 buildings and injured more than 200 people.

The Malibu fire killed British movie director Duncan Gibbins, 41, and two people whose charred bodies were found on a mountain road. Friends identified them as Donn and Amy Yarrow, owners of a backcountry ranch.

About 5,400 firefighters were on the lines Saturday; a number expected to dwindle to 4,000 by Monday, said county fire Inspector Jack Pritchard. Vehicles needed to be checked, lost equipment tallied and weary drivers allowed to sleep before they hit the road, Pritchard said.

Scores of residents lined up as Malibu's first emergency-aid center opened Saturday morning. Another center opened near the fire's origin in Calabasas.

Federal aid officials, mental-health counselors, Internal Revenue Service officials and Department of Motor Vehicles representatives interviewed victims under two large striped tents at the Malibu Civic Center.

Rita Kepner, spokeswoman for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said some affluent fire victims seemed to be in a state of denial about help they might need.

▼ Retracing the Paper Trail

By JEFF PRUGH
STAFF WRITER

When a wildfire strikes, there may not be time to retrieve all the important documents that you have collected over a lifetime.

If important papers are destroyed, many of them—property deeds, birth certificates, marriage licenses, bank statements, canceled checks, among others—can be reconstructed by phone. Others must be requested in writing or in person.

But take heed: Your paper chase sometimes can be frustrating—and deceptively costly.

You'll probably have to listen and talk to automated voices and be put on hold again and again. And even though banks may waive service fees if you show that documents were destroyed by fire, you may have to put up expensive bond to replace lost

stock certificates. And copying fees of as much as \$15 apiece for some government-issued records can mount quickly. Still, it's easier today, experts say, navigating the mega-electronic jungle—computer discs, microfilm, photocopying—that documents so much of how we live, save and live than the ways Americans tried to salvage documents decades ago.

"Lost records are what disasters are made of," said Harvey Saferstein, past president of the State Bar of California. "Our paperless society is scary to some people, but it's easier now to rebuild your file because so many records can be

The key is knowing who to call or write—and what to ask for.

Banks keep microfilm records of your statements and canceled checks for as long as seven years. Employers generally keep copies of paychecks and W-2 forms. Property deeds are usually no problem, either. The Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder's Office can provide certified copies for a fee (\$2 for the first page, 50 cents per page for all others), as well as birth, marriage and death certificates at \$15 per copy.

Your tax returns, too, are stored in a database. The Internal Revenue Service, which says you must keep copies of returns for the past three years, makes copies available at \$1.25 per return (but free to victims of the recent wildfires).

The IRS offers victims of Southern California's recent calamitous fires additional help. Agents have been sent to temporary centers of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), an IRS spokesman said.

And the IRS can expedite claims for losses not covered by insurance when victims ask to amend their returns filed last April. In other words, a taxpayer's 1992 federal return can be amended to reflect unreimbursed losses suffered in 1993—if they occurred in locations designated by President Clinton as disaster areas. (Such a declaration by the President recently made Los Angeles and other Southern California counties eligible for federal emergency-relief funds.)

"This helps people who need money sooner, who can't wait until next year when they file their 1993 return," said Keith Kimball, a public affairs specialist in the agency's Los Angeles office. Applicants should request Form 1040X, he said.

The most difficult documents to re-create include wills and unsecured promissory notes, said Clifford Cate, a Glendale probate attorney.

Wills can be easily restored, Cate said, when copies are kept by attorneys. If not, those whose wills are lost or destroyed must reconstruct them with at least two witnesses present, he said. If a promissory note is destroyed, Cate said, it can be all but impossible to prove who owes whom—and how much.

As for protecting those documents once you've re-created them, experts say nothing surpasses a safe-deposit box. The Bank of America's monthly fees range from \$20 to \$75, although they are waived for holders of certain accounts, bank spokesman Charlie Coleman said.

When two Bank of America branches burned to the ground during the 1992 Los Angeles riots, Coleman said, the vaults at both stood intact. "The contents," he said, "weren't even touched."

Moreover, one victim of an out-

of-state fire recommends handing—in a sealed envelope every two years or so—an updated list of all account and telephone numbers for bank and credit cards, as well as an inventory of other documents, to a trusted relative, but not a spouse. "You and your spouse could die together in a fire," she explained.

And attorney Saferstein strongly suggests—to show proof of purchase for insurance—keeping an inventory of not just important documents but all household items on film, videotape or paper and storing the documentation elsewhere for safekeeping.

"The real problem today isn't so much reconstructing documents," he said. "It's claiming losses for everything else you own. Most people today don't recognize how important that really is."

Marines kept from firefight

BUREAUCRACY: Procedures make it hard to deploy military firefighters and their powerful copters. And Marines say they weren't asked.

By GARY A. WARNER
The Orange County Register

A convoluted system for requesting military help virtually assured that Marines from nearby bases would arrive too late to battle the Laguna Beach blaze that destroyed 366 homes, fire officials said Friday.

Although the Marines had 1,200 fire-trained troops and several powerful water-dropping helicopters within 25 miles of the Laguna fire, the system for requesting help stretched across the country and back again.

"I think people believe you can pick up a phone and get squadrons of Marine helicopters to show up — it doesn't work that way," said Capt. Dan Young, spokesman for the Orange County Fire Department.

For example, requests for water-dropping helicopters from Tustin Marine Corps Air Station, less than 10 minutes from the fire, go from local fire officials to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. From

FULL STORY

► **AID:** FEMA office in Laguna to stay open another week. Page 22

► **DONATIONS:** Businesses give big in wake of fires. Page 22

► **VICTIMS:** Couple feared dead loved the out of doors. Page 23

► **HELPING:** Wedding-style registry set up for fire victims. Page 25

► **POLL:** Should Marines be used to fight brush fires? Metro, Page 3

there they go to the Federal Emergency Management Agency in Washington, then on to the Department of Defense, Department of the Navy, Marine Corps Headquarters, the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Pendleton and, finally, to the helicopter units at Tustin.

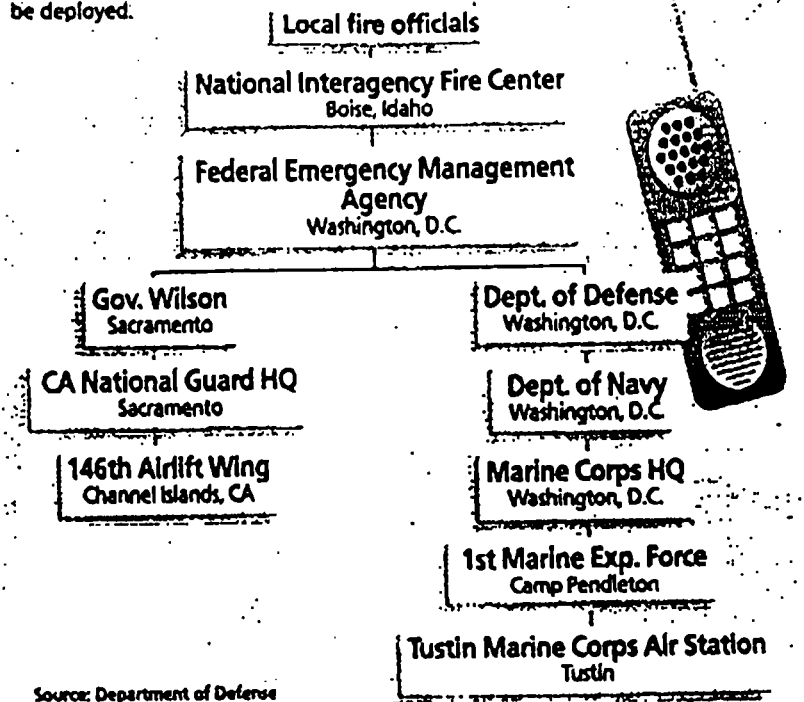
The Laguna fire is hardly an isolated case. Over the past two weeks, 19 fires have scorched more than 180,000 acres from San Diego County to Ventura County, forcing local authorities to fly in firefighters from as far away as Montana.

But the Marines say they have received no requests for help. Camp Pendleton officials said

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SEND IN THE MARINES

The chart below shows layers of command that must be penetrated before a military firefighting force can be deployed.



Source: Department of Defense

The Orange County Register

MARINES: Help wasn't sought

they were ready to go — if they received the green light from the Pentagon.

"It's not a matter of 'Camp Pendleton to the rescue,'" said Chief Warrant Officer Mike Hedlund, a spokesman for the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, the main command at the base. "We have a contingency force ready if we are called to assist. The decision is made in Washington — it's far out of our hands."

Among the units available, but not requested nor used:

► A battalion of 600 trained Marine firefighters based at Camp Pendleton who can move out within four hours. The battalion was put on "standby" during the first hours of the Laguna fire but was not used. A second battalion of 600 fire-trained Marines was in reserve. The units were created in 1991 after criticism over federal firefighting efforts in the 1 million-acre blaze at Yellowstone National Park.

► A squadron of CH-53E Super Stallions at the Tustin Marine Corps Air Station capable of carrying huge water-dropping buckets. The Marines had three helicopters on standby during the fires. They can carry much larger water-dropping buckets than civilian helicopters, up to 2,600 gallons. Civilian helicopters were using buckets as small as 150 gallons.

► Thirty-nine 5-ton trucks, each towing a water tank, at Camp Pendleton. The trucks could transport firefighters or equipment and evacuate fire victims. Six bulldozers, including one kept ready to go on a flatbed truck, were available at Camp Pendleton and El Toro Marine Corps Air Station.

Military and civilian authorities agreed that no request was made to bring in the two battalions or the trucks to fight the Laguna Beach fire, but they disagreed over exactly what happened with the helicopters.

Young said one — and perhaps two — CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters carrying 1,320-gallon water buckets were involved in the firefighting efforts.

"They were there as far as we know," Young said. "We were in communication with Wolfpack 10, who was en route to the fire,

and turned them over to the air-operations people."

Wolfpack is the nickname of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 466, the unit Marines confirm was put on alert for possible fire duty.

But the Marines said none of the three helicopters they offered was used.

"No helicopters from Tustin dropped water," said Lt. Beth Carreiro, a base spokeswoman. "It was a mutual decision between local authorities and base and wing authorities not to use them in the end. Safety was the primary reason, based on the terrain, the other air traffic and the communications concerns."

The Marines did send two fire engines and two water tankers from the civilian-run fire departments at El Toro and Tustin.

Hedlund said Orange County fire officials made a direct request to El Toro late Thursday for 100 Marines. The request was sent one step up the chain of command to Lt. Gen. George Christmas, commander of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Pendleton. Because of the small size of the request and the immediate need, the general authorized the troops to move out without going through normal channels.

"I think he decided it was in the best interest of us and the community," Hedlund said.

Six bulldozers were sent to combat the fire late Wednesday and 80 El Toro Marines were used to search for victims Thursday and Friday.

County fire officials said they would review all actions connected with the fire, including communications with the Marines.

"Any time you have an event of this size, you review everything," Young said. "We learned a lot from the Oakland fire, and maybe people can learn from us."

Marine officials said they had no plans to review their role in the fire.

But Rep. Chris Cox, R-Newport Beach, whose district includes Laguna Beach, said everyone should find ways to cooperate better in the future.

"This is obviously one of the things we need to look at," he said.

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Criticized in past, federal relief agency praised for fire response

FEMA quick with aid to victims, say state officials

By Vic Ostrowidzki
EXAMINER WASHINGTON BUREAU

P-A 19

WASHINGTON — FEMA, the federal disaster relief agency accused of ineptness in previous calamities, is winning plaudits from California officials for its prompt response to two weeks worth of wildfires that have devastated the south state.

The officials say the Federal Emergency Management Agency reacted rapidly to help victims of the blazes.

The current fires in Los Angeles caused \$500 million in destruction so far. That total does include Tuesday's flareup in Topanga Canyon, in which more expensive homes were destroyed.

The raging fires in Oakland, which destroyed more than 2,400 in 1991, caused \$1.5 billion in damage.

"We think FEMA is doing a very good job," said Tom Mullins, a spokesman for the California Office of Emergency Services.

"FEMA responded quickly," he added. "The agency's director was at the scene early, meeting not only with state officials but also with insurance industry officials to try to coordinate the recovery effort with them."

FEMA came under attack after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in Northern California for its sluggish response, bad management of relief funds and regulations so complicated and so narrowly interpreted that many people — especially the poor — had trouble getting help.

Political appointees

The agency, which in the past had been a dumping ground for political appointees not known for their competence, also was criticized in May by the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress.

The GAO studied FEMA's relief efforts after Hurricane Hugo, which hit Charleston, S.C., in 1989, and Hurricane Andrew, which leveled parts of Louisiana and southern Florida in 1992. In those disasters, the report said, FEMA lacked "an effective strategy for rapid federal response."

After Hurricane Hugo, FEMA waited 10 days before opening its first disaster-aid centers. After Hurricane Andrew, the agency waited four days before opening an aid center.

By the time the Oakland fire struck in October 1991, FEMA had learned some critical lessons — money flowed much more quickly to victims, and the agency was widely perceived to be more sensitive to the poor.

Still, there were problems, including a lack of multilingual assistance for non-English-speaking victims even though a national multilingual telephone system was in place.

FEMA head on the spot

Last week, during the first outbreak of devastating fires, James Lee Witt, FEMA's new director, flew to Southern California on Thursday to assess the scope of the damage personally. That was one day before Gov. Wilson asked that the state be declared a disaster area.

President Clinton, briefed by Witt, issued the declaration two hours after Wilson requested it.

By Saturday, FEMA had deployed to Southern California 150 staffers from within California and Colorado, Washington

state and Washington, D.C., to assess damage and coordinate the federal government's response to the fires, according to Marvin Davis, a FEMA spokesman.

That day FEMA set up centers to process disaster relief applications in Los Angeles, Ventura, Riverside and Orange counties, Davis said.

Witt flew to California again late Tuesday after news that devastating fires had roared back to life.

Mullins of the California Emergency Services Office said he was impressed by the FEMA workers' use of portable computers to assess damage and file reports immediately from the scene of the fires.

New national strategy

FEMA intends to draft a national strategy to reduce the risks linked to natural disasters, Harvey Ryland, senior policy advisor to FEMA's director, said Wednesday.

Ryland told a conference on natural hazards in Washington that FEMA would unveil a comprehensive hazards mitigation strategy by January 1995 after a series of meetings around the country with state and local officials and business and community leaders.

The new strategy would seek to address all hazards by relying on incentives, including tax breaks aimed at encouraging developers and individuals to do such things as use nonflammable roofing materials, build safer houses, install hurricane shutters and elevate buildings in flood-prone areas.

Ryland said FEMA's strategy also would increase coordination by federal agencies to promote mitigation, rather than continue the current emphasis on disaster relief.

Marsha Gineburg of The Examiner staff, and Reuter news service contributed to this report.

New fires flare in south state

Dry winds drive flames toward homes, schools

By Larry D. Hatfield
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

P.A.

Fanned by accelerating Santa winds off the Mojave Desert, a of new wildfires exploded T ay in Southern California

brushlands, critically injuring two people, burning homes and threatening towns and schools.

With hot, dry winds gusting to 40 mph, flames crackled untamed through the brittle landscape of the Calabasas-Woodland Hills-Topanga Canyon area 25 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles; outside Banning, in Riverside County;

Yucaipa, in San Bernardino County; and near Alpina, in San Diego County.

By early afternoon, the new had consumed thousands of and an undetermined number of houses.

"We can tell you where they are not how big they are because they're growing fast," said Terri [See FIRES, A-12]

Zubchenok, a California Department of Forestry spokeswoman in Riverside County.

Two people suffered burns while trying to rescue animals, said Los Angeles County Fire Department spokesman Steve Valenzuela. They were reported in critical condition.

"It's out of control," said a Los Angeles fire spokesman as a huge plume of reddish-brown smoke climbed from a blaze near luxury s on Mulholland Drive, not from Calabasas.

Classes at Pepperdine University were canceled and firefighters warned officials at the Getty Museum in Malibu to be prepared to evacuate as the fire headed toward both.

Roads jammed as people fled the blaze, which spewed thick clouds of smoke.

"We've got ashes falling all around. It's like nighttime over here in Malibu," said Jeffrey B.

A wind-whipped fire north of Banning, 90 miles east of downtown L.A., was eating its way toward Beaumont High School, which was evacuated, said Riverside County fire spokeswoman Bonnie O'Connell.

"The winds are a real problem," she said. "It's moving at a rapid rate of speed."

The fire was started by arcing power lines in trees, said Teresa Merrill, a spokeswoman for the Riverside County Fire Department. At least 3,000 acres had burned by early afternoon.

In Yucaipa, 75 miles east of Los Angeles, an intentionally set fire burned more than 70 acres within half an hour, said San Bernardino County fire spokesman Bill Peters.

"If it crests the hill, there is a potential threat to homes," he said. Winds were fairly calm in that area Tuesday morning, but weather experts noted that the Santa Ana winds are highly erratic and can kick up without notice.

San Francisco and other North-

ern California cities sent emergency crews south to join hundreds of weary firefighters from California and other western states who have been battling wildfires for a week.

Before the latest flares, firefighters in Southern California had declared victory over 14 wildfires that damaged or destroyed 830 buildings — including more than 700 homes — and charred 185,000 acres.

Hot, dry winds, low humidity and abnormally high temperatures also kept the fire danger on the Bay Area's tinder-dry and fuel-rich hillsides at the flash point Tuesday.

A "red flag" alert for extreme fire danger closed parks and kept Bay Area fire departments nervous.

A small but scary fire brought intense response from edgy East Bay firefighters Tuesday morning in the Hiller Highlands, ground zero of the historic conflagration that hit the Oakland hills in October 1991.

Four Oakland engines, two Berkeley units, an assistant chief and a tanker were sent to a fire that turned out to be a couple of burning hay bales. They were quickly extinguished.

Arson investigators blamed the small blaze on a cigarette discarded by a construction worker involved in rebuilding the neighborhood from the last fire.

Southern California officials were fearful of more problems from the gathering Santa Ana winds, though they were not nearly as strong as last week's gale-force winds off the desert.

Despite the new blazes, most of the big wildfires, including the largest, the 42,000-acre Thousand Oaks blaze in the Santa Monica Mountains above Malibu, were declared under control or close to it on Monday.

"The general feeling is that we've conquered it," said a Ventura County fire spokesman after cool, moist weekend weather helped tired firefighters get the upper hand.

Before the new flare-ups Tuesday morning, fires still burning were in remote, mountainous areas and posed no threat to human life or property.

In San Francisco, National Weather Service forecaster Steve Markkanen said the Bay Area would continue to be dry for several days, and winds would decrease by Tuesday afternoon.

On Monday, however, the gusty north winds, high temperatures and low humidity drove fire danger up, prompting another red flag alert for the fire service.

Extra fire patrols were maintained in the East Bay and state park rangers again closed the upper reaches of Mount Tamalpais, which was closed most of last week. East Bay Regional Park officials also were ready to close parks if the extreme fire danger continued.

In the aftermath of last week's Southern California blazes, among the most devastating in the state's history, biologists and engineers were hurrying to reseed fire-denuded hillsides in advance of winter rains.

Officials fear expected heavy winter rains will create mud slides, endangering property that escaped.

There were also fears of copycat arsonists setting new fires. Five of the blazes — including the worst in terms of property damage, the Laguna Beach fire that wiped out 330 homes Wednesday — were set.

A sixth, the Altadena firestorm that destroyed 115 homes, was accidentally started by a homeless man who lit a fire to keep warm.

The federal government, meanwhile, was moving quickly to help fire victims, hoping to head off criticism of slow response that followed the Loma Prieta earthquake, Hurricane Andrew, the Los Angeles riot last year and other recent disasters.

President Clinton, who has declared five Southern California counties disaster areas, promised victims they would not be forgotten.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency vowed to issue relief checks to victims within 10 days. FEMA Director James Lee Witt estimated damage at \$500 million or more.

California Insurance Commissioner John Garamendi also pledged quick help for fire victims.

Examiner news services contributed to this report.

In California, Insurance Policies Burn Taxpayers

By *Sheldon Richman*

The natural disaster making headlines may have changed from floods in the Midwest to autumn brush fires in Southern California, but one thing remains the same: The taxpayers will be forced to bail out people, including some very wealthy people, who choose to live in risky locations. Insured losses in California are expected to reach \$250 million from fires that at last count had burned 152,000 acres, destroyed 720 buildings and displaced 25,000 people.

President Clinton has declared five counties to be federal disaster areas, making a bundle of free or low-cost goodies available to the stricken residents. But that assistance is just a small part of the subsidy to people who build homes where brush fires rage year after year.

The question is whether people will make rational decisions about living in a literal tinderbox if government lowers the cost of that choice. Any economist will testify that the way to get more of something is to subsidize it. Subsidies to people who live in hazardous areas guarantee that more people will live there and that when disaster strikes the damage will be greater than it would otherwise have been. Is that wise public policy?

The first subsidy to some residents of disaster-prone areas is below-market fire insurance. California requires insurance companies to participate in a risk-pool arrangement, the California Fair Plan Association, to "guarantee accessibility" to people who cannot get regular fire insurance. It is similar to assigned-risk systems for high-risk drivers who can't afford auto insurance. In effect, property insurance companies must cover a percentage of "uninsurables" equal to their market share, although Fair Plan has its own agents and writes its own policies. Fair Plan has 26,500 policyholders in brush areas; in the current fires it has already received claims totaling \$26 million.

Marjorie Berte, Gov. Pete Wilson's insurance adviser, says Fair Plan charges "break-even rates" and is intended to be self-supporting. In bad years, such as this one, when the program is not self-supporting, the shortfall is made up through a special assessment against the insurance companies. Ms. Berte insists the insur-

ance is not subsidized. But how could it not be? After all, the free market has a perfectly sensible way to guarantee accessibility: If you are willing to pay the market rate, you are guaranteed insurance. There would be no need to legally require a company to insure someone who was willing to pay the market rate.

But neither California nor any other state has a free insurance market; rates are closely regulated. Fair Plan was started in 1968 to help businesses return to riot-torn inner cities after the insurance companies had been scared away. Residents of fire-prone brush areas who couldn't get fire insurance at the state-approved rates then pressured to have the program include them.

The implicit rate subsidy is the difference between the premium in the absence of regulation and the Fair Plan premium. Under the "break even" rates applied across the government-created pool of insured, some people are charged higher rates than they might otherwise pay to make up for the lower rates that others in the pool are charged. The subsidy makes it possible for some people to own homes in a brush fire area who otherwise would have chosen to live elsewhere.

That subsidy would be bad enough, but the federal government makes things worse by standing ready to pay the bills for damage not covered by insurance. Disaster relief is available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Small Business Administration as soon as the president declares a county a disaster area. Individuals can obtain 4%, 30-year loans for uninsured damage to their homes and possessions. Money is also available for rent for temporary housing and home repair if rebuilding is not necessary. SBA money can even be used to pay the deductible on an insurance policy.

FEMA has money for other things as well. For example, local mental health agencies can be reimbursed for the additional counseling services they may provide in the aftermath of a disaster. FEMA can also pay unemployment benefits to people who lose jobs because of a disaster. The price tag can be quite high. Congress passed a \$5.7 billion disaster appropriation during the Midwest flooding. FEMA officials have not been able to es-

timate what their total outlay will be from the brush fires.

This complex web of pooled-risk insurance, loans and grants amounts to a situation in which the taxpayers and California homeowners in less risky areas chip in to make it possible for other people—in some cases, much wealthier people—to live in areas perennially threatened by wildfire and to rebuild in the same place whenever fire destroys their homes. That is dubious public policy.

A more equitable system would be to let people face the true costs of their decisions about where to live. Insurance, of course, is a time-honored method of pooling risk. But regulated and subsidized insurance tampers with important signals regarding relative risk that market-set premiums provide. If those signals are distorted, more people will take risks. That exposes the taxpayers to an unnecessary financial burden and also prompts talk about regulating where people may live.

People, rich or poor, need not be defenseless in the face of natural disasters. The competitive market allows discovery of things we won't learn otherwise. A deregulated insurance industry would be free to search for innovative ways to protect people against losses due to disaster. But we won't know what it will discover until the regulators get out of the way.

Mr. Richman is an editor at the Cato Institute in Washington.



GOVERNMENT COMES TO THE RESCUE

P. NEWS 4

Federal and state authorities received 110 emergency-assistance applications Sunday, and pledged to begin writing checks by week's end.

Disaster victims lined up at the Laguna Recreation Center for the second day of government-assistance offers. Altogether, 195 people applied for fire-related assistance over the weekend.

"It's our intention to cut checks within seven to 10 days. People who came in Saturday and Sunday will receive assistance even faster," said Cory La Bianca, spokeswoman for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

FEMA is coordinating multiagency efforts that range from small-business loans to psychological counseling.

More than half of the local claims involve homeowners with home offices, said Carol Lambert, a U.S. Small Business Administration loan specialist, a marked dif-

ference from the situation after the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

That complicates matters for the fire's victims: Not only are their homes and workplaces destroyed, but also their personal and work records.

Lambert said, however, that recent SBA measures streamline the loan-request process. Some applicants after the 1992 riots criticized FEMA and the SBA for what they claimed were onerous application procedures.

Laguna Beach's fire victims appeared particularly surprised by Internal Revenue Service representatives, who said 1992 tax returns still could be amended. Last week's fire-related costs can be claimed on last year's tax return.

"The primary advantage is (victims) may be able to get a refund check faster. Otherwise they'd be waiting until April 1994," said Ron Edgar of the IRS.

Here are some of the services being offered by the FEMA-coordinated Disaster Assistance Program through Friday:

► Low-interest SBA loans on personal property up to \$100,000 and business losses up to \$1.5 million. Call (800) 488-5323.

► FEMA-sponsored mortgage- and rental-assistance grants. Call (800) 525-0321 or (800) 660-8005.

► Individual and family grants up to \$12,000 through the California Department of Social Services. Call (800) 759-6807 or (800) 952-8349.

► IRS-sponsored income-tax assistance. Call the IRS at (800) 829-1040 or (800) 829-4059. Call the California Franchise Tax Board at (800) 852-5711 or (800) 822-6268.

► Social Security assistance, for help in delivering Social Security checks, due Wednesday. Call (800) 772-1213.

By ELLIOT BLAIR SMITH/The Register

LOS ANGELES TIMES

DATE: NOV-02-93

Santa Ana Winds, Fire Danger to Return

■ **Preparedness:** Police and firefighters plan special patrols to deter arsonists like those believed to have set last week's blazes.

By ERIC MALNIC
and JOHN E. MITCHELL **B1**
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

Hot, dry Santa Ana winds are expected to return today, and police and firefighters will be on special patrol across Southern California to deter arsonists who might attempt to take advantage of the dangerous fire conditions, officials said Monday.

Arsonists were blamed for at least six of last week's devastating fires. No suspects have been arrested as yet in any of those blazes, and investigators fear that some may attempt to strike again today.

Volunteer citizen groups, equipped with portable radios, were scheduled to join police and fire personnel in the patrolling effort that will begin today in areas where brush is thickest and fire danger is the greatest. Fire units were being placed on "red flag" alert.

The Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, which serves as the nation's federal arson investigation arm, is coordinating the investigative efforts of at least 35 agencies probing the Southern California fires.

The FBI has sent copies of recent letters threatening arson to the bureau's central laboratory in Washington for fingerprint identification and development of personality profiles of the authors.

Fire officials disclosed last week that more than 30 letters threatening arson were received by various Southern California police and fire departments and by citizens between Sept. 1 and the outbreak of the fires. The officials said they had no evidence that the letters were connected to any of last week's fires.

The officials said that a man calling himself "Fedbuster"

sent 15 letters at random, promising to set fires to get back at agents who seized his assets. KCBS-TV broadcast excerpts from some letters it attributed to Fedbuster, that read in part:

"They burned me, now I'm going to burn them back. I fight fire with fire. . . . You think the Oakland [Hills] fire was big? You should see my plans."

"I'm going to set a big fire, actually more than one, bigger than Oakland on October 20, 1991—[going to] settle the score with one of these agencies and other government people that screwed me bad."

Steve Ruda, a spokesman for the Los Angeles Fire Department, said that despite some clues, the department's arson investigators have yet to figure out the identity of Fedbuster.

"The clues are not specific, they are general," Ruda said. "The writer doesn't specifically state when or where he is going to set fires, only that he is threatening to set fires."

Orange County Fire Chief Larry Holmes said the
Please see WINDS, B4

situation is ripe for renewed strikes by arsonists.

"They all recognize how much attention these fires got nationally," Holmes said. "With these wind conditions coming, it is more likely that they will come out again."

"There is a whole list of people who are apt to start fires," Holmes said. "When the media begins to cover it like this, it just becomes a feeding frenzy for them."

Forecasters said the winds should gust up to 50 m.p.h. over some areas of the Southland today and Wednesday, accompanied by warm temperatures and low humidity—conditions similar to those that whipped last week's brush fires into destructive firestorms that destroyed at least 815 buildings, including 685 homes.

With the 13 blazes that charred more than 170,000 acres, fully contained and largely extinguished by Monday night, the main work of the hundreds of firefighters still manning the lines was to prepare for today's winds and to ready the land for the winter rains.

In many fire areas, firefighters were using hand tools to snuff out the few remaining hot spots and to unearth smoldering brush buried by bulldozers that could still be hot enough to start new fires when the winds pick up.

The next big task—should Southern California get through the next few days without another major trial by fire—will be to repair slopes where the heaviest runoff is expected during winter rains, smoothing over bulldozer tracks that could erode into gullies, cutting shallow "water bars" to divert the runoff, and spiking down heavy mesh to fasten unstable hillsides in place, said Fire Capt. Joe Sing of the California Department of Forestry.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors today is expected to appropriate an estimated \$1 million for emergency flood-control measures, including extra sandbags for residents who live below denuded hillsides.

In a memo to the board, Public Works Director T.A. Tidemanson warned of a "substantially increased risk of flood damage during the present storm season and for several years hereafter" as a result of the fires in Malibu-Thousand Oaks, Altadena and Chatsworth. The money would be used to build concrete debris basins and other barriers, clear sediment from existing basins and buy 1.2 million extra sandbags, a public works spokeswoman said.

The emergency expenditure is not expected to hurt the cash-starved county because the money

would be drawn from Flood Control District revenue.

The preparation for rain will include a major reseeding effort in the burn areas, so grass will grow to help hold the topsoil in place. "There's sides of hills where the fire burned so hot that it's burnt almost white," Sing said. "In a scenario where there's runoff, the best thing is to go in there and reseed."

Hand crews will shovel earth smooth where firebreaks were slashed across the land, and bulldozers will drag huge steel claws to break up fire-baked earth to prepare it for seeding, Sing said.

The big tractors will plow under some brush that was cut by firefighters during the battles to stem the blazes, he said. The plowed brush will decay slowly, enriching the soil and promoting new growth.

As the fire crews worked, fire victims continued to stream into disaster centers seeking federal and state aid.

Officials of the Federal Emergency Management Agency said 475 families have registered for assistance at four disaster application centers set up in Laguna Beach, Arcadia, Camarillo and Murietta in Riverside County.

At the centers, workers from state and federal agencies are pro-

cessing requests for temporary housing assistance, disaster unemployment insurance and low-interest loans for rebuilding homes and businesses.

Frank Kishton, FEMA's coordinating officer for the disaster, said the first checks to meet emergency housing needs were issued Monday. He could not provide figures on the amount of money dispersed or on how many families had qualified for aid.

FEMA, criticized in the past for its slow response after major disasters, has promised this time to speed up its process and, for the first time on a wide-scale basis, is using a new hand-held electronic system designed to expedite claims from the field.

With the small, computer-like devices, inspectors are able to submit information on damage and repair estimates that are then fed into the system for processing. The computers free inspectors from having to travel with their data to field offices, often miles away from disaster sites, officials said.

"During the Loma Prieta [earthquake] disaster, there was about a 21-day turnaround for application, but with this system, it will take as little as three days," said Robert Lambert, a FEMA emergency management specialist.

One hundred furnished apart-

ments are being made available rent-free for a month for victims of the fires, according to Herb Rosenbloom, president of the R&B Apartment Management Co., which operates the national Oakwood Apartments chain.

The firm is providing 25 apartments at each of four locations—Newport Beach, Long Beach, Torrance Hills and Anaheim. Inquiries should be made through local Red Cross service centers, the firm said.

Richard Andrews, director of the state Office of Emergency Services, said more than \$41 million has been spent by state and local agencies to fight the destructive fires.

Andrews said it is the largest mobilization and test of the California fire mutual aid system in history.

Curtis Brack, a meteorologist with WeatherData Inc., said the Santa Ana winds are being gener-

ated by a high-pressure system over the Rocky Mountains that is pushing air toward Southern California and by a trough of low pressure off the coast that is pulling the air offshore.

He said that as the air spills downhill through the San Gabriel Mountains, it will dry out and heat by compression, gusting up to 50 m.p.h. near mountain passes and at up to 40 m.p.h. in the coastal valleys.

The high temperature at the Los Angeles Civic Center on Monday was 75 degrees, after an overnight low of 61. High temperatures today and Wednesday should range from the 70s at the beaches to the middle 80s in the coastal valleys, Brack said.

Times staff writers Kevin Johnson, Tracey Kaplan, Daryl Kelley, Carlos Lozano and Mack Reed contributed to this story.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

DATE: NOV-02-93

Scars From Firestorm Keep Oakland on Constant Vigil

■ Preparedness: New activism of volunteers is one sign of the changes that took effect after disastrous '91 blaze.

By RICHARD C. PADDOCK
TIMES STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND—When contractor James Servais saw smoke billowing in the Oakland hills last week, he knew just what to do: he raced to his truck, grabbed the fire hose and hooked it up to a nearby hydrant.

Construction workers rebuilding houses destroyed in the huge Oakland fire two years ago dropped their tools, picked up the hose and attacked the wind-driven flames that shot 30 feet in the air. By the time the Fire Department arrived 11 minutes later, the volunteer firefighters had the blaze under control.

"I don't want to be a victim any more," said Servais, who lost two homes in the 1991 fire and now keeps a fire hose in his truck. "The bottom line is, no matter what kind of Fire Department you have, there are never enough people so

■ ARSON SQUADS

Police, firefighters plan special patrols to deter arsonists. B1

we have to get citizens back involved."

The new activism of volunteers is one sign of the changes that took place in the Oakland and Berkeley hills since California's worst fire killed 25 people and destroyed 2,810 homes.

Oakland, which got poor marks

Please see OAKLAND, A20

for its handling of the fire, has taken such steps as setting up its own weather stations in the hills and buying an infrared scanner so its helicopter can hunt for hidden embers. The city also required flameproof building materials for new construction and modified its fire hydrants so firefighters from other cities can hook up.

With a new tax assessment approved by voters, the city also moved aggressively to clear vegetation in the hills—even bringing in goats to eat brush in inaccessible areas.

"I think the city is much better prepared than it was two years ago," said Oakland Mayor Elihu Harris. "We learned a lot. After the storm, people always get a little complacent. But in this case I think we have maintained our vigilance."

Offering its experience this past week, the city sent officials to Southern California to help fire victims there, in particular by offering guidance on the establishment of one-stop centers to aid victims in rebuilding.

At Oakland's emergency centers, burned-out residents could meet with representatives of the Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, replace a driver's license, stop a newspaper subscription, transfer phone service, find information about lost animals, get mental health counseling and obtain information about insurance reimbursement or home rentals.

Two years later, the centers have evolved into a place where victims can process permits for rebuilding their homes and arrange to hook up their utilities without delays faced by other builders.

When the fire broke out in the Oakland Hills on Oct. 20, 1991, the Oakland Fire Department was unaware of the high fire danger that day and was poorly prepared to deal with a major crisis.

"We were criticized for not being responsive to a red flag alert," said Fire Department spokesman Don Parker. "But we were not in the loop. We didn't even know that the California Department of Forestry had issued a red flag alert. Now we pay more attention to the weather."

Oakland's new municipal weather stations provide immediate readings on temperature, winds, humidity and the moisture content of brush. When the readings indicate a high hazard, the Fire Department begins patrolling danger

areas, and responds with more engines to any reports of fire.

The 1991 conflagration began from a brush fire that firefighters thought they had extinguished the previous day. Now, firefighters are ordered to stay with a blaze when conditions are hazardous and to turn over the soil to make sure the fire is out.

During the huge fire, the region's water supply system was so overloaded that some firefighters ran out of water. Now, the city is buying four trucks with miles of hose that can pump water from San Francisco Bay or a distant water main.

Similarly, the city has purchased a new communications center to replace the radio system that was so overwhelmed that dispatchers could not send fire engines to the proper locations.

Firefighters from other jurisdictions who came to Oakland's aid in 1991 found that the city had a different size hydrant hookup than nearly every city in the state. Oakland is converting all its hydrants to match the equipment of other cities.

Another critique in the wake of the 1991 fire—that help and residents trying to evacuate were hampered by narrow, winding roads—proved more difficult to solve. Although some streets have been widened, most were not. Instead, the city has imposed strict limits on street parking in the hills.

In the aftermath of the Oakland blaze, the state Legislature approved a law requiring fire-resistant roofs in high-fire areas, effective in 1995. Oakland approved even tougher restrictions that took effect immediately, requiring new roofs to meet the strictest standards for fire resistance.

In addition, siding on homes must be able to tolerate high heat for an hour without igniting and attics must be vented so that heat does not collect and cause houses to explode.

"In the Berkeley and Oakland hills there have been five major fires in the last 100 years and each time they would rebuild just like before," said Assemblyman Tom Bates (D-Oakland), who represents the burned area and sponsored the state measure. "Maybe this time the message got through."

One reason the 1991 fire was so disastrous was the vast amount of dry vegetation in the hills. This

year, out of 16,000 properties inspected, about 4,000 were cited for overgrown brush or for not having spark arresters on their chimneys. Property owners who do not correct the problem will find the work done by the city and the cost tacked onto their property tax bills.

In areas where it is difficult for crews to work, the city has contracted with a goat herder whose goats can clear about an acre of brush a day, even eating the poison oak. "They eat anything and everything," said former Oakland City Councilwoman Marge Gibson-Haskell, who lost two homes in the fire.

In another step to help prevent another disaster, fire departments have agreed that engines will disregard city limits when a fire is reported in the hills. When the alarm sounded for the Oakland fire last Wednesday, 11 engines from four jurisdictions converged on the neighborhood.

Recognizing the limits on its emergency services, however, Oakland also has begun training hundreds of volunteers in how to deal with disasters such as fires and earthquakes.

"They can't always wait for the Fire Department," Mayor Harris said. "We're starting a volunteer fire reserve so there will be more people available to help in a disaster."

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

NOV 01 1993

HEFTY DONATIONS AID RED CROSS EFFORT

P. METRO
About \$200,000 in donations has streamed into the Orange County Red Cross since Wednesday's devastating fires.

According to Terry Hartshorn, chairman of the Orange County Red Cross and PacificCare Health Systems, the donations will be used to provide shelter, crisis counseling, food, first aid and long-term recovery assistance.

Among the donors: IBM, BMW and Home Savings of America and FHP.

Also Sunday, state Sen. Art Torres scheduled a workshop today in Laguna Beach to inform insurance policyholders of their rights. The workshop will be at 7 p.m. at Laguna Beach Community Presbyterian Church, Turner Hall classrooms 201 and 202, 415 Forest Ave.

GENERAL ASSISTANCE

► American Red Cross: Family-services center has moved from 515 Forest Ave. to 260 Ocean Ave., Laguna Beach (Wells Fargo Bank Building, third floor).

► Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance: Laguna Beach Disaster Application Center, Laguna Beach Recreation Center, 505 Forest Ave., open weekdays 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturdays 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. until Nov. 5. Information: (800) 462-9029 from 8 a.m.-6 p.m. daily. There is also a number for the hearing-impaired, (800) 462-7585. Operators speak Spanish and other languages.

CHILD CARE

► Orange County Child Care Hot Line: (714) 960-7370.

► All Heart Nanny Service: Free babysitting services at the Newport Beach Marriott Hotel & Tennis Club for all evacuees. Romona Bruce, (714) 433-9433.

ANIMALS

► Animal Assistance League: Taking information regarding lost or found animals. (714) 978-PETS.

► Major Kennels: 9761 W. 11th St., Garden Grove: (714) 531-7473. Will board animals free, up to pony size.

► D and T Sunshine Services: Free animal shelter, (714) 494-9865.

► Hidden Valley Ranch: Boarding of horses. 215 Olinda Drive, Brea. (714) 524-2631.

► Irvine Animal Care Center: Temporary housing for animals and assistance in locating lost pets. 15129 Sand Canyon Road. (714) 724-7740.

► Laguna Beach Animal Shelter: Temporary housing for animals and help finding lost pets. 20612 Laguna Canyon Road. (714) 497-3552.

► Orange County Fairgrounds' Equestrian Center: Claim lost pets at 88 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa. Stray horses, goats, sheep, rabbits, ducks, geese and others have been dropped off there. Information: (714) 708-1655.

► Orange County People for Animals: Coordinating rescue services for animals and listings for boarding services for animals. (714) 751-6272.

► Pet Metro Co.: 17942 Sky Park Circle, Suite J, Irvine. Free pet food, supplies and veterinarian services. (714) 756-5656, Ext. 233.

► Veterinary Centers of America: Free boarding of animals left homeless, except horses. VCA Ana Brook Animal Hospital, 335 N. Brookhurst St., Anaheim. (714) 772-8220.

MEDICAL

► Laguna Beach Community Clinic offers free medical and counseling services. Medical: 460 Ocean Ave., call (714) 494-0761 for appointments. Counseling: 255 Thalia, call (714) 494-9429 for appointments.

► Free back-injury care for south-county fire victims: Chris A. Hawn, D.C. (714) 249-1116. Family Chiropractic of Laguna Niguel, 30001 Town Center Drive, Suite 2, Laguna Niguel.

► Orange County Optometric Association: Free eye exams, plus discounted and free glasses, contacts, contact-cleaning supplies and eye drops. (800) 994-7483.

BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

► Chris Tooker, ARMS, Relocation Management Services for businesses. Consulting advice at no charge for two weeks. (800) 266-2767.

COUNSELING

► Excellence Unlimited, David Aronson, Ph.D., and Sheryl Aronson, Ph.D. 24-hour counseling service to people of all ages. (714) 493-1966.

► Jewish Family Service of Orange County: (714) 939-1111.

► Laguna Beach Community Clinic: Offering counseling at its offices at 255 Thalia St., Suite B, through the weekend to community members, particularly children, about fire issues. Free to Laguna Beach residents. Information: (714) 494-9429.

► Orange County Mental Health Department, Laguna Beach: 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Crisis clinic counseling services. Walk in at 30818 S. Pacific Coast Highway or call (714) 499-1877 (adults), (714) 499-5346 (children).

► South Coast Counseling Group: Free counseling for fire victims. (714) 251-9630 or (714) 520-4894.

► South Coast Medical Center, Laguna Beach: (714) 499-7501.

► West Newport Community pet-loss support group: 8 a.m. First and third Thursday every month. 883 W. 15th St., Newport Beach. (310) 559-3164.

► YMCA: Free counseling to fire victims. Call (714) 442-1000 weekdays.

CLOTHING/SUPPLIES

► Dorothy's on Broadway Thrift Shop: Free clothing, housing supplies and other items to fire victims 355 Broadway, Laguna Beach. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. (714) 494-1911.

► Fashion Island, Newport Beach: Many merchants are offering discounts on shoes, clothing, household items and food. (714) 721-2000

► Home Base: Free shovels, trash cans and work gloves for fire victims. Call American Red Cross, (714) 835-5381.

► Early Parenting Center: Diapers, formula, bottles and other baby supplies. Contact the American Red Cross, (714) 835-5381.

► Laguna Beach volunteer agencies: Food, clothing, shelter, counseling services and other referrals. 7 a.m.-7 p.m. through Nov. 5. (714) 376-9288.

FOOD

► Five Feet restaurant, Laguna Beach: Free food for fire victims with vouchers, available at Red Cross sites. (714) 494-1165.

► Marie Callendar's Restaurant: Pies, baked goods and bottled water to be distributed to Red Cross shelters and emergency-operations stations.

HOUSING

► Arnel Management Corp.: Providing a list of furnished apartments ready for immediate occupancy. Waiving security deposit for fire victims. (714) 434-5100.

► Brook Furniture Rental: Free temporary-housing location service, (714) 645-4772.

► California Apartment Association: Rental referral program. Apartment Association of Orange County, 12822 Garden Grove Blvd., No. D, Garden Grove. (714) 638-5550.

► Community Coalition: Services include housing assistance to child care. Also, referrals for general services such as counseling and legal assistance. (714) 376-9288.

► Cort Furniture Rental: Temporary housing assistance, (800) 537-2849.

► Evans Rents: Free relocating service. Costa Mesa, (714) 650-1855; Tustin, (714) 838-2834.

► Hyatt Hotels in Ventura, Los Angeles and Orange counties are providing reduced room rates to fire victims in need of short- and long-term housing and other aid. The Hyatt Regency Irvine and Hyatt Newporter are among hotels offering reduced rates.

► Irvine Co.: Assisting fire victims with apartment-rental information. Credit checks, security deposits and other pre-rental procedures will be eliminated for fire victims. Call (714) 720-2407.

► Laguna Outreach: Housing, pet care for gays and lesbians. Referrals for general services such as therapy and counseling. Call Kristen Enos, (714) 745-4333.

► Apartment listings: Newport-Mesa Association of Realtors, 401 N. Newport Blvd., Newport Beach; Irvine Association of Realtors, 16267 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine; South Orange County Association of Realtors, 34932 Calle del Sol; Capistrano Beach and Laguna Board of Realtors, 939 Glenneyre St., Laguna Beach.

UFDELTA Mobile homes: The Salvation Army has been offered 60 mobile homes for residents who wish to stay on their property. Mobile homes will be delivered free of charge. Rental rates negotiable. Contact Ian Robinson at (714) 546-7880.

► Oakwood Apartments: Free use of 50 apartments in Newport Beach,

Long Beach and Anaheim for 30 days. Contact Red Cross Service Center for referral. (714) 835-5381.

► Western National Property Management: Fire Victim Assistance Hot Line is (714) 750-RENT, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

► Newport Dunes Resort: Free RV spaces through Thursday. Call (714) 729-DUNE.

► William Lyon Property Management Co.: Offering discounted rents at six of its south-county apartment projects. The company is cutting 5 percent off rents, plus offering month-to-month arrangements. The projects include three communities in The Resorts Apartments, Aliso Viejo; Country Club Villas, Laguna Niguel; The Bluffs at Monarch Beach, Dana Point; and Capistrano Pointe, San Juan Capistrano.

► Zaby's Motor Lodge, Harbor Boulevard and Katella Avenue, Anaheim, and Rip Van Winkle's Inn, 301 W. Katella Ave., Anaheim, are offering reduced rates to fire victims. (800) 995-9093.



BRUCE STRONG/The Orange County Register

WISH LIST: A blackboard outside Laguna Presbyterian Church lists items needed by fire victims, tells victims where to go for help, and tells volunteers where help is needed.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

- Orange County Bar Association Information Helpline: (714) 541-6222, (714) 756-6306.
- Orange County Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service: Waiving attorney-referral fees for victims of the fire. (714) 835-8811.
- Law offices of David, Punelli, Keathley & Willard: Offering free help with claims processing and other legal work. (714) 640-0700.
- Law offices of Paone, Callahan, McHolm & Winton: Offering free help with claims processing and other legal work. (714) 955-2900.

TAXES

- Orange County/Long Beach Chapter of the California CPAs: Providing tax information and assistance to residents who suffered property losses. Laguna Beach Recreation Center, 505 Forest Ave., Laguna Beach. 9 a.m.-7 p.m.
- Disaster Information seminar: Free insurance and tax seminar for fire victims. Chet Hollifield Federal Building, 24000 Avila Road, second floor training room, Laguna Niguel. 6 p.m. today. (714) 643-4060.

LOAN ASSISTANCE

- Orange County Teachers Federal Credit Union: Deferred payments on existing loans. Interest-free loans available for members. (714) 547-4141, Ext. 70.

Please see AID Page 9

► **Samwa Bank:** One- to three-month deferral on existing loans. No fee, low interest on new loans. Contact bank locations in Santa Ana, (714) 285-4570; Newport Beach, (714) 476-7000; and Mission Viejo, (714) 582-5641.

► **Wells Fargo Bank:** Special loan program for fire victims. It includes personal loans to homeowners up to \$25,000 and renters up to \$5,000, at 2.47 percent. If you have a Wells Fargo home loan or credit card, you can defer payments by calling (800) 522-1294 (mortgages) or (800) 642-4720 (credit cards). Small-business owners can get a 90-day insurance bridge loan up to \$100,000 by calling (800) 545-2844.

INSURANCE ASSISTANCE

► **Policyholders' rights workshop,** sponsored by state Sen. Art Torres. 7 p.m. today, Laguna Beach Community Presbyterian Church, Turner Hall classrooms 201 and 202, 415 Forest Ave.

► **Federal Emergency Management Agency:** National tele-registration number, (800) 462-9029.

► **Kinko's Copy Centers:** Offering free fax/copy service to assist fire victims with processing insurance claims. For nearest location, call (800) 743-COPY.

► **State Department of Insurance:** Toll-free hot line: (800) 927-4357

► **Ricoh Co.:** Free videotaping of home fire damage for insurance purposes. Call Kevin Shurtz, (714) 566-3575.

► **The American Institute of Architects, Orange County Chapter:** Will track down original building plans for insurance appraisals. The plans will be supplied free to owners. For information, call the AIA/OC, (714) 557-7796.

► **The Laguna Art Museum,** photographic archive of works by prominent California architects, available for fire survivors. For information, call (714) 494-8971.

MAIL

► **The Letter Box:** Free mailboxes to residential and business fire victims on Ortega Highway. (714) 661-4342.

TELEPHONES

► **GTE and MCI:** Free long-distance calling for fire victims. GTE Building, 295 Broadway, Laguna Beach. (800) 227-5556.

► **PacTel Paging:** Free paging service. Includes use of a PacTel pager for up to 90 days and express voice mail. Information: (800) 807-2437.

► **Pacific Bell:** Free voice-mail and call-forwarding services to victims who have lost telephone service. Voice-mail orders: Residence customers, (800) 273-7000, Ext. 345; business customers, (800) 540-8020. Call-forwarding orders: Residence customers, (800) 491-2355; business customers, (800) 300-2355.

SENIORS

► **Alzheimer's Association, Orange County chapter:** Coordinating offers from licensed facilities to provide free short-term care for Alzheimer's patients affected by the fires, (714) 283-1111.

► **United States Eldercare Referral Agency:** Temporary lodging. Call Robert Rosenberg, (800) 848-1008.

► **South County Senior Services,** (714) 498-0400.

STORAGE

► **All Aboard Mini Storage in Anaheim and San Gabriel:** Free storage space through Dec. 31. Information: (714) 563-0331 (Anaheim) or (818) 289-6964 (San Gabriel).

MISCELLANEOUS

► **Southern California Gas Co.** is waiving bills for customers whose residences were destroyed. (800) 427-2200.

► **Bank of California** is considering payment deferrals for up to four months on home mortgages, unsecured installment loans and commercial lines of credit.

► **30 Minute Photos, Etc.:** Free reproduction of photos damaged by fire or water. 92 Corporate Park Plaza, Irvine. (714) 474-3942.

► **D and T Sunshine Services:** Local transportation for people whose cars were destroyed, (714) 494-9865.

► **Integrated Waste Management Board Consumer Hot Line:** List of approved landfill or recycling centers to dispose of fire debris. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday. (800) 553-2962.

► **Orange County Environmental Health Division:** Questions regarding food safety, (714) 667-3600. Questions regarding proper handling and disposal of hazardous chemicals, (714) 667-3700.

► **Salon Chandon, Brea Mall Embassy Suites Court:** Offering firefighters free haircuts and rehydration treatment for their skin. (714) 990-4200.

DONATIONS

To Red Cross:

► **Irvine Co.,** \$250,000. Also matching employees' contributions, plus collecting donations at the company's 21 shopping centers.

► **United Way of Orange County,** up to \$100,000.

► **Dreyfus Corp.,** \$50,000.

► **FHP International Corp.,** \$25,000. Also matching employees' contributions.

► **Mervyn's,** \$30,000 in-kind donations.

► **IBM,** \$25,000.

► **Home Savings of America,** \$25,000.

► **Auto Trader,** \$20,000.

► **San Diego Gas & Electric,** \$12,500.

► **Kmart,** \$10,000.

► **Allergan Inc.,** \$10,000.

The drawing is Wednesday. (11-3)
850-4752.

and firefighters.

P.6

► Avco Financial, \$10,000.

► Fluor Corp., \$10,000.

Others:

► McDonald's, more than 8,000 meals to firefighters, emergency workers and fire victims.

► Prudential Real Estate Affiliates Inc., selling \$1 raffle tickets for a fund raiser for United Way. Also hosting a live auction and bake sale.

► Western Digital Corp., food for emergency shelters and firefighters and has started a food and clothing drive.

► HomeBase Inc., shovels, trash cans and work gloves to be distributed to fire victims through the Red Cross. Also accepting Red Cross vouchers for the purchase of home-related supplies.

► Taco Bell Corp., food to shelters

► I Corp., 7,000 gallons of diesel fuel and two 4,000-gallon water trucks to help the firefighting efforts.

► Sutro & Co., Newport Beach, collecting food and clothing for fire victims.

► Continental Lawyers Title Co., reducing basic title rates by 50 percent on single-family homes for fire victims.

Compiled by Register staff

5/5

FEMA tries to improve image with quick response to fires

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Federal Emergency Management Agency, frequently criticized as slow and inefficient, is hoping to avoid another public relations catastrophe with a quick response to the Southern California wildfires.

FEMA opened four service centers in hard-hit areas this weekend to take applications for loans and aid.

FEMA Director James Lee Witt acknowledged that the agency had a reputation to overcome. He promised a new spirit of cooperation with local governments and the insurance industry — and prompt delivery of aid checks.

"We are reorganized," Witt said. "We are a new agency."

"People need money right away. They've gone through enough losing their homes," Brooks said as victims of the Altadena fire began filling out forms at the FEMA service center in Arcadia, northeast of Los Angeles.

The agency offers outright grants and low-interest loans to individuals and businesses hit by disasters, as well

as temporary housing money and counseling.

Preliminary damage estimates from the wildfires that roared through Southern California last week were set at \$500 million.

Criticism of FEMA generally follows disasters. Victims of hurricanes Hugo, Andrew and Iniki had little good to say about the agency, and a class-action lawsuit filed by victims of last year's Los Angeles riots accused the agency of illegally denying them benefits.

The agency drew generally favorable reviews for its quick response to last summer's floods in the Midwest.

Firefighters stamped out the few brush fires still burning on Sunday. Calmer, cooler weather allowed weary crews to extinguish or contain most of the fires that ravaged the region for four days.

Thirteen major fires in a 200-mile stretch from Ventura County to the Mexican border torched 167,700 acres, damaged or destroyed 787 buildings (including at least 650 homes) and injured 82.

The National Weather Service said

FEMA ACTION

The fire recovery will mark some FEMA firsts:

■ Insurance industry representatives will staff the service centers to advise people about private insurance and coordinate claims.

■ The agency is promising to deliver checks within seven to 10 days of a claim's approval. FEMA has failed to deliver on this commitment in the past, but Witt said this time would be different.

■ FEMA will write checks to people for some losses covered by private insurance in cases where the insurer cannot pay promptly, agency spokesman Oscar Brooks said. The insurer then can reimburse FEMA.

the Santa Anas — hot desert winds from the East or Northeast — could begin blowing again tonight and Tuesday. The winds are expected to blow at 20 mph to 30 mph with gusts up to 45 mph — milder than the winds that spread the wildfires.

PANIC, FEAR ABATE

► **FEMA promises rapid aid.**

By **MARILYN KALFUS**
The Orange County Register

Laguna Beach residents breathed a collective sigh of relief Saturday as feared Santa Ana winds failed to appear and federal officials set up shop to help reconstruct this fire-scarred city.

"Things now are very normal and very abnormal," said Laguna Beach police Capt. William Cavanaugh. "The panic and fear are over, and we're starting to rebuild. But if you look around the disaster area, it still looks like a bomb went off."

By late Saturday, the Ortega fire still was raging out of control, adding every minute to the more than 20,500 acres of Cleveland National Forest land that it has already consumed. But with help from mild winds and more than 2,000 firefighters, the Coto de Caza mansions that were threatened Thursday were out of the fire's reach.

The dreaded dry Santa Anas aren't expected back until late Monday at the earliest, but even then, they should be much weaker than the 60 mph gusts that propelled last Wednesday's inferno.

Federal officials pegged the damage for all 15 Southern California fires at \$500 million. Of that, \$250 million is expected to be covered by private insurance companies, and the other half will be handled through the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

FEMA Director James Lee Witt promised that applicants wouldn't have to wait longer than 10 days to receive checks. In the meantime, the American Red Cross is dispensing vouchers and grants for food, clothing and shelter.

State Insurance Commissioner John Garamendi promised to make sure insurance companies also make payments quickly: "We don't want any foot-dragging. If it doesn't go smoothly,

we'll hammer them."

Workers from county, state and federal offices turned the Laguna Beach Recreation Center into a bustling, paper-shuffling disaster-assistance headquarters. As of 7 p.m. Saturday, 85 homeowners applied for loans and grants from various agencies assembled by FEMA.

The American Red Cross counted 383 homes — 380 in Laguna Beach — as destroyed or seriously damaged in the fires. They said an additional 329 homes had minor damage. The Orange County Fire Department's figure was substantially lower — 320 Laguna Beach homes destroyed — but it is expected to rise.

President Clinton Saturday pledged assistance, saying, "We'll be there for the follow-up." In a conference call from Washington, D.C., with administration officials dispatched to California and with state disaster officials, Clinton said, "If there's anything else we can do, you just pick up the phone and call."

Roger Johnson, head of the General Services Administration, which supplies the federal government, told Clinton that GSA supplies were coming in from around the country, including trailer loads of fire hoses, sleeping bags and tents.

Johnson's Laguna Beach home survived.

On the third floor of the Wells Fargo Bank, Red Cross workers counseled grief-stricken victims, handed out food and hotel vouchers, passed out prescriptions and served doughnuts, sandwiches and juice.

Initially some disaster victims were reluctant to ask for help.

"Their whole attitude is, 'We're not used to taking charity; we're used to giving it,'" said Betty Jacobson, a Red Cross nurse.

"Everybody's in denial," she said. "We had to pull people away from the rubble who were looking for family treasures."

Also Saturday:

► Investigators looking into the Laguna Beach arson logged about 60 telephone tips, ranging from witnesses who overheard people claiming to be the fire setter to a man who alleged the firestorm was part of a conspiracy by President Clinton and the CIA.

A fire investigator discounted reports that the Laguna Beach fire may be linked to the one in Anaheim Hills and Villa Park, saying there was no evidence to support that assertion. However, he said investigators are reviewing all of the fires in Southern California, looking for similarities.

► Police said looters stole about \$60,000 worth of jewelry and tapestries in one of four incidents as residents fled the firestorm. Burglars also broke into two homes and stole safes as people were evacuating.

► Lookie-loos showed up for the weekend. Traffic slowed and there were at least two fender benders as folks from as close as Newport Beach and as far away

as Salt Lake City descended on the town to see the damage for themselves.

► U.S. Forest Service officials confirmed that the Ortega fire was set by the roadside near the lower San Juan campgrounds. Gov. Pete Wilson walked through the Laguna Beach disaster center Saturday afternoon, stopping to chat with fire victims.

Homeowner Bill Halbert challenged the governor, who had criticized residents Thursday for not clearing the brush by their homes.

"I thought it was a little insensitive," Halbert, 53, an advertising executive, said later. "Many of us did that (cleared brush) and we still lost our homes. It was more luck of the draw than the fault of the owner."

Halbert, garbed in gray sweat pants and a white polo shirt, and his wife, Ginny, 52, who wore morale-boosting bright yellow sunflower earrings, spent 2½ hours shuttling from table to table. They applied for a U.S. Small Business Administration loan to

rebuild the one-story, four-bedroom home on Pitcairn Place they had cherished for 22 years.

"It was our retirement," Ginny Halbert said. "That's what we had counted on."

"I just feel like for the first time in my life, I'm really not impatient," she added, while waiting at a table. "We're all in this so I'm going to have to wait. I don't have anything else to do."

Fire victim Eric Rodig said that while Laguna's image is that of expensive homes, "The reality is a lot of people have lived here a long time. They couldn't purchase their homes today."

"To people living outside, there's a sense that they'll just bounce back," said Rodig, 49, who lived on Skyline Drive. "It's a false illusion."

Register staff writers Gina Shaffer, Edward Iwata, Jeordan Legon and Tony Saavedra contributed to this report.

U.S. Emergency Aid Officials Promise Improved Effort

■ Assistance: New head says federal agency will be much more helpful to fire victims than it was after last year's riots.

By CARLA RIVERA
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Faulted for its performance after recent major disasters, including the Los Angeles riots, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is ready to mount a major "outreach" effort to ensure that Southland fire victims receive all the aid they need to rebuild homes and lives, its director promised Friday.

James Lee Witt, who assumed charge of the federal government's beleaguered disaster agency in April, said FEMA has adopted a new, aggressive approach that will speed delivery of vital services to residents hit hard by devastating wildfires.

"We're not the old FEMA anymore," said Witt, a close friend of President Clinton's who formerly headed the Arkansas Office of Emergency Services. "We're an agency that is proactive instead of reactive; we want to make people understand that they are customers."

Witt, speaking at a news conference at the agency's Pasadena field

office, said four disaster application centers will open in various Southland locations today to accommodate fire victims who want to apply for federal and state assistance.

The locations are: Arcadia Community Regional Park, 405 S. Anita Ave., Arcadia; Laguna Beach Recreation Center, 505 Forrest Ave., Laguna Beach; the Sheriff's Training Facility at Camarillo Airport, 273 E. Pleasant Valley Road, and the French Valley Airport, 37562 Winchester Road, Murieta, in Riverside County.

The centers will open at 1 p.m. today. After that, they will be open daily from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sundays through Fridays and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturdays.

In the past, FEMA has been attacked as a cold bureaucracy that put the burden on citizens to prove that they deserved assistance.

Witt vowed Friday that the agency's efforts will extend beyond merely accepting applications.

For example, representatives of private insurance companies will be on hand at the disaster centers to work directly with fire victims, the first time such an experiment has been tried, said Witt.

The agency will also adopt more of a caseworker approach to ensure that victims are advised of all aid programs for which they might qualify, and so that each case will be sure to be followed up, Witt said.

The agency hopes to be able to dispense relief checks within seven to 10 days of application, Witt said. FEMA routinely promises to act within that time frame, but in past disasters victims have waited weeks and sometimes months for relief checks.

Witt said the agency is attempting to right past practices that placed much of the onus of gathering information and filling out dozens of forms on the often dazed and emotionally racked victims of disaster.

"We're going to be doing everything we can do for the (fire victims), just like we did for the Midwest flood victims," he said.

FEMA received relatively good reviews for its performance following this summer's massive Midwestern floods, opening dozens of disaster centers and responding quickly with aid.

It was the first bit of positive news for the agency in years. As recently as January, FEMA's reputation was at such a low ebb that critics were calling for its abolition.

It was subjected to severe criticism for its laggardly response after Hurricane Hugo, which swept through Southeastern states, and the Loma Prieta earthquake, both in 1989, as well as in the wake of Hurricanes Andrew and Iniki, which devastated South Florida and Hawaii last year.

A congressional oversight com-

mittee branded the agency a "turkey farm" of inexperienced and inept political appointees.

Much of the sharpest criticism of FEMA's relief programs has come from Los Angeles, where 50% to 60% of riot victims were denied disaster aid last year. A class-action lawsuit on behalf of thousands of riot victims, filed against the agency in June, alleged that it had illegally denied them relief.

Witt said he could not comment on the matter since it is still pending.

Cynthia Robbins, directing attorney of Urban Recovery Legal Assistance, one of the public-interest law firms that brought the suit, said she hoped the agency's response to fires would renew attention to the plight of riot victims.

"It's heartening," she said. "I hope it means that this new Administration and FEMA are willing to carefully rethink and review their operation in order to increase efficiency and quickly offer assistance that will speed the recovery of a community blighted by disaster."

Several California officials said they are impressed with Witt and believe he can turn FEMA around.

"California has had problems with FEMA in the past, both after Loma Prieta and the riots," said Democratic U.S. Sen. Diane Feinstein. "But it's a new agency and we should give them a chance."

Criticized aid agency sends help

Fire victims may see centers today

By Joyce Price
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

While firefighters battle wild-fires raging across Southern California, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has initiated plans to set up offices in the area, probably by today, to help those who have lost homes or businesses.

Victims of Hurricane Hugo in September 1989, the San Francisco earthquake a month later and Hurricane Andrew in South Florida in August 1992 might scoff at the news of FEMA's arrival in another major disaster area.

Many of them remember an agency that was slow to respond to their needs. After Hugo devastated much of the South Carolina low country, victims in rural areas waited as long as 10 days for federal disaster centers to open.

"Andrew in South Florida was a prime example of how government can become a disaster victim itself," said FEMA spokesman Marvin Davis, who said the agency was "caught flat-footed by the massive numbers of people who were left homeless" by that hurricane.

After a barrage of complaints about FEMA's response in that emergency, President Bush named a task force headed by Transportation Secretary Andrew Card Jr. to coordinate disaster relief in South Florida.

Coordinating disaster relief is normally FEMA's job.

And the Pentagon sent at least 20,000 soldiers to help distribute relief in that stricken area.

"We don't expect as severe a need" in the aftermath of the California fires as existed after Andrew, Mr. Davis said yesterday.

"The extent of devastation is less. ... The people affected are different [more affluent], and there's not the massive loss of infrastructure as there was in South Florida," he said.

"There was just no place [for displaced people] to stay in South Florida after Andrew. ... That's why we had to put up those tents."

In fact, "we don't expect the immediate needs to be more than agencies such as the Red Cross and the Salvation Army can furnish," the FEMA spokesman said.

Because of the wealth of many of those whose homes were damaged or destroyed by the California fires, Mr. Davis said private insurers may be the first line of response for many victims.

He said federal assistance will be in the form of low-interest (4 percent) loans of up to \$100,000 for residences and \$500,000 for businesses from the Small Business Administration and outright grants from FEMA of up to \$11,900 for those unable to pay back loans.

Because many of the homes destroyed were worth around \$1 million, FEMA's assistance would be inadequate, he said.

"But if someone's insurance didn't cover the full loss, that person would be eligible for additional assistance" from the federal government, Mr. Davis said.

Those left homeless by the fires may be eligible for disaster housing assistance for up to 18 months, he said, adding that those who suffered losses should call 800/462-9029.

Although no one has assessed the losses from the California brush fires, in part because many are still burning, FEMA Director James Lee Witt said there is enough money in the president's disaster fund to take care of the problems, said David Martin, another FEMA spokesman.

Mr. Martin could not say how long California fire victims will have to wait for assistance. He said it will depend on the nature of their situations.

Firestorms ebb, questions flow

Six of 13 Calif. fires tied to arson

By Haya El Nasser
USA TODAY

3A

LOS ANGELES — The smoke is clearing over southern California as firefighters tame one of the worst firestorms ever. But the mystery of who set six of 13 major wild-fires last week remains.

While keeping a wary eye on forecasts for more hot Santa Ana winds that could cause flare-ups, firefighters Sunday began pulling out of six counties where fires left a half-billion-dollar trail of destruction.

Officials hope most of the fires will be completely under control by week's end. Already, the worst fire, in Laguna Beach, is fully contained, and fires that started in Thousand Oaks and Altadena were expected to be contained today.

Arson task forces have stepped up efforts to catch suspects, setting up hot lines and poring over clues.

Investigators have found a device they say was used to start a fire near Chatsworth but would not describe it.

And Los Angeles fire officials said that since Sept. 1, more than 30 letters threatening arson had been sent to law enforcement officials and private citizens.

A local television station reported that several letters — signed "Fedbuster" — were sent by someone seeking revenge on federal agents for seizing his or her assets.

According to the report, one letter said: "They burned me, now I'm going to burn them back. I fight fire with fire. Like my puns, chump? Sizzle. Sizzle. You think the Oakland fire was big? You should see my plans."

Officials say they have no reason yet to believe that the letters are linked to the fires, but the FBI is checking them for fingerprints.

"It's the single hardest crime ... to prove," says Doug Allen, president of the California Conference of Arson Investigators. "You have to prove that nothing else caused this fire."

California Gov. Pete Wilson is offering a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of arsonists.

"I wish I could get my hands on the bastard," Wilson said, while touring devastated areas. "I'd like to strangle him."

Serial arsonists are typically males, ages 16 to 23 — usually loners who suffer from depression but who get uplifted by the idea of causing a lot of commotion, Allen says. That's why many of them are inspired after a big fire breaks out.

Last week, for example, one of the first major fires was started accidentally when a homeless man lit a campfire to keep warm in Altadena.

Within 24 hours, a dozen oth-

er big fires had broken out — half of them suspected to be arson, including Laguna Beach.

While investigators search for clues, the Federal Emergency Management Agency rushed to help victims.

FEMA opened four emergency assistance centers and promised relief checks within 10 days.

Insurance experts estimate

half the losses are uninsured. Officials already are worrying about additional losses that could come if heavy winter rains trigger floods and mudslides on scorched hills.

"The fire is only the tip of the iceberg," says Angeles National Forest Supervisor Michael Rogers. "It may be that the homes we saved may be lost in the floods."

WILDFIRES AT A GLANCE

ACRES BURNED: 167,724

STRUCTURES DAMAGED, DESTROYED: 787 (651 homes)

PEOPLE DISPLACED FROM HOMES: About 25,000

FIREFIGHTERS, CIVILIANS INJURED: 62

PRELIMINARY DAMAGE ESTIMATE: \$500 million

State's 'Heartfelt Thanks' Send Firefighters on Way

LOS ANGELES—Authorities prepared to send home some fire crews yesterday in one of the first signs of victory over Southern California firestorms that caused at least \$500 million in damage.

"It's time for them to go home," said Los Angeles County Fire Chief Ray Blackburn, referring to the hundreds of firefighters from other western states. "They have our heartfelt thanks."

Cooler weather and lack of winds helped 9,000 firefighters tame the fierce blazes that raged for four days and nights, destroying more than 700 buildings and scorching more than 170,000 acres.

The fierce Santa Ana winds that swept westward from the deserts to fan the firestorms that began last Tuesday were not forecast to return until Tuesday or Wednesday. Even then, forecasters said, they would be mere whispers compared to the howling 60 to 70 mph gusts that whipped up the initial flames.

As fire crews savored their victory, homeless families—some with nothing but the clothes on their backs—jammed the four "one-stop" government relief offices set up to process requests for rebuilding loans and temporary housing.

"I'm so numb," said Nancy Goldsworthy, a

45-year-old architect, as she clutched forms in one hand and her 22-month-old daughter in the other. "I think I appear to be a normal person but I'm not. I'm shellshocked."

"We'll apply for whatever loans we can pay back and for whatever grants we can get," she said.

While many of the homeless were wealthy professionals who moved into posh hotels to search for apartments, others—some former servants from now-destroyed mansions—were desperate for help just to get by. "We just want enough to buy food and sleeping bags," one Mexican immigrant said.

Sensitive to severe criticism of the federal government's slow response to last year's riots in Los Angeles and Hurricane Andrew in Florida, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has promised to get out relief checks in seven to 10 days.

OCT 3 1 1993

Raging Blazes Subside

Injury Total Hits 84; Californians Brace For More Searing Winds

Compiled From News Services

LOS ANGELES — Firefighters gained the upper hand Friday on infernos that caused more than \$400 million in damage across Southern California. But crews were racing against time as searing winds were expected to return and whip up the flames again.

Calm, cooler weather helped extinguish four wildfires and contain several others after walls of flame leveled exclusive suburbs, destroyed more than 700 homes and scorched 180,000 acres from Ventura County, north of Los Angeles, to the Mexican border. Still out of control were a 35,000-acre blaze in Ventura County that incinerated 35 homes and a 20,000-acre fire in the Cleveland National Forest.

More than 6,000 firefighters — some from as far away as Oregon — were battling the remaining blazes.

The Santa Ana winds that caused the parched region to ignite like a tinderbox Wednesday were expected to pick up over the weekend, increasing the danger to population centers.

The National Weather Service said that the winds were expected again today but that they would not as strong as the 50 mph winds that whipped wildfires into walls of flame earlier in the week.

"This area burns very aggressively with no winds at all. I'm very worried," U.S. Forest Service officer Tom Harbour said at a fire camp in Altadena, where 118 homes and buildings were destroyed this week. As he spoke, the fire no longer posed a threat to houses but raged out of control in the San Gabriel Mountains overlooking Altadena, 15 miles northeast of Los Angeles.

In Pasadena, Andres Huang, 35, a transient, pleaded innocent to a misdemeanor charge of setting the fire that engulfed parts of Altadena by lighting brush at his hillside camp to

keep warm. He was jailed in lieu of \$25,000 bail; trial was set for Nov. 15.

No deaths were reported, but the injury total climbed to 84, including 67 firefighters.

The fire disaster was California's worst since a blaze killed 25 people, destroyed 3,000 homes and caused \$1.75 billion in damage in Oakland in 1991. Millions of people saw their lives disrupted. Many roads were closed, and huge clouds of acrid smoke blanketed the area.

Refugees filled shelters, some wearing what remained of their possessions.

Clues suggested that at least six of the 15 major fires were the work of arsonists, including one that raged through the seaside artists' colony of Laguna Beach, destroying more than 300 homes and forcing 24,000 people to evacuate.

After touring devastated neighborhoods in Laguna Beach, Gov. Pete Wilson offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of "the sick animal who did this thing."

On Friday, detectives found an "incendiary device" that started an 1,800-acre blaze in Ventura County that injured four firefighters, two

critically.

Damage in Orange County — the hardest-hit area — was estimated at between \$300 million and \$400 million, said county Administrative Officer Ernie Schneider. The loss from one Los Angeles County fire was put at \$60 million, and the firefighting effort was expected to cost millions more. The Laguna Beach fire was declared fully contained late Thursday. On Friday, authorities allowed residents to return to their homes.

Mary Sinclair, a British-born resident, likened the scene of devastation to what she saw during the Nazi blitz of London in World War II.

"This is how it was when the bombs went off and none of the houses were left standing," she said as she and her husband surveyed the ruins of their four-bedroom home.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency planned to open aid-application centers by today in all five counties declared federal disaster areas. James Lee Witt, director of the agency, toured fire zones by helicopter.

In Washington, Thomas F. McLarty III, the White House chief of staff, said the agency, already taxed by floods in the Midwest, would not require more money because private insurance will play a large role in covering damage.

Firefighters gain ground in blazes

By JEFF BARNARD
Associated Press

1A

Firefighters made big gains against Southern California's devastating wildfires Saturday, as the powerful Santa Ana winds failed to return as feared and a blanket of humidity smothered the region.

Brushfires that swept more than 162,000 acres and burned some 750 structures, most of them homes, remained entrenched in heavily overgrown areas. Thousands of firefighters gained ground in surrounding the fires.

"It's up to Mother Nature. If it stays like this we should be in good shape," said Los Angeles Fire Department Battalion Chief Terry Manning.

The 16,680-acre Laguna blaze, which damaged or destroyed 366 Orange County homes, was totally contained. Containment increased to 55% at the 5,700-acre Altadena fire, where 118 homes burned and 17 were damaged. And firefighters contained 90% of the 37,600-acre Green Meadow blaze that destroyed 43 homes in Ventura County.

"I have just been terribly impressed with the work of the people out there fighting the fires," President Clinton said in Washington.

Losses from more than a dozen blazes arrayed in a

Please see Blazes/page 12A



Associated Press

Time for tears: Mark and JoAnna Konno break down as they arrive at their Laguna Beach home.

200-mile arc from Ventura County southeast to the Mexican border totaled \$500 million and were growing, said director James Lee Witt of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Disaster aid application centers were established in Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and Riverside counties. Fire victims in San Diego and San Bernardino counties could apply for government help by telephone.

"We'll do whatever is necessary ... so these people can get their lives back together," U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy told Clinton in a call from Altadena, in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains.

The hunt intensified Saturday for the arsonists who authorities believe set at last six of 13 major blazes.

In Los Angeles, the FBI was investigating more than 30 threatening letters mailed to police, fire stations and San Fernando Valley residents since Sept. 1, said fire department spokesman Brian Humphrey.

The letters describe a fascination with fire and threaten to ignite blazes. Humphrey said there was no reason to believe the letters were connected to the fires that were set.

KCBS-TV reported that a man calling himself Fedbuster had sent 15 letters threatening to set fires in revenge against "government people that screwed me bad."

"They burned me, now I'm going to burn them back," the letters reportedly read. "I fight fire with fire. Like my puns, chump? Sizzle. Sizzle. You think the Oakland fire was big? You should see my plans.

"I will wait for a hot windy fall day in the brush. Yeah, fire, I'm fascinated with fire."

As homeowners surveyed the ruins, there was a growing consensus that the destruction need not have been so widespread.

More than 7 million Californians now live in what fire experts call the "wildland-urban interface," the no-man's land of sprawl across the hillocks, mountains and valleys ringing Los Angeles and other major cities.

These are the areas that burned last week — increasingly populated enclaves where water, sewerage and other basic services are stretched thin and where narrow, winding mountain roads make emergency relief difficult.

Given water outages at critical times, disputes between local government agencies, lax fire codes for existing structures and many residents' blithe obliviousness to fire hazards, fire experts warned that even greater dangers may lie ahead.

"These are the fires of the future," said California Assistant Fire Marshal Dave Walizer. "There are more people living out there to get away from the cities than ever before. So you're going to have more people and more structures at risk than ever before."

In Sierra Madre, below the eastern flank of the San Gabriel Mountains blaze, people who escaped harm began to return to their normal routines.

"If you live here there's earthquakes and fires. Someplace else it's floods and tornadoes. It's just a part of life," said Rick Reed as 11-year-old son Ricky played a winter league baseball game.

Nancy Anderson looked over the ruins of her foothill home in Pasadena Glen and found hope. "It used to be so beautiful," she said. "It will be again."

Fire-squelching humidity increased to levels ranging from 70% to 97% early Saturday as the moist and cooling influence of the Pacific Ocean dominated Southern California's weather.

The hot, dry winds called Santa Anas that leached moisture from vegetation and whipped sparks into wildfires earlier in the week were predicted to rise out of the desert interior again Friday night. But they failed to materialize.

With the weather's help, a 20,700-acre fire that burned five homes in San Diego County also was brought under 90% containment. "The humidity was high and there was no wind and they really got a good handle on it," said Audrey Hagen, a state forestry

department spokeswoman.

□□□

The Chicago Tribune and The New York Times contributed to this article.

Southern California wildfires

- Area burned: 162,780 acres
- Structures: 746 damaged or destroyed, mostly houses
- Estimated damage: \$500 million

DETROIT NEWS & FREE PRESS

OCT 31 1993

Cool weather helps to contain California fires

DETROIT NEWS WIRE SERVICES

Firefighters, enjoying a reprieve from the searing winds that ignited southern California like a tinderbox, launched an all-out assault Saturday that brought the \$500-million firestorm largely under control.

The fierce Santa Ana winds that were expected to whip up the flames again this weekend never materialized, giving 9,000 weary firefighters a chance to tame hellish wildfires that cut a swath of destruction from Los Angeles to the Mexican border. The fires burned 84 buildings, 51 of them homes, as they swept over 167,722 acres.

In cool, humid weather, firefighters extinguished four major blazes and contained a half-dozen others.

But state and local authorities warned that the danger was not yet over. More dry desert winds are forecast for Monday night.

As dazed residents returned to find dream homes gone, crews continued battling at least five major blazes confined to remote areas near Malibu and north and south of Los Angeles.

Helicopters and tanker planes dropped tons of water and flame retardants. On the ground, firefighters used bulldozers to dig trenches to encircle the flames.

As the threat diminished, President Clinton promised victims Saturday the government would "make sure we don't forget them when the fire's gone."

James Lee Witt, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, gave Clinton "a rough estimate of about \$500 million in damages, which probably will rise," with only half the losses insured.

Homeless families crowded into four newly opened relief offices Saturday, where state and federal agencies processed requests for rebuilding loans and temporary housing.

Southern California Firefighters Hustle To Beat Resurgence of Santa Ana Winds

Clinton Praises Efforts; Damage Estimate at \$500 Million and Climbing

Reuter

LOS ANGELES, Oct. 30—Firefighters got a reprieve from the searing winds that ignited Southern California like a tinderbox and today launched an all-out assault to snuff out infernos that have caused \$500 million in damage.

The fierce Santa Ana winds that had been forecast to again fan the flames this weekend are now predicted to arrive Monday night, giving weary crews a chance to tame hellish fires that cut a swath of destruction from Los Angeles to Mexico.

Calmer, cooler weather has helped firefighters extinguish four of 18 major blazes and contain several others after walls of flame leveled exclusive neighborhoods, destroyed more than 700 buildings and scorched more than 160,000 acres.

State and local authorities said they were gaining control over a wide-ranging firestorm that has ravaged the region for three days, but they cautioned that the danger was far from over.

As dazed, tearful residents returned to find dream homes reduced to smoking rubble, an army of 6,000 firefighters launched assaults on a half-dozen fires that continued to burn in the hills near Malibu and north and south of Los Angeles.

From the air, helicopters and tanker planes dropped tons of water and flame retardants. On the ground, firefighters—including hundreds of prison inmates pressed into service—used shovels and bulldozers to dig trenches to encircle the flames.

President Clinton, who has declared disaster areas in five counties, praised the firefighting effort today and promised victims to "make sure we don't forget them when the fire's gone."

James Lee Witt, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, told Clinton in a conference call that authorities have "a rough estimate of about \$500 million in damages, which probably will rise." Only half of the losses are covered by insurance, he said.

Homeless families crowded into newly opened relief offices, where

state and federal agencies processed requests for rebuilding loans, temporary housing and unemployment assistance.

No deaths were reported in what has become one of California's worst fire disasters this century. But the injury total climbed to 84, including 67 firefighters.

The first reports of looting surfaced, with police saying \$60,000 worth of jewelry and tapestries were stolen from a Laguna Beach house during Wednesday's evacuation while safes were stolen from two others. But authorities said there was no reason to suspect anything more widespread.

Clues suggested that at least six of the major fires were the work of arsonists, including the worst one that destroyed more than 300 Laguna Beach houses.

FBI agents were studying more than 30 letters mailed to police and fire stations since September by a man threatening to set huge blazes in Southern California. Los Angeles Fire Department spokesman Brian Humphrey said there was no evidence linking the letters to the firestorm, but he said the investigation was continuing.

California Gov. Pete Wilson (R), after touring devastated Laguna Beach neighborhoods, offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of "the sick animal who did this thing."

"I just hope they catch the guy who set this fire, catch him and kill him," said Steve Foulger, a retired Marine, as he sifted through the ashes of his three-bedroom home.

Foulger said his wife, who could only save a few family pictures when she fled Wednesday, was too heartbroken to return.

Hollywood has greeted the firestorm raging at its doorstep the way it deals with most major disasters—by making a movie out of it. When brush fires spread to the hills north of Los Angeles on Wednesday, a crew shooting the low-budget Western "Cheyenne Warrior" decided it was the perfect chance to film the wagon train fire they needed before fleeing the area.

Residents and firefighters alike breathed a sigh of relief when the National Weather Service lifted a Santa Ana wind advisory early today.

Fire crews had been literally racing against time to get the remaining blazes under control before the fierce winds came blowing in from the desert.

The next threat of strong Santa Ana winds will not be until Monday night or Tuesday, forecasters said. Even then, they were expected to be far weaker than the 60 mph gusts that created Wednesday's firestorms.

It was California's worst fire disaster since the 1991 Oakland Hills conflagration, which killed 25 people, destroyed 3,000 homes and caused \$1.75 billion in damage.

Weather aids firefighters in California

POST NEWS SERVICES

PAB

Firefighters made big gains against Southern California's devastating wildfires Saturday as a feared return of powerful Santa Ana winds failed to materialize and a smothering blanket of humidity fell on the region.

**QUOTE
CONTEST
#4**

Brushfires that swept over 167,722 acres and burned 750 homes and other buildings remained entrenched in heavily overgrown areas. Thousands of firefighters gained ground in surrounding the fires.

The 16,680-acre Laguna blaze, which damaged or destroyed 366 Orange County homes, was completely contained. Containment increased to 60 percent at the 5,700-acre Altadena fire, where 118 homes burned and 17 were damaged.

Firefighters dropped the containment figure from 90 percent to 75 percent Saturday night in the 39,000-acre Green Meadow blaze that destroyed 21 houses, seven mobile homes and 30 other structures in Ventura County.

Losses from more than a dozen blazes arrayed in a 200-mile arc from Ventura County southeast to the Mexican border totaled \$500 million and were growing.



Associated Press

Laguna Beach, Calif., resident Eric Jensen is interviewed by FEMA representative Carol Lambert after his home burned.

said Federal Emergency Management Agency Director James Lee Witt.

One Laguna Beach resident reported losses of a more sinister kind: \$63,000 worth of goods, including a 17th-century tapestry and a \$20,000 man's ring, were stolen from a home after the family evacuated, said police Capt. William Cavanaugh.

FEMA opened aid application centers in Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and Riverside counties. For the first time, insurance industry representatives will be available at such centers.

Fire-squelching humidity in-

creased to levels ranging from 70 to 97 percent early Saturday as the moist and cooling influence of the Pacific Ocean dominated Southern California's weather.

In Los Angeles, the FBI was investigating more than 30 threatening letters mailed to police, fire stations and San Fernando Valley residents since Sept. 1, said Fire Department spokesman Brian Humphrey.

The letters describe a fascination with fire and threaten to ignite blazes. Humphrey said there was no reason to believe the letters were connected to the fires that were set.

DATE: OCT-31-93

Battered Southland Breathes a Sigh of Relief as Wildfires Ebb

■ **Blazes:** Many emergency workers pack up and head home. Homeowners take stock of the damage and consider whether to rebuild.

By DIANNE KLEIN
and ANDREA FORD
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

Al

Nature handed fire-scarred Southern California a break Saturday, corralling dreaded Santa Ana winds and allowing firefighters to contain the ravenous brush fires that have seared their way through the region's landscape and collective psyche.

By late Saturday, fires were still burning in five uninhabited areas but their pace had slowed. Officials were finally talking about an end in sight to the blazes that began early last week and reached their destructive peak Wednesday.

The officials also said they expected to be ready to battle any flare-ups if the dry, blustery winds return as forecast for early this week.

The region, battered by the flames and agony left in their wake, seemed to exhale deeply with relief. Children looked forward to treats on Halloween. Volleyball games resumed on the shores of Laguna Beach, the community hardest hit by the fires. Firefighters who had rushed to Southern California from other parts of the state and country packed up their equipment and were heading home. And four federal emergency assistance centers opened their doors to homeowners who were beginning the arduous process of rebuilding and carrying on.

"If there's anything else we can do, pick up the phone and call," President Clinton told state and federal officials in a conference call Saturday from the Oval Office. "We'll be there for the follow-up."

On the scene in Laguna Beach, Republican Gov. Pete Wilson and one of the Democrats who wants to run against him next year, Insurance Commissioner John Garimendi, separately promised great cooperation in approving fire-related insurance claims.

Wilson, on his second visit to Laguna Beach in three days, said

he had met with insurance industry representatives and that many checks had already gone out.

Garamendi, trekking with his son through the charred sections of Laguna's Mystic Hills neighborhood, said: "We have the toughest insurance regulations in the state and if they don't work I'll have them rewritten."

With all of the 14 major fires that had ravaged the region either extinguished or largely under containment, officials totaled losses, and the news was grim.

Capt. John Bryden of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said more than 167,500 acres in six counties were burned, and at least 731 homes and

Please see FIRES, A5

other buildings were destroyed or damaged. Nobody was killed, but up to 81 people were hurt.

Some loss was of the more prosaic, yet disturbing, sort. In Laguna Beach, looters stole more than \$60,000 worth of jewelry and personal property, including a rare 17th-Century tapestry, from fire victims who had to be evacuated, the city's police reported.

Other fire-related damage was more intangible, but no less real.

Irene Cox, returning to her Sierra Madre home for the first time since flames forced her out Wednesday, was having second thoughts about sticking it out yet again. She has lived in her neighborhood for 23 years.

"I'm still getting organized from the earthquake," she said, referring to the tremor that rattled her community in June, 1991. "I just told my sister, 'I think God is trying to tell me something, between the earthquake and this fire.' I'm too old for this."

Cox, 58, said that only minutes before she and her neighbors were forced to flee last week they gathered in her home, joined hands in a circle and prayed. "We prayed for protection," she said.

Throughout the Southland, people moved on. There was much to be done. In the Kingleo district above Pasadena, residents held "parties" to clear rubble and sift through the ash. Some homeowners hired laborers to do the work.

A veterinarian and 20 Los Angeles County animal control workers combed the nearby hills and streets in search of lost pets and stranded wildlife, the first such operation since the fires began.

But Frank Andrews, director of the county's animal care and control operations, said workers were surprised that so few animals appeared to need their help. The operation's tally so far: two cats who were reunited with their owners, and two dogs who were taken to the Baldwin Park animal shelter.

And in Laguna Beach, as the first post-fire volleyball game picked up steam on Main Beach, Joseph Blanda married Caren Jansen in the sunny courtyard of the Hotel Laguna. The priest compared their union to the grass that will one day sprout from the nearby blackened hills.

The fire spared downtown Laguna Beach, but it consumed the conversation. Reminders were everywhere—from the musky scent of lingering smoke to the "Discounts for Fire Victims" sign at the Hobie Sports store.

On Sierra Madre's Alegria Avenue, the site of the neighborhood's annual Halloween block party, preparations were well under way to carry on with the show. Bud Switzer, 65, was on his second day of pumpkin carving so that he and his son, Kevin, could keep up the family tradition of setting out rows of elaborately decorated jack-o-lanterns along the street.

"These fires are very scary," Switzer said, "but the Fire Department has always handled them and we've learned to live with this. Now it's business as usual."

Ann Palmer, a mother of two who lives in the section of Sierra Madre that had been most threatened by the fires, was busy unpacking belongings and settling back into her home. But outside the house stood buckets and two large trash cans next to the hose, just in case the inferno rises again.

Palmer, though, has no plans to bail out. "If I have to live in L.A., it's going to be here, thank you," she said.

At Pasadena's Oak Grove Park, the command center for the Altadena fire, red, yellow and white fire engines lined the streets ready for the trips back to their home bases.

Firefighters, many just awakened from a few hours sleep in small domed tents that filled the park, swapped T-shirts bearing their department logos. One especially popular one was emblazoned, "Firestorm 93" in bright script that resembled flames.

Los Angeles County Deputy Fire Chief Larry Miller, who commanded the fight against the Altadena fire, said: "The fire is extremely stable. As far as structural threat, there is none right now. We have spent since Thursday mopping up around the houses. L.A. County is going back to routine operations."

Earlier in the day, Miller had apologized to his fellow firefighters for the mistaken weather reports that had predicted strong Santa Ana winds that were sure to whip up flames. Preparing for those winds, firefighters had run several thousand feet of fire hose into the hills above Sierra Madre overnight.

But they never had to turn the water on.

James McCutcheon, a meteorologist with WeatherData Inc., which provides weather information to The Times, said the only winds blowing in Southern California on Saturday afternoon were sea breezes along the coast, and some gusts of up to 28 m.p.h. in desert areas.

He said the Santa Anas could develop again Tuesday or Wednesday, but fire officials said they were confident that by then the danger of new fires will have passed. By late Saturday, there was a feeling among many firefighting crews that a chapter had been closed. And they were very glad for that.

An exhausted Robert Reysden, a firefighter from Monterrey Park who had fought the flames since Wednesday, said, "I haven't seen a bed for days. I've been trying to sleep on the top of the engine."

But tempering the weary exhilaration was a feeling of awe, and fearful respect, for the terror that nature can unleash. Firestorm '93 was different, worse than anything most firefighters and residents had ever seen.

"You felt helpless," said Glendora firefighter Jerry Thompson, whose Los Angeles County fire crew was dispatched to the Kinne-loa district near Pasadena on Wednesday. "Everyone's dream was going up in flames and there was nothing you could do. I've never seen anything like it."

Thousand Oaks firefighter Roger Simms, a member of the first team that responded to the blaze there, said: "There's not much you can do about fires like this. You've got to just see where they're going and try to protect what's in their way."

Meanwhile, investigators throughout Southern California kept up their hunt for arsonists believed to be responsible for at least five of last week's blazes.

"We've sucked in all of the arson kings from Southern California, and we're interfacing with everybody who has resources that can help us," Ventura County Fire Chief George Lund said.

Officials in Ventura County said they expected the state's largest fire, the 39,000-acre Thousand Oaks/Malibu fire, to be completely contained by Tuesday thanks to 1,400 firefighters and 600 support personnel.

At the command center, which only a day earlier had resembled a harried battle station, firefighters were winding down Saturday, swapping war stories as they shucked off their sooty yellow protective gear. Others lined up at a bank of free telephones to call home. Those who are parents

promised their children that they would try to make it home for Halloween.

Some of those dispatched to do battle with the flames were assigned other tasks, causing at least some chagrin.

"I'd like a chance to do something, you know?" said Mike Rubio, 33, a firefighter from Sonoma County. "At least then I could say I saved a structure."

Instead, Rubio and 17 other crew members have been spending time at local fire stations—Rubio wasn't sure exactly where—in Los Angeles County.

"This one woman brought 15 pumpkin pies," Rubio said, shaking his head in amazement. "I feel guilty. All I've done is eat and

sleep."

Local fire crews, however, have had their fill. With a four-day growth of whiskers and a face battered by the sun, Camarillo firefighter Howard Johnston slumped against his rig, cheered by the prospect of getting out.

"Now that it's almost over, I'm realizing that when you're over 50 you might be too old for this kind of stuff," said Johnston, 53.

Johnston had followed the flames from the brush off the 16th green of Los Robles Golf Course across the rugged Santa Monica Mountains to the Malibu coast.

Exhaustion was written on the faces of fire victims who began streaming into Federal Emergency Management Agency relief centers

In Arcadia, Laguna Beach, Camarillo and Murietta in Riverside County to start the long process of rebuilding.

Workers from state and federal agencies were available to process applications for temporary housing, disaster unemployment insurance, mortgage and rental assistance, and low-interest loans for rebuilding homes and businesses.

At the Arcadia Community Regional Park center, Pasadena real estate broker Jaime Suarez, 48, said that although his \$500,000 home was insured, his policy will not cover the total loss of his fire-gutted home.

Suarez was disgruntled. "For people who are very poor, grants are available, but for the middle class, the ones who pay taxes, when it comes down to it and you need help from the system, it's not there," he said.

Tom Soulanille, a 34-year-old engineer whose Pasadena Glen home was destroyed, had a differ-

ent outlook. He was already mulling about architects and floor plans and just what he would rebuild.

"Right now the best thing to do is nothing until after the winter and what I'm sure will be flooding," he said. "I want to go back next fall. I may put a trailer up there. We're subject to nature up there. It's one thing that binds the neighbors together."

Earlier in the day, Wilson and FEMA Director James Lee Witt met in Downtown Los Angeles with representatives of 12 insurance firms to devise ways to ease relief efforts.

Wilson noted that he had recently approved legislation that requires insurers to contact policyholders and begin investigations into claims within 15 days. The regulations stemmed from complaints lodged against the insurance industry after the 1991 Oakland Hills fires.

California crews tame infernos

Mother Nature helping

Republic Wire Services

LOS ANGELES — Firefighters, enjoying a reprieve from the searing winds that ignited southern California like a tinderbox, launched an all-out assault Saturday that brought the \$500 million firestorm largely under control.

The firefighters were aided in their attack by a smothering blanket of humidity that fell on the region.

Brush fires that swept over 167,722 acres and burned about 750 homes and other buildings remained entrenched in heavily overgrown areas. Thousands of firefighters gained ground in surrounding the fires.

"It's up to Mother Nature. If it stays like this, we should be in good shape," Battalion Chief Terry Manning said.

The 16,680-acre Laguna blaze, which damaged or destroyed 366 Orange County homes, was completely contained, meaning a line of bare earth had been cut around the fire. Containment increased to 60 percent at the 5,700-acre "Altadena" fire, where 118 homes burned and 17 were damaged.

Firefighters dropped the containment figure to 75 percent from 90 percent Saturday night in the 39,000-acre Green Meadow blaze that destroyed 21 houses, seven

WILSON: Lessons from the fires, A2
ARIZONA: Could major blazes happen here? A10

— See FIRE, page A10

— FIRE, from page A1

mobile homes and 30 other structures in Ventura County.

"I have just been terribly impressed with the work of the people out there fighting the fires," President Clinton said in Washington.

Losses from more than a dozen

blazes arrayed in a 200-mile arc from Ventura County southeast to the Mexican border totaled \$500 million and were growing, said James Lee Witt, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The estimate was "very preliminary" and certain to rise, said Richard Andrews, director of the state Office of Emergency Services. He said industry experts estimated half of the losses were uninsured.

One Laguna Beach resident reported losses of a more sinister kind: \$63,000 worth of goods, including a 17th-century tapestry and a \$20,000 man's ring, were stolen from a home after the family evacuated, police Capt. William Cavanaugh said. And in a burned-out Laguna Beach home, someone tried unsuccessfully to break into a charred safe, Cavanaugh said.

The federal emergency agency, often criticized as slow to respond, opened aid-application centers in Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and Riverside counties. For the first time, insurance-industry representatives will

be available at such centers. Victims in San Diego and San Bernardino could apply for aid by telephone.

Nancy Anderson looked over the ruins of her home in Altadena and was hopeful.

"It used to be so beautiful," she said. "It will be again."

For others, life resumed a normal pace, with seniors lawn-bowling outside an emergency-agency center and youths playing baseball in Sierra Madre below the eastern flank of the "San Gabriel Mountains" blaze.

Fire-squelching humidity increased to levels ranging from 70 to 97 percent early Saturday as the moist and cooling influence of the Pacific Ocean dominated the weather.

The hot, dry winds called Santa Anas, which leached moisture from vegetation and whipped sparks into firestorms earlier in the week, were predicted to rise out of the desert interior again Friday night, but failed to materialize.

A high-pressure system over the Nevada-Utah area was too far east and was weakening, said James Ray, a National Weather Service forecaster.

A 20,700-acre fire that burned five homes in San Diego County also was brought to 90 percent containment with the weather's help.

"The humidity was high and there was no wind, and they really got a good handle on it," said Audrey

Hagen, a state Forestry Department spokeswoman.

On Saturday, travelers found thick fog in Laguna Canyon, where a suspected arson-caused blaze began Wednesday and was hurled down on Laguna Beach homes in a matter of minutes by a powerful Santa Ana.

The Altadena blaze was started by a homeless man's campfire, authorities said, but they believe at least six fires were arson-caused. On Friday, investigators found an incendiary device that started an 1,800-acre Ventura County fire that injured four firefighters.

In Los Angeles, the FBI was investigating more than 30 threatening letters mailed to police, fire stations and San Fernando Valley residents since Sept. 1, Fire Department spokesman Brian Humphrey said. The letters describe a fascination with fire and threaten to ignite blazes. Humphrey said there was no reason to believe the letters were connected to the fires that were set.

Compiled from reports by *The Associated Press* and *Reuters*.

WHERE TO FIND HELP

P. METRO 7

GENERAL ASSISTANCE

► American Red Cross: Family-services center has moved from 515 Forest Ave. to 260 Ocean Ave., Laguna Beach (Wells Fargo Bank Building, third floor).

► Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance: Laguna Beach Disaster Application Center, Laguna Beach Recreation Center, 505 Forest Ave., open weekdays 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturdays 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. until Nov. 5. Information: (800) 462-9029 from 8 a.m.-6 p.m. daily. There is also a number for the hearing-impaired, (800) 462-7585. Operators speak Spanish and other languages.

CHILD CARE

► Orange County Child Care Hot Line: (714) 960-7370.

► All Heart Nanny Service: Free babysitting services at the Newport Beach Marriot Hotel & Tennis Club for all evacuees. Romona Bruce, (714) 433-9433.

ANIMALS

► Animal Assistance League: Taking information regarding lost or found animals. (714) 978-PETS.

► B-Major Kennels: 9761 W. 11th St., Garden Grove: (714) 531-7473. Will board animals free, up to pony size.

► D and T Sunshine Services: Free animal shelter. (714) 494-9865.

► Hidden Valley Ranch: Boarding of horses. 215 Olinda Drive, Brea. (714) 524-2631.

► Irvine Animal Care Center: Temporary housing for animals and assistance in locating lost pets. 15129 Sand Canyon Road. (714) 724-7740.

► Laguna Beach Animal Shelter: Temporary housing for animals and help finding lost pets. 20612 Laguna Canyon Road. (714) 497-3552.

► Orange County Fairgrounds' Equestrian Center: Claim lost pets at 88 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa. Stray horses, goats, sheep, rabbits, ducks, geese and others have been dropped off there. Information: (714) 708-1655.

► Orange County People for Animals: Coordinating rescue services for animals and listings for boarding services for animals. (714) 642-1474.

► Pet Metro Co.: 17942 Sky Park Circle, Suite J, Irvine. Free pet food, supplies and veterinarian services. (714) 756-5656, Ext. 233.

► Veterinary Centers of America: Free boarding of animals left homeless, except horses. VCA Ana Brook Animal Hospital, 335 N. Brookhurst St., Anaheim. (714) 772-8220.

MEDICAL

► Free back-injury care for south county fire victims: Chris A. Hawn, D.C. (714) 249-1116. Family Chiropractic of Laguna Niguel, 30001 Town Center Drive, Suite 2, Laguna Niguel.

► Orange County Optometric Association: Free eye exams, plus discounted and free glasses, contacts, contact-cleaning supplies and eye drops. (800) 994-7483.

BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

► Chris Tooker, ARMS, Relocation Management Services for businesses. Consulting advice at no charge for two weeks. (800) 266-2767.

COUNSELING

► Excellence Unlimited, David Aronson, Ph.D., and Sheryl Aronson, Ph.D. 24-hour counseling service to people of all ages. (714) 493-1966.

► Jewish Family Service of Orange County: (714) 939-1111.

► Laguna Beach Community Clinic: Offering counseling at its offices at 255 Thalia St., Suite B, through the weekend to community members, particularly children, about fire issues. Free to Laguna Beach residents. Information: (714) 494-9429.

► Orange County Mental Health Department, Laguna Beach: 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Crisis clinic counseling services. Walk in at 30818 S. Pacific Coast Highway or call (714) 499-1877 (adults), (714) 499-5346 (children).

► South Coast Counseling Group: Free counseling for fire victims. (714) 251-9630 or (714) 520-4894.

► South Coast Medical Center, Laguna Beach: (714) 499-7501.

► West Newport Community pet-loss support group: 8 a.m. First and third Thursday every month. 883 W. 15th St., Newport Beach. (310) 559-3164.

► YMCA: Free counseling to fire victims. Call (714) 442-1000 weekdays.

CLOTHING/SUPPLIES

► Dorothy's on Broadway Thrift Shop: Free clothing, housing supplies and other items to fire victims. 355 Broadway, Laguna Beach. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. (714) 494-1911.

► Fashion Island, Newport Beach: Many merchants are offering discounts on shoes, clothing, household items and food. (714) 721-2000.

► Home Base: Free shovels, trash cans and work gloves for fire victims. Call American Red Cross, (714) 835-5381.

► Early Parenting Center: Diapers, formula, bottles and other baby supplies. Contact the American Red Cross, (714) 835-5381.

► Laguna Beach volunteer agencies: Food, clothing, shelter, counseling services and other referrals. 7 a.m.-7 p.m. through Nov. 5. (714) 376-9288.

FOOD

► Five Feet restaurant, Laguna Beach: Free food for fire victims with vouchers, available at Red Cross sites. (714) 494-1165.

► Marie Callendar's Restaurant: Pies, baked goods and bottled water to be distributed to Red Cross shelters and emergency-operations stations.

HOUSING

► Arnel Management Corp: Providing a list of furnished apartments ready for immediate occupancy. Waiving security deposit for fire victims. (714) 434-5100.

► Brook Furniture Rental: Free temporary-housing location service, (714) 645-4772.

► California Apartment Association: Rental referral program. Apartment Association of Orange County, 12822 Garden Grove Blvd., No. D, Garden Grove. (714) 638-5550.

► Community Coalition: Services include housing assistance to child care. Also, referrals for general services such as counseling and legal assistance. (714) 376-9288.

► Cort Furniture Rental: Temporary housing assistance, (800) 537-2849.

► Evans Rents: Free relocating service. Costa Mesa, (714) 650-1855; Tustin, (714) 838-2834.

► Hyatt Hotels in Ventura, Los Angeles and Orange counties are providing reduced room rates to fire victims in need of short- and long-term housing and other aid. The Hyatt Regency Irvine and Hyatt Newporter are among hotels offering reduced rates.

► Irvine Co.: Assisting fire victims with apartment-rental information. Credit checks, security deposits and other pre-rental procedures will be eliminated for fire victims. Call (714) 720-2407.

► **Laguna Outreach:** Housing, pet care for gays and lesbians. Referrals for general services such as therapy and counseling. Call Kristen Enos, (714) 745-4333.

► **Apartment listings:** Newport-Mesa Association of Realtors, 401 N. Newport Blvd., Newport Beach; Irvine Association of Realtors, 16267 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine; South Orange County Association of Realtors, 34932 Calle del Sol; Capistrano Beach and Laguna Board of Realtors, 939 Glenneyre St., Laguna Beach.

► **Mobile homes:** The Salvation Army has been offered 60 mobile homes for residents who wish to stay on their property. Mobile homes will be delivered free of charge. Rental rates negotiable. Contact Ian Robinson at (714) 546-7880.

► **Oakwood Apartments:** Free use of 50 apartments in Newport Beach, Long Beach and Anaheim for 30 days. Contact Red Cross Service Center for referral. (714) 835-5381.

► **Western National Property Management:** Fire Victim Assistance Hot Line is (714) 750-RENT, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

► **Newport Dunes Resort:** Free RV spaces through Nov. 4. Call (714) 729-DUNE.

► **William Lyon Property Management Co.:** Offering discounted rents at six of its south-county apartment projects. The company is cutting 5 percent off rents, plus offering month-to-month arrangements. The projects include three communities in The Resorts Apartments, Aliso Viejo; Country Club Villas, Laguna Niguel; The Bluffs at Monarch Beach, Dana Point; and Capistrano Pointe, San Juan Capistrano.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

► **Orange County Bar Association Information Helpline:** (714) 541-6222, (714) 756-6306.

► **Orange County Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service:** Waiving attorney referral fees for victims of the fire. (714) 835-8811.

► **Law offices of David, Punelli, Keathley & Willard:** Offering free help with claims processing and other legal work. (714) 640-0700.

► **Law offices of Paone, Callahan, McHolm & Winton:** Offering free

help with claims processing and other legal work. (714) 955-2900.

TAXES

► Orange County/Long Beach Chapter of the California CPAs: Providing tax information and assistance to residents who suffered property losses. Laguna Beach Recreation Center, 505 Forest Ave., Laguna Beach. 9 a.m.-7 p.m.

► Disaster information seminar: Free insurance and tax seminar for fire victims. Chet Holifield Federal Building, 24000 Avila Road, second floor training room, Laguna Niguel. 6 p.m. Monday, Nov. 1. (714) 643-4060.

LOAN ASSISTANCE

► Orange County Teachers Federal Credit Union: Deferred payments on existing loans. Interest-free loans available for members. (714) 547-4141, Ext. 70.

► Sanwa Bank: One- to three-month deferral on existing loans. No fee, low interest on new loans. Contact bank locations in Santa Ana, (714) 285-4570; Newport Beach, (714) 476-7000; and Mission Viejo, (714) 582-5641.

► Wells Fargo Bank: Special loan program for fire victims. It includes personal loans to homeowners up to \$25,000 and renters up to \$5,000, at 2.47 percent. If you have a Wells Fargo home loan or credit card, you can defer payments by calling (800) 522-1294 (mortgages) or (800) 642-4720 (credit cards). Small-business owners can get a 90-day insurance bridge loan up to \$100,000 by calling (800) 545-2844.

INSURANCE ASSISTANCE

► Federal Emergency Management Agency: National tele-registration number, (800) 462-9029.

► Kinko's Copy Centers: Offering free fax/copy service to assist fire victims with processing insurance claims. For nearest location, call (800) 743-COPY.

► State Department of Insurance: Toll-free hot line: (800) 927-4357

► Ricoh Co.: Free videotaping of home fire damage for insurance purposes. Call Kevin Shutt, (714) 566-3575.

► The American Institute of Architects, Orange County Chapter: Will track down original building plans for insurance appraisals. The plans will be supplied free to owners. For information, call the AIA/OC, (714) 557-7796.

► The Laguna Art Museum, photographic archive of works by prominent California architects, available for fire survivors. For information, call (714) 494-8971.

MAIL

► The Letter Box: Free mailboxes to residential and business fire victims on Ortega Highway. (714) 661-4342.

TELEPHONES

► GTE and MCI: Free long-distance calling for fire victims. GTE Building, 295 Broadway, Laguna Beach. (800) 227-5556.

► PacTel Paging: Free paging service, includes use of a PacTel pager for up to 90 days and express voice mail. Information: (800) 807-2437.

► Pacific Bell: Free voice-mail and call-forwarding services to victims who have lost telephone service. Voice-mail orders: Residence customers, (800) 273-7000, Ext. 345; business customers, (800) 540-8020. Call-forwarding orders: Residence customers, (800) 491-2355; business customers, (800) 300-2355.

SENIORS

► Alzheimer's Association, Orange County chapter: Coordinating offers from licensed facilities to provide free short-term care for Alzheimer's patients affected by the fires. (714) 283-1111.

► United States Eldercare Referral Agency: Temporary lodging. Call Robert Rosenberg, (800) 848-1008.

► South County Senior Services, (714) 498-0400.

10/30/93

The Washington Times

NATION

FBI says threats of arson were mailed out

By Norma Meyer
COMLEY NEWS SERVICE

LOS ANGELES — While firefighters pressed their battle against flames on nine fronts, the FBI revealed yesterday that arson threats had been mailed last month to homes and fire stations in at least one area blackened by this week's inferno.

The FBI's Los Angeles office received one of the arson letters as long ago as the first week of September, said bureau spokesman John Hoos. KCBS-TV reported that 15 similar letters, written by someone who identified himself as "Fedbuster," were mailed to Chatsworth addresses last month.

Chatsworth was hit by a 1,260-acre fire Wednesday. Four firefighters were injured in the blaze, two of them critically. Authorities said yesterday an "incendiary device" ignited the fire.

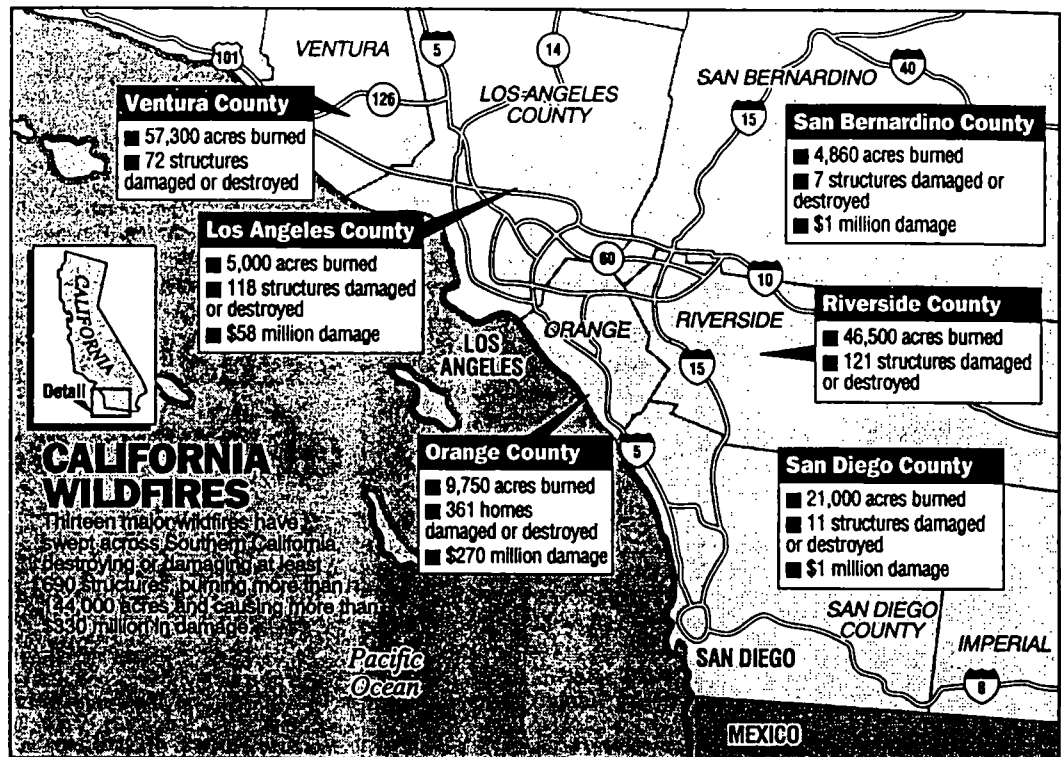
Arson also has been blamed for at least five other blazes that carved a path of destruction from Ventura County to the Mexican border since Tuesday.

Firefighters raced yesterday to tame blazes throughout Southern California, as wicked winds threatened to renew the smoky rampage in cities and canyons.

Fires have destroyed at least 690 homes and blackened 144,000 acres. A siege of dry Santa Ana winds is forecast for today.

"The wind could push the fire into homes," said Steve Knevelbaard, a spokesman for the Los Angeles County Fire Department, referring to the Altadena blaze that has already gutted 118 structures. "It is highly dependent on the strength and direction of the winds."

The FBI said the arson letter was also mailed to Glendale and possibly other communities in the fire zone. KCBS reported that one letter consisted of a rambling diatribe against



Graphic by Greg Grossch / The Washington Times

the federal government, and that the missive referred to several catastrophic fires in recent years.

"I will wait for a hot, windy fall day in the brush, maybe in areas where residents I chosed at random got this notice," the letter reportedly said. "Maybe other areas you won't know. Yeah, fire. I'm fascinated with fire."

Mr. Hoos said the FBI has offered to help fire investigators in the arson probe.

Meanwhile, in Pasadena, Andres Huang, 35, a transient whose campfire allegedly started the Altadena blaze, was arraigned on a misdemeanor count of starting an unlawful fire. He was jailed in lieu of \$25,000 bail, facing a maximum sentence of six months in jail.

Sixty-two firefighters and civilians were injured and 25,000 people displaced in six counties over four days.

In Laguna Beach, hundreds of homeowners lined up yesterday at the police department to get permits to pass barricades designed to keep looters and lookie-loos from blackened neighborhoods.

Jerry Kenny found his house

standing and a note from the South Bay Fire Strike Team: "Good luck. Looks like we got it." The firefighters also put his photographs in a drawer for safekeeping.

Laguna Beach firefighter Roy Sendele was not so fortunate. He was on the front lines while his house was consumed by flames a few blocks away.

"You try not to let it affect you, but . . .," he said, unable to finish his sentence as he choked up.

James Lee Witt, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, toured devastated areas by helicopter and promised rapid action on aid applications.

Mr. Witt said disaster application centers would open today in Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, San Diego and San Bernardino counties.

Hotels and retail businesses also got in the act. The Ritz Carlton Hotel in Laguna Niguel offered a "burned-out special," cutting room rates from \$250 to \$99 a night. About 300 refugees who fled posh Laguna Beach took up temporary residence there.

"We have a no-pet policy but we have allowed all the refugees to have

cats, dogs, mice and rabbits, parakeets," said Geoff Young, executive assistant manager of the hotel.

With winds expected to whip up again, Ventura County fire officials were particularly concerned about flames that refused to die from the four-day old Thousand Oaks fire. That blaze has traveled the 12 miles to the ocean in Malibu and back again, destroying or damaging 35 homes and threatening many others.

The National Weather Service said gusts up to 40 mph were expected by this morning. The winds that fanned the worst flames Wednesday were up to 70 mph.

In Washington, White House Chief of Staff Thomas F. "Mack" McLarty said FEMA, already-burdened by this year's Midwest floods, will not require more money because private insurance will play a large role in covering the estimated hundreds of millions of dollars in damage.

As 15,000 firefighters pressed their attack on air and ground, claims injurers were deployed to the ghostly remains of suburbs and as utility crews repaired telephone, electrical and gas lines.

OCT 3 0 1993

Raging Blazes Subside

**Injury Total Hits 84;
Californians Brace For
More Searing Winds**

Compiled From News Services

LOS ANGELES — Firefighters gained the upper hand Friday on infernos that caused more than \$400 million in damage across Southern California. But crews were racing against time as searing winds were expected to return and whip up the flames again.

Calmer, cooler weather helped extinguish four wildfires and contain several others after walls of flame leveled exclusive suburbs, destroyed more than 700 homes and scorched 180,000 acres from Ventura County, north of Los Angeles, to the Mexican border. Still out of control were a 35,000-acre blaze in Ventura County that incinerated 35 homes and a 20,000-acre fire in the Cleveland National Forest.

More than 6,000 firefighters — some from as far away as Oregon — were battling the remaining blazes.

The Santa Ana winds that caused the parched region to ignite like a tinderbox Wednesday were expected to pick up over the weekend, increasing the danger to population centers.

The National Weather Service said that the winds were expected again today but that they would not as strong as the 50 mph winds that whipped wildfires into walls of flame earlier in the week.

"This area burns very aggressively with no winds at all. I'm very worried," U.S. Forest Service officer Tom Harbour said at a fire camp in Altadena, where 118 homes and buildings were destroyed this week. As he spoke, the fire no longer posed a threat to houses but raged out of control in the San Gabriel Mountains overlooking Altadena, 15 miles northeast of Los Angeles.

In Pasadena, Andres Huang, 35, a transient, pleaded innocent to a misdemeanor charge of setting the fire that engulfed parts of Altadena by lighting br at his hillside camp to

keep warm. He was jailed in lieu of \$25,000 bail; trial was set for Nov. 15.

No deaths were reported, but the injury total climbed to 84, including 67 firefighters.

The fire disaster was California's worst since a blaze killed 25 people, destroyed 3,000 homes and caused \$1.75 billion in damage in Oakland in 1991. Millions of people saw their lives disrupted. Many roads were closed, and huge clouds of acrid smoke blanketed the area.

Refugees filled shelters, some wearing what remained of their possessions.

Clues suggested that at least six of the 15 major fires were the work of arsonists, including one that raged through the seaside artists' colony of Laguna Beach, destroying more than 300 homes and forcing 24,000 people to evacuate.

After touring devastated neighborhoods in Laguna Beach, Gov. Pete Wilson offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of "the sick animal who did this thing."

On Friday, detectives found an "incendiary device" that started an 1,800-acre blaze in Ventura County that injured four firefighters, two

critically.

Damage in Orange County — the hardest-hit area — was estimated at between \$300 million and \$400 million, said county Administrative Officer Ernie Schneider. The loss from one Los Angeles County fire was put at \$60 million, and the firefighting effort was expected to cost millions more. The Laguna Beach fire was declared fully contained late Thursday. On Friday, authorities allowed residents to return to their homes.

Mary Sinclair, a British-born resident, likened the scene of devastation to what she saw during the Nazi blitz of London in World War II.

"This is how it was when the bombs went off and none of the houses were left standing," she said as she and her husband surveyed the ruins of their four-bedroom home.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency planned to open aid-application centers by today in all five counties declared federal disaster areas. James Lee Witt, director of the agency, toured fire zones by helicopter.

In Washington, Thomas P. McLarty III, the White House chief of staff, said the agency, already taxed by floods in the Midwest, would not require more money because private insurance will play a large role in covering damage.

OCT 30 1993

2 Stubborn Blazes Tire Crews

■ **Inferno:** Flames continue to rage above Malibu and Sierra Madre as firefighters race against expected Santa Ana winds. Laguna Beach guards against flare-ups.

By JESSE KATZ, TIMES STAFF WRITER

A1

Racing against a predicted return of the blistering winds that have made kindling of Southern California's rugged terrain, thousands of bone-tired firefighters launched an all-out air and ground assault on fires that continued to rage Friday in the canyons above Malibu and Sierra Madre.

Despite some small flare-ups, Orange County fire crews were able to maintain their lid on the devastating Laguna Beach blaze—the most destructive of the 14 major fires that had consumed at least 152,000 acres and incinerated or damaged 537 homes this week in six counties from Ventura to the Mexican border.

But even where flames had been beaten back, unnerved hillside residents were scrambling to trim overgrown brush and soak their land with garden hoses amid worry that the fierce, dry Santa Anas were expected to blow in from the desert by dawn today.

A National Weather Service advisory predicted winds of 15 to 25 m.p.h. in the valleys and coastal areas, with gusts of up to 40 m.p.h. possible in the canyons and mountains.

"Hopefully, we can get a handle on these fires before the winds come back," said Los Angeles County Fire Inspector Steve Knevelbaard. "We've got partial containment . . . but if the winds come back it'll take right off again."

OCT 30 1993

LOS ANGELES TIMES

In a stark reminder that Mother Nature is not the only recalcitrant force fueling the disaster, Los Angeles arson investigators announced they had found an incendiary device believed responsible for the 1,260-acre Chatsworth blaze that injured four city firefighters Wednesday, two critically.

Officials declined to elaborate on the investigation, but set up a special phone number—(800) 47-ARSON—in the hope that anyone with information would come forward.

Also late Friday, a Los Angeles city fire official disclosed that more than 30 letters threatening arson

have been received by various Southern California police and fire departments, as well as citizens, since Sept. 1.

The letters are undergoing "a detailed scientific analysis" at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, said Fire Department spokesman

Please see FIRES, A6

Continued from A1

Brian Humphrey.

KCBS-TV reported that a man calling himself "Fedbuster" sent 15 letters at random in early September promising to set fires to get back at agents who seized his assets.

Humphrey said "no specific names" were included in the letters being investigated and officials have no reason to believe that the letters are connected to this week's fires.

Meanwhile, the transient whose campfire is being blamed for the 5,700-acre Altadena/Sierra Madre fire pleaded not guilty Friday to one misdemeanor charge of setting a fire without a permit. Andres Z. Huang, 35, dressed in hospital pajamas and sitting in a wheelchair, entered his plea through a Mandarin-speaking translator in Pasadena Municipal Court. He could face a maximum of six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

"He was cold and decided to light a small fire to keep warm, pushed dirt into a circle, put dry brush into the circle, which he ignited with some matches," said spokeswoman Suzanne Childs of the district attorney's office, explaining why prosecutors—who expressed "tremendous sympathy" for those who suffered losses—did not think there was enough evidence to convict Huang of a felony.

In Orange County, arson investigators said they were studying the possibility that Wednesday's fires in Laguna Beach and the Villa Park/Anaheim Hills area were set by the same person. Anaheim Fire Investigator Mike Doty said the suspect in the Villa Park/Anaheim Hills fire may have fled in a black Pontiac Fiero that was seen speeding from the flash point near Stage Coach Road. Similar cars registered in the area are being traced through state files.

Even as investigators were probing the causes of the Orange County fires, a fourth brush fire—also intentionally set—erupted in Dana Point. Authorities were searching for a white male in his early 30s with shoulder-length dark brown hair, wearing dark pants, a white T-shirt and driving a newer model white Ford Mustang. The blaze did little damage and was quickly extinguished, but it heightened officials' concerns of "copycat" crimes.

In its report on the arson threats, KCBS-TV showed excerpts from some letters it attributed to "Fedbuster" that read in part:

"They burned me, now I'm going to burn them back. I fight fire with fire. . . . You think the Oakland (Hills) fire was big? You should see my plans.

"I'm going to set a big fire, actually more than one, bigger than Oakland on October 20, 1991—(going to) settle the score with one of these agencies and other government people that screwed me bad.

"I will wait for a hot windy fall day in the brush, maybe in areas where residents I choosed (sic) at random got this notice."

Some of Fedbuster's letters were sent to residents in Chatsworth, where one of the first suspected arson fires erupted, the station reported.

After touring the damage in Ventura County on Friday morning, an exhausted looking Gov. Pete Wilson said of the arsonist who started the 37,500-acre Thousand Oaks/Malibu blaze: "I wish I could get my hands on the bastard. I'd like to strangle him."

The Battle

Wilson joined Ventura County Fire Chief George Lund aboard a sleek black Viper helicopter, which flew over the exclusive Lake Sherwood Ranch

Aid to Fire Victims

Businesses or organizations that wish to offer free services for fire victims may call The Times at 1-800-254-4444 to offer assistance. Or call TimesLink at 800-848-8300 to leave a recorded message. The Times will publish the services at no charge.

community where firefighters had fended off fires that threatened dozens of \$2- and \$3-million homes Thursday night.

Back at the command post, he shook hands and slapped backs of weary firefighters who had been battling the Thousand Oaks/Malibu blaze, which had destroyed 44 homes and 23 outbuildings by nightfall Friday.

"What they have been called upon to do is what a surgeon is called upon to do in a battlefield—and that is to practice triage," he said.

By 10 a.m., firefighters in the Santa Paula area maintained a grasp on the Steckel Park fire there that had charred 23,000 acres, declaring it 50% contained after stopping a wind-borne push of flame that had leaped fire lines and threatened ranch homes along Alison Canyon on Thursday afternoon. About 200 firefighters near Ojai had contained about 90% of a fire still burning through 1,650 acres of steep, dense brush in Wheeler Gorge.

The Thousand Oaks/Malibu fire, though 75% contained by Friday afternoon, was still the most threatening, having crossed into a rugged wilderness area in southwestern Los Angeles County near Little Sycamore Canyon during the night. Firefighters were drawing up defense lines along the Mulholland Highway to keep it from spreading if it reaches the road.

From their command post at Pasadena's Oak Grove Park, just north of the Rose Bowl, firefighters worked furiously to keep the Altadena/Sierra Madre blaze from storming into the town of Sierra Madre.

The good news was that the western flank of the fire had been halted near the Chaney Truck Trail, above Alta Loma Drive, by a firebreak that was part of a 100-acre prescribed burn last March—a measure taken to thwart such a disaster.

As a result, most of the 1,200 firefighters on hand were doing battle at the blaze's eastern front, which had reached Bailey Canyon, just north of Sierra Madre.

There, about 1,100 acres of woodland were engulfed Friday afternoon and fire crews were working with bulldozers to build a dirt wall that they hoped would keep the flames from jumping east to Santa Anita Canyon, home to 80 cabins that are used for overnight stays by hikers. The canyon empties into downtown Sierra Madre.

"The danger is in the eastern flank of the fire," said Rick Kuyendall, a U.S. Forest Service spokesman, as he stood in Oak Grove Park, where firefighters from the all-night shift napped Friday in small dome tents. "Winds will take the fire toward the city, so there is a potential for problems."

Officials said the Altadena/Sierra Madre blaze was 35% contained by sundown Friday, but it had done an estimated \$63.5 million in damage, destroying 118 canyon homes.

In Laguna Hills, where 313 homes were destroyed at a total cost of \$270 million, 15 of

firefighters, coroner's investigators, sheriff's deputies with dogs and Marines continued a "house pad by house pad" search for casualties Friday.

Fire officials expanded their estimate of the burn zone to 16,684 acres, up from 10,000 acres. That would rank the fire as the second biggest in Orange County history by acreage, behind a 1948 blaze in Santa Ana Canyon.

About 400 firefighters in the Laguna area continued to patrol the area to guard against flare-ups.

Some Laguna Beach activists began pointing fingers over the extent of the fire, arguing that the City Council should have approved a new reservoir for the city and pushed tougher laws requiring homeowners to clear brush from yards.

Fire officials on Friday said the fire that has consumed 17,000 acres near Ortega Highway in the Cleveland National Forest was of suspicious origin. Like the others, it started near a roadway and had no apparent natural ignition source, authorities said.

In Riverside County, the 25,300-acre California fire had been 70% contained and 50% controlled by Friday afternoon, with full control expected Sunday night, said Tom Freeman, spokesman for the state Department of Forestry. So far, the blaze has destroyed 30 homes, 77 outbuildings and 42 vehicles, he said.

The official cause of the fire, which was at its worst in Winchester, an unincorporated area near Temecula and Lake Skinner, was believed to be arcing power lines.

The Survivors

Huddled on a park bench outside a tony Thousand Oaks shopping plaza, Arnold and Sarah Zamora stared in numb anger at the carefree crowds strolling by.

The Zamoras' entire inventory of possessions lay jumbled in a shopping cart nearby—a few random clothes and a black duffel bag containing cough and skin medication. They had watched in shock as the house they were living in burned, just days after they arrived to take over gardening and cleaning duties.

With no ties to the area and no way of contacting their evacuated employers, the Zamoras found their way to the shopping plaza and camped out—miserable, scared and neglected.

"You hear about all the millionaires who have nine homes and one of them burns and they're called homeless?" Arnold Zamora asked. "Well, what happened to their gardeners, their maids? That's who we are. We're out."

Her husband's arm wrapped around her in a gruff embrace, Sarah Zamora said. "We didn't lose a home, just our means of survival."

There was a bit more comforting to be had in Laguna Beach, where residents of close-knit Canyon Acres, a cozy neighborhood about a quarter mile from town, lined up outside the Laguna Beach Police Department waiting for passes to return to their homes.

"It's like a family there and it's gone," said 10-year Canyon Acres resident Paula Sorensen. "It's pretty awful—but mostly for the children, because the children on those streets don't have homes anymore."

One survivor of the Laguna Beach fire was a burned jack rabbit discovered off San Joaquin Hills Road on Thursday by two Costa Mesa residents taking photos of fire damage.

Michael Kamara and Gabe Johnson thought the rabbit, which had a charred back, was dead when they first saw it in a hole. But they took photos, it began

to move.

They put it in a box, trekked back onto the road and took it to Corona del Mar Hospital. The rabbit, which is still undergoing treatment, suffered a blinded eye and burns on more than 40% of its body.

Relief

As fire victims continue to sift through ashy rubble looking for a few sentimental keepsakes, a combination of public agencies, utilities and opportunistic businesses came to the rescue.

Federal officials, who have one Federal Emergency Management Agency office open in Pasadena, said they plan to open additional disaster relief offices in the areas affected by the fires over the next several days. At least two more offices should be open by the end of today, said White House Chief of Staff Thomas F. (Mac) McLarty.

"FEMA has been criticized in the past . . . but we've done a good job with the floods, and we think we're prepared to do well here," McLarty said. "We want to provide the sort of firm, coordinated response people have a right to expect the federal government to provide."

Also offering a hand to fire victims were the Southern California Edison Co. and the Southern California Gas Co., both of which said they will waive utility bills for all customers who lost their homes.

Pacific Bell, which has set up coin-operated phone trailers in three locations around Pasadena, said it will provide free voice mail and call forwarding to anyone without phone service.

Several Southern California real estate agents' associations said they will try to help Southland fire victims find apartments.

Meanwhile, a host of retail businesses, looking to offer a hand while also boosting sales, wasted no time getting the word out that they're open to help.

The Weather

It remained to be seen whether the wind would cooperate.

Meteorologists at the National Weather Service issued a wind advisory for Friday night and today, predicting winds of 15 to 25 m.p.h. in the valleys and coastal areas, with gusts of up to 40 m.p.h. possible in the canyons and the mountains.

Still, the winds are not expected to reach the gusts of 60 to 80 m.p.h. reported Wednesday when flames seemed to be racing across all of Southern California.

Weather service officials also cautioned about the exceedingly low humidity that usually accompanies the Santa Ana winds, which are being pushed westward by a large high pressure area in Montana that has been moving south into the central Rockies.

During the height of Wednesday's conflagration, the humidity level dipped to just 7% in Los Angeles. Humidity in Southern California is usually about 70% to 80% in the morning hours and about 40% in afternoons.

"The humidity can be as damaging as the winds, and that's why the Santa Anas are twice as bad," said weather specialist Dennis Seto of the National Weather Service's Oxnard office.

Dry winds "drain the plants of their moisture a lot quicker, and when that happens, they burn more readily and are easier to catch fire," Seto said. "For fire weather, the winds, once the fires get going, and the humidity, are the two major elements."

VIEWING THE AFTERMATH

► In the stark light of day, residents assess damage.

By TRACY WEBER
and JEORDAN LEGON
The Orange County Register

Soot-stained Laguna Beach residents and politicians nurtured plans of rebuilding Thursday, while a wall of fire lurked just outside luxurious Coto de Caza, with another round of Santa Ana winds on the way.

By 10:30 p.m., the Ortega fire already had left 13,000 acres blackened and 16 buildings destroyed.

On the sand of Laguna's Main Beach on Thursday, fire refugees, politicians and relief workers tried to pick up the pieces after Orange County's worst fire ever cut a path of destruction through the seaside village.

A two-mile line of traffic

clogged Coast Highway at dusk, when the city's mandatory evacuation ended. Some weary refugees ditched their cars and trudged on foot to reclaim their town.

In Washington, President Clinton declared Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, Riverside and San Diego counties federal disaster areas.

By evening, fire officials said five of 14 Southern California brush fires had been fully contained and five more were partly contained.

Damage estimates in Laguna alone totaled \$270 million late Thursday and were expected to rise.

Politicians respond

After viewing the destruction Thursday, California's U.S.

Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein pledged that Federal Emergency Management Agency disaster-relief centers would be opened in Laguna Beach and other fire-ravaged areas Saturday.

FEMA director James Lee Witt said residents could get checks in seven to 10 days.

State Sen. Marion Bergeson, R-Newport Beach, promised to seek tax relief for burned-out property owners with a bill similar to one passed after the Oakland fire.

Bergeson, Gov. Pete Wilson, Orange County Sheriff Brad Gates and county supervisors toured one of the hardest-hit Laguna neighborhoods Thursday morning. Flames still flared from broken gas mains; gray, burned carcasses of cars sat on rubberless rims outside what were once \$2 million homes.

Wilson said homeowners were partly to blame for the acceleration of Wednesday's firestorm.

He pointed to homes built up to the edge of steep slopes, brush within 35 feet of the homes and streets too narrow for fire equipment to maneuver.

"It's just too much to ask from the firefighters, asking them to risk their lives needlessly and against the odds," Wilson said.

The Laguna blaze

Wilson offered a \$50,000 reward for the capture of the "sick animal" who started the Laguna blaze.

By 4 p.m. Thursday, the Emerald Canyon fire had been contained, and fire officials predicted the last embers would be out Saturday.

The flames consumed 313 homes and 9,000 acres, and damaged 17 structures. More than 24,000 people were evacuated. Late Thursday, 2,500 firefighters still battled hot spots. Twenty-two suffered minor injuries in two days.

More than 200 deputies and police from 22 agencies patrolled the empty streets to prevent looting. Platoons of helicopters skirted the yachts of lookie-loos to dip into the ocean for firefighting water.

The search for remains in the Mystic Hills area ended at 4:30 p.m. without turning up a casualty.

"We found koi fish in a pond. We found live goldfish in a bowl, but, as we fully expected, we did not find any bodies," said Orange County Deputy Coroner Jim Beisner.

Eighty-two Marines helped sift through more than 100 homes, Beisner said.

At El Morro Mobile Home Park, more than 100 coaches stood intact on a ridgetop. About 60 lay smoldering in the ravine below, their corrugated steel sides twisted and black.

Nearby, residents of Irvine's Turtle Rock area returned to their homes as firefighters tended flare-ups in the nearby foothills. Wednesday night, the fire had stopped just 300 yards from the development.

Ortega fire

With the Emerald Canyon fire winding down, Orange County's attention turned to a massive blaze in the largely uninhabited foothills south of Coto de Caza.

Thursday night, the Ortega fire was about two miles from dozens of million-dollar Coto de Caza and Dove Canyon homes. Much of the 13,000-acre blaze burned in uninhabited rocky ravines in the Cleveland National Forest near the border of Orange and Riverside counties.

By 10:30 p.m., 16 structures had been destroyed, but no one had been injured.

There was no official evacuation order for Coto de Caza.

Stage Coach fire

Residents of Crest de Ville in Orange started to clean up Thursday. Their burned houses were hardest hit by the Stage Coach fire in the Anaheim Hills the day before.

The fire damaged 22 homes and swept through 750 acres of the Anaheim Hills on Tuesday night before it was contained about 8 p.m. Wednesday.

Fire investigators suspected arson, and four of the burned homes sustained about \$575,000 in damage.

The aftermath

Hundreds of calls flooded the county's rumor-control hot line Thursday: Was the fire headed inland? Had the Little League baseball fields in Irvine burned? Was it true the Pacific Amphitheater was charred?

No, no and no.

"There's all sorts of things being said out there," said county spokesman Rod Speer. "We're just trying to separate fact from fiction."

Thursday afternoon, several hundred Laguna residents were without phone service. Schools in

Laguna Beach will remain closed today; schools in all surrounding areas reopened.

Cable TV service was down in some parts of the city.

Coast Highway remained closed throughout Laguna Beach, with police allowing in only those with proof of residency. It is expected to reopen sometime today.

Elsewhere

► The 3-day-old Greenmeadow fire, which has consumed more than 33,000 acres and damaged or destroyed at least 33 homes, continued threatening property in the rugged Santa Monica Mountains.

► The Guejito fire near Escondido, which consumed five homes and 14,800 acres, continued to cut a swath through northeastern San Diego County on

Thursday, forcing more evacuations. The San Diego Wild Animal Park was no longer in danger Thursday night.

► The Altadena fire, though still out of control, took a turn for the better with help from the cooler, calmer winds, heading north into the steep canyons.

► In Riverside County, firefighters led by California Department of Forestry crews took advantage of the break in the weather to contain two smaller fires near Riverside and Anza. The mammoth 21,350-acre fire in rolling ranchland near Winchester destroyed 29 structures and was reported as 60 percent contained.

► Forestry department firefighters nearly contained a 4,860-acre fire that burned five homes near Yucaipa.

WIND'S RETURN FEARED

Fire crews battle clock

Most blazes
contained, but
worries mount over
danger from new
Santa Ana gusts

By George Raine
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

PA/

Firefighters gained the upper hand Friday over most of the 13 major wildfires still burning in Southern California, but they were racing the clock to beat the expected resumption of Santa Ana winds later in the day.

"Today would be the day to get them (the fires) out as much as possible so that if there's any remains of the fires they wouldn't be reignited again by the winds," which were forecast to reach 40 mph, said James Hammond, a National Weather Service meteorologist.

Already the fires have charred nearly 187,000 acres and burned almost 700 homes from Ventura County, north of Los Angeles, to San Diego.

Most of the wildfires were contained by midday Friday, but firefighters feared they could jump the firebreaks if the dry Santa Ana winds picked up again. The Santa Anas drove the fires with winds of up to 70 mph on Wednesday.

The two fires still causing the biggest headaches for firefighters were the Altadena blaze, which had consumed 8,000 acres and was only

[See FIRES, A-21]

35 percent contained, and the Guajito fire, which had consumed more than 18,000 acres and had burned within two miles of the town of Ramona in San Diego County.

Firefighters who had expected to be relieved Friday were being held on lines in Altadena, "to see what the winds do this afternoon," said Los Angeles County Fire Department Inspector Robert Lockett.

All told, nearly 9,000 firefighters, including reinforcements from Northern California and 600 U.S. Forest Service firefighters, were deployed across the region.

Crews also were working to ensure that a fire that spilled across the Santa Monica Mountains from Thousand Oaks and reached the Pacific Coast Highway near Malibu did not escape containment. The fire had burned about 35,000 acres, mostly in unincorporated parts of Ventura and Los Angeles counties.

Three fires, totaling 6,600 acres, were declared extinguished early Friday in Riverside County.

As firefighters sought to press their advantage, thousands of Southern Californians worked their way by bicycle and on foot through thick clouds of smoke and drifting ash to return to burned-out neighborhoods.

James Lee Witt, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, toured devastated areas Friday and promised quick action on aid applications. Witt said that disaster centers would open Saturday in the five counties declared disaster areas by President Clinton — Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, San Diego and Riverside. A disaster field office has opened in Pasadena.

Considered together, the blazes ranked among the state's worst for property destroyed.

Local authorities were trying to put a price tag on the damage. In Laguna Beach alone, city officials issued a preliminary estimate Friday of \$270 million.

By comparison, claims in the East Bay hills fire of 1991 reached \$1.2 billion. That firestorm killed 25 people, injured 150, and destroyed more than 3,400 dwellings.

Arson is suspected in three of the fires, including the one in Laguna Beach, which caused the most property damage. About 330 homes were damaged or destroyed in the seaside town in Orange County when a wall of fire rushed down a canyon Wednesday night.

The Altadena fire was believed to have been caused by a transient who lit a fire to keep warm as he camped in the foothills of the San Gabriel mountains. The suspect, Andres Huang, was to be arraigned later Friday.

The Altadena blaze was consuming brush and trees in a northwesterly direction toward Mount Wilson, said Inspector Lockett of the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

He said the scattered dwellings in the area were not immediately threatened, but added that firefighters were worried that wind-blown embers could help ignite brush in valleys and canyons that flames skipped over as they leaped high along the canopy of trees.

The 8,000-acre fire destroyed or damaged 118 homes in Altadena on Wednesday and early Thursday.

On the coast, the California Highway Patrol closed the highway between Malibu and a point several miles north, in Ventura County, as firefighters struggled to control the fire that originated in Thousand Oaks.

Malibu and its environs, including some of Los Angeles County's most expensive and elegant homes, were not threatened.

Country singer Dwight Yoakum's home in a canyon above Malibu was lost, though the fire spared the neighboring homes of celebrities Jack Nicholson and Dick Clark as well as ranches owned by Tom Selleck and Sophia Loren.

A flare-up in the Lake Sherwood area of Ventura County — where the first fire started Tuesday

— destroyed a million-dollar home late Thursday.

In San Diego County, firefighters held the line Friday on a wild-fire that began near a wild animal park in Escondido, destroying five homes and burning 18,000 acres. After raging out of control early Friday, the fire slowed its destruction but continued to threaten the city of Ramona as the hot winds that fanned it calmed down.

Meanwhile, lives disrupted were being resumed.

"We're happy for one thing," said Altadena resident Gerry Bonaccorso as she hugged her son amid the debris of their destroyed home. "My baby is here. Everything can be replaced, right? Everything except this."

\$50,000 reward offered

Gov. Wilson offered a \$50,000 reward for arrests of arsonists, and police patrolled neighborhoods to prevent looting.

Arson was believed responsible for the blaze that roared into laid-back Laguna Beach — art colony, gay mecca and honeymoon resort.

Fifty miles south of Los Angeles, Laguna Beach was one of the first towns in the nation to declare itself a nuclear-free zone.

Mary Pickford, Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart and countless other luminaries used to hang out there. Industrialist Warren Buffett still does.

Until his frame house was leveled by the flames, Jack Parham, caterer, lived there as well. He's wondering what comes next.

"I've lost everything," he said. "It was just a shack. I and my friends got it for \$285,000 six years ago, and everything we had was in it. I only just got out in time. What can I say? I'm in shock."

Residents barred

Most of Laguna Beach's 28,000 residents were evacuated. Incredibly, no one there, or in any of the other fires, is known to have died.

Laguna residents were not allowed to drive into fire-damaged neighborhoods, because authorities wanted to keep roads free for firefighters battling hot spots.

When Jack Parham walked up to the ruins of his \$1 million dream home in Laguna Beach, the only recognizable things he could retrieve from blackened remains were a couple of charred teacups, a scorched six-pack of Pepsi and James Fenimore Cooper's "The Pi-

oneers."

Cassie Parham was home alone when the fire neared her Laguna Beach neighborhood. "You always think they'll give you an hour to get out," she said.

"It wasn't even like 10 minutes and you can leave. It was got out now. No tragedy like this has ever happened to any of us. That's always what happens to others on TV. I'm just numb."

She, like many others, will rebuild. "There's a reason people keep coming back to California after earthquakes and mud slides," she said. "Look over there. Can you see the surf breaking? At 2 in the morning, when you can't sleep, it's like music."

Examiner news services contributed to this report.

25,000 Displaced as California Fires Ebb

By Christine Spolar
Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, Oct. 28—An unexpected ocean breeze took the bluster out of wind-driven wildfires scarring Southern California today, dropping coastal temperatures and buoying the hopes of those battling one of the worst firestorms here in a decade.

Forestry officials said at least 15 fires tumbled down hillsides, raced through canyons and confounded man-made fire lines. By today, they charred more than 100,000 acres from San Bernardino County to the Pacific Ocean and consumed nearly 600 homes, garages and barns. No deaths were reported, but about 25,000 people were displaced, they said.

The blazes were yet another frightening manifestation of California's love-hate relationship with the elements in a region besieged in the last two years by severe drought, relentless flooding, occasional earthquakes and now fire.

"People live in California because we have beautiful weather, great mountains and beautiful valleys," said Lisa Boyd of the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. "Unfortunately, those are some of the same things that make it fire-prone."

The worst of the blazes, some of which are being investigated as arsons, raged Wednesday night and early today as huge curtains of fire cascaded through hills and valleys, destroying in minutes many lavish homes.

Firefighters dumped water from helicopters. People watered down their houses in hopes that they would be spared. But these efforts often proved meager against fierce and unpredictable winds that steered flames this way and that.

Many people could do little but flee stricken areas as quickly as possible, heading for evacuation centers and perhaps returning hours later to determine the fate of their property.

President Clinton declared five counties—Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego and Ventura—disaster areas, making federal assistance available to individuals and state and local governments. He sent James Lee Witt, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to California.

The sea breeze that began shortly after midnight today calmed the dry, parching Santa Ana winds that had stoked wildfires for two days. Weather forecasters said the easterly breeze, which dropped temperature by five to 15 degrees in Los Angeles, should last until late Friday.

"That will give the firefighters a catch-up period," said Milo Radulovich of the National Weather Service. "It'll give them a rest from the up and running fires."

Forestry officials counted 15 blazes billowing white haze across the countryside today and labeled nine, including one that has

scorched 8,000 acres in seaside Laguna Beach, as significantly dangerous. One blaze that charred more than 5,000 acres was set by a homeless man attempting to warm himself, Los Angeles officials said. He was arrested. Two other fires appeared to be the work of arsonists, according to county fire officials.

The blazes, which rivaled the deadly 1991 fires in Oakland for ferocity, could burn for weeks in foothills surrounding Los Angeles, fire officials said. In Altadena, a wealthy residential area just east of Los Angeles, at least 115 homes were lost, and firefighters had contained only about 20 percent of the affected area, officials said.

Containment usually involves bulldozing barrier lines around a fire to halt its spread, officials said.

Two days ago, Altadena was a charming hillside community. But what made it so appealing also made it ripe for destruction—winding streets, sloping hillsides, homes with wooden roofs and overhangs and large plate-glass windows.

Fire can jump those hills faster than fire trucks can arrive on them, forestry officials explained. Embers flying from a spreading blaze eat through wooden roofs and plate-glass windows explode in intense heat.

Clayton and Pauline Howland, both in their 60s, came back to their Brambling Lane home today to find the aftermath of just such a scenario. They awoke to see fire climbing over a ridge near their home Tuesday, they said.

The couple grabbed family photos, and each drove a car down to the Pasadena Freeway to save the vehicles. They tried to return for the family's bone china and a third car, a 22-year-old Jaguar, but flames had overrun their Mediterranean-style home.

"People are taking inventory,"

Pauline Howland said as she wandered through the black cinders of what had been her home for 17 years, "to see who made it and who didn't."

Down the street, Cherie Ray, 32, helped her parents sort through the mess near their home, unscathed, apparently because it had a flame-retardant roof. She said her parents, Californians for most of their lives, probably would not want to live anywhere else.

"Where you going to go?" Ray asked. "There's always earthquakes, floods, volcanos. They've lived here 32 years."

CONTINUED

Southern California has not experienced such devastating fire since November 1980, when four people died in a brush fire that destroyed 325 structures in a 23,000-acre area of San Bernadino County.

This year, a combination of good and bad fortune made this area vulnerable, officials said. An unprecedented six-year drought that ended last year left behind large amounts of brush, and heavy rain and runoff last winter allowed new grasses to seed. One spark on a hot day with gusting Santa Ana winds was fuel for disaster, officials said.

"You put all of this together—high temperatures, low humidity and lots of fuel," said Loren Poore, state chief of fire prevention. "Everything was just right."

Weary firefighters were not the only ones on the scene today. Insurance agents waited near cooling embers in Laguna and Altadena to begin their work.

"It's not ambulance-chasing. It's fire truck-chasing," said agent Stan Poore, who owns his own insurance company in Rolling Heights.

Special correspondent Jessica Crosby contributed to this report.

President Acts Fast on Aid — 'Money's in the Bank'

By Marc Sandalow
and Carolyn Lochhead
Chronicle Washington Bureau

Washington

President Clinton sought to assure Southern Californians yesterday that he will "do whatever it takes" to assist fire victims, as relief officials in Washington said they have as much as \$1 billion to offer in aid.

"The money is there in the bank. We're ready to write the checks now," said Marvin Davis, a spokesman for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The president moved swiftly, declaring a major disaster in five counties and dispatching two members of his cabinet to the scene after what he described as a "very heart-rending talk" with Governor Wilson.

Aware of the criticism leveled at his predecessors for their handling of calamities — including the Loma Prieta earthquake — Clinton

appeared determined to display his compassion for California as well as his confidence in the ability of the much-maligned emergency management agency.

"My heart goes out to the people across Southern California," Clinton said in a statement delivered in the Rose Garden. "We're going to do whatever it takes to help the people."

The president declared five counties — Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego and Ventura — as major disaster areas, making them available for federal assistance.

He also dispatched FEMA Director James Lee Witt, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy to the scene, and instructed Chief of Staff Mack McLarty to oversee the

Congressman Christopher Cox, R-Newport Beach, also left Washington — where Thursday's editions of the Washington Post did

not even include a story on the destruction — to check on his home in the fire area, which apparently suffered only minor smoke damage.

California Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer returned to their home state to tour the ravaged areas. Feinstein interrupted action on the Senate floor Wednesday to inform her colleagues that "there is a potential catastrophe in the making in the state of California."

The rush from Washington to assist Southern California comes more than a year after Florida residents criticized President Bush for not acting forcefully enough to provide aid to victims of Hurricane Andrew.

The latest calamity will provide another test for FEMA, whose reputation was so battered by charges of bureaucratic bumbling following the Loma Prieta earthquake and hurricanes Andrew and Hugo, that Congressman Pete Stark, D-Hayward, offered legislation last year to abolish the agency.

"It always is a test," said FEMA's Davis, who said that the agency had redeemed itself during the summer by its handling of the Midwest floods.

"We feel like we vindicated ourselves pretty well," he said.

The agency was appropriated \$2 billion by Congress this year, and Davis said he expects \$1 billion would be available to Southern California if needed.

The 14-year-old bureaucracy was created by President Carter to coordinate federal assistance to communities struck by disaster. It also funnels millions of federal relief dollars to affected individuals and local governments.

Some Bay Area officials are still angry over the agency's reluctance to dole out checks following the 1989 earthquake. However, early reports from the Midwest indicate the agency was well received there.

"They responded immediately and were in our community," said Richard Schwartz, mayor of Hannibal, Mo. Along with other state, federal and volunteer agencies, FEMA helped set up what Schwartz called a "one-stop, quick-stop for disaster relief," where people could apply for help from various agencies.

FEMA also sent in 73 trailers for those made homeless by the floods. FEMA will now set up a similar program in Southern California. By yesterday, they had already established a toll-free number where residents could apply for emergency loans, and expected to set up several outposts within a day or two.

Wind Ebbs, But Fires Rage On Around LA

Clinton Declares Disaster In 5 Counties

Compiled From News Services

LOS ANGELES — A firestorm raged across Southern California for the second day Thursday, but calmer wind helped firefighters as they battled more than a dozen infernos that have incinerated 600 and forced 30,000 people to flee.

Most of the remaining blazes were burned out of control in remote, unpopulated areas. But one fast-moving wildfire leapt several homes near a golf course in Ventura County and was bearing down on a gated community of 100 houses. Dozens of families were ordered to evacuate.

Pledging a "full federal response," President Bill Clinton declared disaster in five counties where 15 fires charred more than 115,000 acres in little more than two days.

"My heart goes out to the people across Southern California who have lost their homes," Clinton said at the White House.

Clinton sent the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, James Lee Witt, and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to California. Witt promised that his agency would respond quickly, opening offices as early as Saturday.

A procession of fire refugees walked through the smoke along a coastal highway into Laguna Beach, a posh coastal town in Orange County. The town was half-gutted by a wall of flame that destroyed more than 300 homes. Authorities blocked the Pacific Coast Highway, allowing residents to return only on foot or bicycle. Hundreds of people abandoned their cars to make the trip.

The outbreak of fires ranks among the worst to hit California this century. Total damage, according to unofficial estimates, is expected to run into hundreds of millions of dollars, perhaps even rivaling the \$1.75 billion firestorm of 1991 in Oakland.

As was true in the Oakland blaze, entire neighborhoods were wiped off the map. This time, however, many of the victims were wealthy homeowners in exclusive suburbs such as Laguna Beach. Nothing but smoldering rubble remained where most of the multimillion-dollar mansions once stood.

The hot Santa Ana winds that fueled runaway fires Wednesday with 60-mph gusts died down and was replaced by cool sea breezes, and firefighters finally were making progress in beating down some of the worst blazes. Crews worked frantically to mop up remaining structure fires and to keep brushfires in more remote areas from spreading to population centers. Relief also came in the form of lower temperatures and higher humidity.

But forecasters warned that more Santa Ana winds — weaker than the last — would come sweeping in from the desert by Saturday.

Authorities said that for a disaster of such magnitude, the human toll was miraculously low. Twenty-nine firefighters were injured, three of them critically. No more than a dozen civilians were hurt, and not a single death was reported.

But just in case, a team of 80 U.S. Marines was dispatched to Laguna Beach from neighboring bases to help scour the ruins for bodies, with the help of bloodhounds.

Arson was suspected in several of the major wildfires, but others were attributed to a combination of tinder-dry brush and high wind that whipped normally manageable fires into raging infernos so fast that firefighters had no time to respond.

Gov. Pete Wilson offered a \$50,000 reward for the arrests of arsonists. Police hunted arsonists and patrolled neighborhoods to prevent looting.

Daybreak revealed scenes of utter devastation. Wilson toured street after street in Laguna Beach, where most homes had been reduced to piles of ashes and twisted metal.

An Orange County firefighter who battled brushfires Wednesday returned Thursday to find his home in Laguna Beach burned to the ground.

More than 6,000 firefighters staffed the lines in Southern California, and reinforcements were on the way from neighboring Western states. U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard C-130 Hercules aircraft joined the battle, thundering low over fire lines and spraying fire retardant like crop dusters.

The cloud of smoke hanging over Southern California was so thick that it could be seen by astronauts in orbit aboard the space shuttle Columbia.

Wilson warned that if Californians wanted to continue moving to idyllic hillside homes such as those destroyed, fire codes would have to be more strictly enforced.

Hardest hit by the infernos Wednesday was Laguna Beach, where the population of 24,000 was forced to evacuate. By Thursday night, firefighters had contained the 10,000-acre fire in Laguna Beach, 40 miles south of Los Angeles. Police said the cause was arson.

Just north of Laguna Beach, fire damaged the ritzy community of Emerald Bay but spared homes owned by Warren E. Buffett, named America's wealthiest man by Forbes magazine, and former baseball commissioner Peter Ueberroth.

More than 150 homes were damaged or destroyed in Altadena, a largely affluent suburb nestled in the foothills just north of Los Angeles. Damage estimates were reported at nearly \$60 million.

Even Malibu, the posh coastal enclave of movie stars and millionaires, lost up to 15 homes atop steep canyons.

Smoke from the Orange County fires forced the closure of the popular Santa Anita horse track in Arcadia, in Los Angeles County. But the San Diego Wild Animal Park reopened.

DATE: OCT 29, 1993

U.S. Agencies Mobilize Aid, Firefighter

Response: Clinton declares region a disaster area, puts in motion a coordinated relief effort. Personnel begin to arrive within hours of his statement.

By DAVID LAUTER
STAFF WRITER

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WASHINGTON—President Clinton declared Southern California a disaster area Thursday as federal agencies began efforts to help contain the area's wildfires and to assist with relief costs.

"Along with all Americans, my heart goes out to the people across Southern California who've lost their homes and their possessions," Clinton said at a morning press conference. "We will offer what we can to help fight the fires, to meet the needs of the victims, to stand with the people who are already doing so much."

Within hours of the declaration, federal agencies had mobilized some 2,000 firefighters from the Forest Service, Park Service and Bureau of Land Management to aid in quelling the blazes, including 160 American Indian firefighters flown in from Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado, federal officials said.

The government's interagency fire center in Boise, Idaho, flew in 15 helicopters, four firefighting planes and 17 aerial tankers. In addition, the Defense Department made available six C-130 cargo planes to ferry firefighters, as well as helicopters and military engineers with bulldozers to assist in clearing firebreaks.

The Forest Service is sending 15 helicopters and 32 aircraft, including 26 aerial tankers.

"You really have to get a lot of resources on it early and contain it," said White House Chief of Staff Thomas (Mack) McLarty, who convened a White House meeting in the afternoon to coordinate federal assistance. "If you get a little break from Mother Nature, we've now got the firefighters on the ground."

The disaster declaration opens the way for federal funds to help in relief and rebuilding efforts in Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, Riverside and San Diego counties. A Federal Emergency Management Agency office in Pasadena, opened after last year's riots, will coordinate federal disaster relief efforts, FEMA officials said.

After the last major natural disaster in California—the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989—FEMA was widely criticized for being slow to respond to aid requests and for being overly bureaucratic in its efforts. Similar criticism hit the agency after the 1992 hurricanes in Florida and Louisiana.

Recalling those public relations disasters, the Administration has made an effort to improve FEMA. Public response after the Midwest floods this summer appears to have been significantly more positive. In addition, Clinton has tried to coordinate federal disaster relief efforts to reduce interagency problems—designating McLarty to oversee the fire relief effort.

FEMA Director James Lee Witt flew to Los Angeles with the state's two senators, Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, Thursday to coordinate federal relief efforts. He will be joined in the next two days by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, whose agency includes the Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management, and Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy, whose agency includes the Forest Service.

Clinton is not likely to visit the area himself, McLarty said. "The last thing we want to do is divert any resources with a trip," he said.

Federal officials do not yet have any estimate of disaster costs but expect they can be handled within the existing federal budget, McLarty said. FEMA received a special additional appropriation early this fall to replenish funds drained by the Midwest flood relief effort, which should be enough to cover the costs of fire relief.

FEMA aid includes grants to help with rent for temporary housing and for repairs, as well as low-interest loans to replace uninsured property, to rebuild small businesses and to replace damaged public facilities. Many of the programs, however, have limits on the amounts they cover. In the past, those limits have been criticized for being too low to handle disasters in high-cost areas like Southern California.

People seeking federal disaster relief can apply through a toll-free FEMA number—800-462-9029. The phone lines will be staffed from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. seven days a week, according to FEMA regional

Continued

director Frank Kishon.

Federal disaster aid fits into several different categories. For short-term emergency relief, FEMA can offer temporary rental payments for up to 18 months for those whose houses are destroyed. The agency can also offer grants for "minimal repairs" to make houses habitable, special unemployment payments for people not covered by other unemployment programs and grants of up to about \$12,000 for "serious disaster-related needs" not covered by other programs.

For rebuilding, the government has programs that provide loans with interest rates of 4% to 8% to cover uninsured private and business property but only up to \$100,000 for primary residences and \$500,000 for businesses. A separate loan fund can provide aid up to \$500,000 to help small businesses with disaster-related cash-flow problems.

Local governments can seek federal help to cover up to 75% of the costs of repairing schools, roads, bridges, recreational areas, and other public facilities.

Sea of fire

By George Raine
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

P.A.1

A ruthless firestorm pushed by dry, hot winds continued its march across Southern California Thursday, having already charred more than 100,000 acres, reduced 600 homes to ruins and turned formerly serene suburbs into smoky moonscapes.

But firefighters were gaining ground against at least some of the fires, thanks to a break in the weather. Cooler temperatures were expected through the day, and the hot Santa Ana winds that gusted to 70 mph on Wednesday and spread the fires so rapidly were replaced by cooler sea breezes of 5 to 10 mph at midday.

The most destructive fires were along the coast.

Half of the seaside city of Laguna Beach and surrounding communities, population about 75,000, remained evacuated after fire roared down to the beach during the night, damaging or destroying at least 310 homes.

Early Thursday, firefighters were able to stop the fire's advance, as it moved northward toward the heavily populated cities of Newport Beach and Irvine.

At the fire's height, the Pacific Coast Highway, a stretch of road with one of the most spectacular views in America, was the scene of a bumper-to-bumper caravan of shocked homeowners fleeing the fire's wrath with their most valued belongings.

In all, 13 major wildfires were burning from Ventura County to the Mexican border. Unofficial damage estimates ran into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Twenty-seven firefighters have been injured, two critically and two seriously. Five civilians suffered smoke inhalation and other minor injuries battling the fires.

Miraculously, no deaths have been reported from the fast-moving fires riding on searing Santa Ana desert winds of the

Nevertheless, 80 Marines from Marine Corps El Toro Air Station in Orange County were briefed by Orange County coroner's deputies and dispatched to Laguna Beach to search for bodies.

Gov. Wilson, after visiting several of the devastated areas, described the scenes as "heartbreaking." He declared five counties — Orange, Ventura, Los Angeles, Riverside and San Diego — as disaster areas.

President Clinton on Thursday promised "a full federal response" to the fires and endorsed Wilson's designation of the five-county disaster area.

He also dispatched Federal Emergency Management Agency Director James Lee Witt and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to California.

He said 20 Forest Service aerial tankers were already on the scene, along with agency firefighters.

Despite the cooler weather, a fire near the Ventura County city of Thousand Oaks was still out of control, as was the L.A. County fire in Altadena, burning in the Angeles National Forest on the flanks of the San Gabriel mountains, adjacent to Pasadena.

Authorities said 115 homes and buildings in Altadena and the surrounding area had been damaged or destroyed.

At their worst, the fires overloaded emergency response by cities and counties.

"It's out of control everywhere," said Harriett Wieder, chairwoman of the Orange County Board of Supervisors. "We've totally extended our resources, our firefighting equipment, everything. Our communications equipment is on overload."

Police said a transient who started a fire in the hills to keep warm was responsible for the Altadena blaze that had covered 5,000 acres by midmorning Thursday. Other fires were believed to be the work of arsonists, including the Laguna Beach fire, and fires near Thousand Oaks and Tecate, on the Mexican border.

Other major fires included:

► A 750-acre blaze that damaged 31 homes in Anaheim Hills and Villa Park.

► A 21,350-acre blaze that damaged or destroyed at least 100 buildings near Winchester in Riverside County.

► A 6,760-acre fire that burned five homes in Escondido in San Diego County.

► A 33,111-acre arson blaze in Ventura County that destroyed seven structures.

► A 4,700-acre blaze in San Bernardino County caused by downed power lines, destroying or damaging five homes and one barn and forcing schools to close.

► An 8,000-acre blaze in the Cleveland National Forest on the border of Orange and Riverside counties that destroyed 12 homes and forced the evacuation of residents in four small communities.

Try as they might, firefighters in some locales faced hopeless tasks.

"The smoke has been so thick that you can't breathe," said Jan Fisher, a registered nurse from Laguna Beach. "I'm watching the helicopters dip their buckets in the ocean to desperately try to get water and it all seems to no avail. It's really pathetic and sad here."

Many Bay Area fire departments sent "strike force" units to Southern California. The San Francisco Fire Department sent five engines and 22 men to Chatsworth.

At Laguna Beach, air tankers

dropped fire retardant ahead of the fire, only to have flames jump blanketed areas and continue their relentless advance.

"We've been standing here watching the homes of our friends burning," said Jackie Hetchings of Laguna Beach.

"Our friends are standing there with us and they're watching other people losing their homes. And we're all crying on each others' shoulders."

Deer, rabbits and other wild animals trying to escape the flames bounded down hillsides above Laguna and jumped into a swimming pool, said resident Wayne Wright.

In downtown Los Angeles, the sun Thursday was eclipsed by smoke and ash. Some freeways and schools were closed. Wind-borne embers continued to pick out homes at random, quickly engulfing roofs in flame.

Visible from space shuttle

Astronauts in the space shuttle Columbia reported being able to see ugly clouds from their orbit, 172 miles up.

In Altadena, where damage was estimated at \$15 million, some residents who fled their homes in terror early Wednesday returned to assess the damage.

Hamid Oliai salvaged two coffee cups and the blackened remains of his wife's watch, but nothing more.

"I worked hard all my life," he said. "And this was the result of it, as you see."

The inferno carved a destructive, but arbitrary path through the heavily populated city.

Spot fires hopscotched through neighborhoods, devouring well-tended mansions while leaving structures on either side unscathed.

Choking smoke blew down the face of Mount Wilson and rained ash on Los Angeles, Pasadena, Glendale and other surrounding cities.

At least 500 homes were abandoned, but some residents stayed behind to water down roofs.

An unlikely survivor of the Altadena blaze was "Chin," a family cat found buried in ice plant near her home in an exclusive Pasadena Glen neighborhood.

"We thought she was dead," said 9-year-old Adam Hackett, who made the discovery with his brother Jeff, 14. But the black cat, though her whisker tips were melted and her paws singed, howled in recognition at the family, said the brothers.

With so many fires, it was difficult getting crews and equipment quickly to the Altadena blaze, said Los Angeles County Deputy Fire Chief Paul Blackburn. But, he added, winds were so strong that extra manpower wouldn't have made much difference.

Eric Brazil and Erin McCormick of The Examiner staff, Examiner correspondent Will Tizard, the Associated Press and Orange County Register contributed to this report.

DATE: OCT 29, 1993

Clinton's Declaration Makes Victims Eligible for U.S. Aid

■ **Assistance:** FEMA programs range from emergency housing assistance to loans for farmers and ranchers. A hot line is set up to give practical advice.

By CARLA RIVERA
TIMES STAFF WRITER

BI

When President Clinton declared Southern California a disaster area Thursday, victims of the region's devastating brush fires became eligible for federal aid programs that range from emergency housing assistance to loans that help farmers and ranchers restore damaged property.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency in the next few days will open at least one and possibly several disaster assistance centers where fire victims can apply for aid.

On Thursday, the agency established a toll-free information line—(800) 525-0321—to provide practical advice to the often dazed and weary victims who wonder what to do next. One hot-line worker said he had fielded 50 to 60 calls in the first few hours of operation.

"Most of the people are very composed. Their houses are gone and they're wondering, 'What's the next step?'" said the worker, who said he was allowed to give only his first name, Pete.

Callers to the hot line can find out where evacuation centers are located, where to call for emergency food, clothing and shelter, and where to donate items such as blankets, food and other necessities, said Pete, who also staffed a disaster hot line during the 1992 riots and the Bay Area's Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989.

The phone lines will be staffed from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. seven days a week, said FEMA Regional Director Frank Kishton.

By late Wednesday, federal disaster workers from all over the country were streaming into FEMA's Pasadena field office, which had been in the process of shutting down after managing a string of Southern California disasters, including the riots and the 1992 Landers earthquake, said spokeswoman Cory La Bianca.

Unlike the riots, which, for the most part, consumed businesses, the brush fires destroyed hundreds of homes. Owners and

renters of residences that were damaged or destroyed will have access to a number of federal programs:

- **Disaster Loans:** An individual may be eligible for Small Business Administration low-interest loans of up to \$100,000 for uninsured losses on a home, up to \$20,000 for losses of personal property and up to \$1.5 million for business losses.

- **Disaster Housing Assistance:** Provides assistance to people whose homes are unlivable because of disaster-related damage.

- **Mortgage and Rental Assistance:** Helps people who lost their jobs or businesses as a result of the fires and face foreclosure or eviction from their homes.

- **Individual Family Grant Program:** Grants of about \$12,000 may be available for people unable to meet disaster-related expenses and who do not qualify for other assistance.

- **Low-Interest Deferred Payment Loans:** Loans are available for homeowners and rental property owners for repair or rebuilding of property. Applicants must have exhausted insurance and other federal and state disaster assistance to apply.

- **Disaster Unemployment Insurance:** Provides weekly payments to people out of work due to the disaster, including those who are self-employed. The program, administered by the California Employment Development Department, also provides job training and help in finding employment.

- **Low-interest loans,** administered by the Farmers Home Administration, are available to restore damaged farm property and for low-income owner occupants in rural areas.

- **FEMA also can provide referrals and numbers for fire victims who need assistance with income taxes, contractors, insurance requirements, Social Security benefits and veterans affairs.**

Fire victims can apply for disaster assistance over the telephone by calling (800) 525-0321.

These Are the Times That Try People's Souls

Fiery tragedy and human triumph underscore region's latest trauma

For those who lost homes to fire this week, from Laguna Beach to Altadena and beyond in the latest round of California disasters, our hearts and hopes for a new beginning go out. At times, it seems that we as a region have been summoned by our moment in history to deal with one catastrophe after another, as if challenged to meet some epochal test of a people's character.

Many instances of heroism can be found in recent days, with Southern Californians showing their mettle in selfless actions great and small: the firefighters seriously injured fighting flames in Chatsworth, resolute efforts to save parts of Laguna Beach, the comfort and assistance that neighbors and strangers everywhere gave each other.

What a wild and sometimes horrible ride it has been for most of us in the last few years. Without much more than a moment to catch a breath, we have found ourselves catapulted through a series of disasters. Many of us have been burned out or "downsized"; directly or indirectly we have witnessed terrible injustice and brutality. These certainly are the times that try people's souls.

There is a sinister side to the week's tragedy, beyond the random capacity of nature to exact an enormous price from humans. The number of fires—and the rapidity with which they ignited across the region—was deeply disturbing for what it suggested about the unthinkable phenomenon of copy-cat arson. What special place in hell could await anyone who with a single malicious act would destroy what people worked years to build?

Fortunately, Wednesday's fires did not produce the loss of life and homes or the vast dislocation that have occurred in some other disasters across the nation. For that, we can thank not only the fickle wind and weather changes that eventually helped but also the firefighters and police officers who did all that was humanly possible and then more. Mutual aid agreements were not just in place but they actually worked, drawing firefighters from

other communities to the region.

It wasn't just the civilian authorities who did it. The Marines sent two squadrons from El Toro and Tustin to assist the Orange County Sheriff's Department in searches for anyone trapped in Laguna Beach. And two Marine helicopters flew throughout the night to help firefighters with command and control. We need more cooperation of this kind between agencies.

Many thanks also to President Clinton and Gov. Pete Wilson for quickly promising to help; we can expect some assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency,

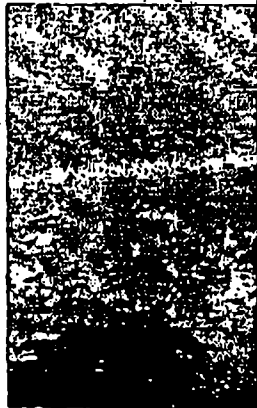
which demonstrated in last summer's Midwestern floods that it has improved its ability to respond in a mass disaster.

But even with these efforts, we need to remember that most of the important work in limiting the damage from large-scale brush fires must be done before, not after, the destructive flames begin. Orange County Fire Capt. Dan Young said it

well Wednesday night as Laguna Beach burned. What makes some of our favorite corners of the Earth so charming is also what makes them so dangerous—the shake-roofed homes close together, the rich vegetation. We must constantly temper our romantic view of our surroundings with common sense. Roofs need to be fire-resistant and brush should be cleared in those scenic areas where structures can, in seconds, become firetraps.

So it goes in Southern California, where we live in an Eden of coastal hills and desert—a sunny but sometimes hostile environment. Earthquakes do level homes and shops. Mountains and canyons do burn. And, please, may it not rain hard soon, because charred hillsides do slide.

Perhaps no one word could sum up what Southern California has gone through these past 48 hours, but after seeing all the suddenly scorched earth, Gov. Wilson described what he had viewed during his tour in a single word. "Heartbreaking," he said. That just about says it all.



As smoke lifts, heavy damage from California fire is clear

P-I News Services **PAI**

LAGUNA BEACH, Calif. — Cool sea breezes helped firefighters gain ground yesterday against a Southern California firestorm that destroyed nearly 600 homes and burned 116,000 acres. Stubborn strips of flames persisted as some residents returned to their homes to find them up in smoke.

The huge cloud of smoke hanging over Southern California was so thick that it could be seen by astronauts in orbit aboard space shuttle Columbia.

Fire refugees walked through the smoke along a coastal highway into Laguna Beach, the posh resort in Orange County half-gutted by a wall of flame that destroyed more than 300 homes.

Authorities blocked Pacific Coast Highway, allowing residents to return only on foot or bicycle. Hundreds of people made the trip.

"It's just total devastation," John McMurray said as he poked through debris that was once his home. "This whole neighborhood is burned. We haven't been able to salvage anything."

Mickie Claxton and hundreds of other residents used modern technology to learn if their houses were safe — they called home.

"My machine answered," she said. "I figure if the machine is working, the house is still there."

President Clinton declared disasters in five counties and federal agencies organized help for 25,000 displaced people. Gov. Pete Wilson offered a \$50,000 reward for arrests of arsonists, and police patrolled neighborhoods to prevent looting.

Sea breezes signaled an end to the hot, dry Santa Ana winds that Wednesday fanned 13 blazes into firestorms from Ventura County, north of Los Angeles, to the U.S.-Mexico border. The National Weather Service warned that the gusty autumn winds that blow from the deserts east of Los Angeles could return Saturday.

Firefighters seized the chance to steadily encircle the fires. Some of the fires raged out of control; others were partially contained; few of the fires threatened more residences.

Dozens of firefighters were hurt, and two were in serious condition yesterday. Thousands of others were exhausted by all-night struggles.

Firefighter Jeff Genoway, 22, caught two hours of sleep on the driveway of a house during a 48-hour shift. "It's not hard to sleep on concrete when you're extremely tired," said Genoway, stationed in Laguna Hills, overlooking the Orange County coastline.

Just north of Laguna Beach, fire damaged the ritzy Emerald Bay community but spared homes owned by Warren E. Buffett, named the wealthiest man in the country by Forbes magazine, and former baseball commissioner Peter Ueberroth.

Among the victims was the Malibu ranch of country singer Dwight Yoakam, destroyed Wednesday when flames roared down a mountain canyon.

The singer wasn't at his ranch at the time. Neighboring homes owned by actor Jack Nicholson and TV personality Dick Clark were spared.

By last night, firefighters had contained the 10,000-acre fire in Laguna Beach, 40 miles southeast of Los Angeles. Police said the cause was arson.

Arson was suspected in a 33,000-acre fire in Ventura County that destroyed 19 structures.

A homeless man who set a fire while trying to keep warm was arrested in connection with a 6,500-acre blaze that consumed 115 homes in Altadena, 15 miles northeast of Los Angeles in the San Gabriel Mountains.

In Washington, Clinton designated as disaster areas the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego and Ventura.

The president put his chief of staff, Mack McLarty, in charge of coordinating "the full delivery of all appropriate federal resources and assistance to California."

He sent Federal Emergency Management Agency Director James Lee Witt and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to California. He said 20 Forest Service tankers are already in California, with federal firefighters.

Witt promised his agency would respond quickly, opening offices as early as Saturday.

Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy, who oversees the Forest Service, was going to California. And Vice President Al Gore might go, too, but it was unlikely Clinton would, White House Press Secre-

Continued

tary Dee Dee Myers said.

Clinton said he had ordered Espy to coordinate with Witt "so that we can have a full federal response to the problems in California."

Clinton said he had "a very heart-rending talk" with Wilson about the fires and was exploring other ways Washington could help.

Thousands of federal, state and local firefighters were mobilized to help 6,500 firefighters already on the lines, Wilson's office said.

A team of 80 Marines was dispatched to Laguna Beach to help coroners' officials scour the ruins for bodies, a Marine spokeswoman said.

Air Force and Air National Guard C-130 Hercules aircraft joined the battle, spraying fire retardant like crop dusters.

At Santa Anita Park, races were canceled yesterday when officials declared that smoke from the wildfires had created "unhealthy running conditions" for the horses.

In San Diego County, the San Diego Wild Animal Park reopened a day after a fire there scorched 50 acres on the eastern perimeter. No animals were harmed.

Firefighters worked to contain five major blazes in Riverside County that charred 32,800 acres and damaged or destroyed 101 structures. Fires in San Bernardino County torched seven structures and blackened 4,660 acres.

Other Ventura County blazes charred about 10,000 acres, while 15,000 acres and 11 structures were blackened in San Diego County.

A 10,000-acre fire raged out of control yesterday in Cleveland National Forest, 50 miles southeast of Los Angeles, forcing residents of several hamlets to flee.

Fewer than 200 firefighters were available to fight the blaze until yesterday morning, when 430 people were on the lines, said Jim Lanning of the Forest Service.

"We had nothing to send," he said.

As fires ease, victims face the destruction

BY SCOTT THURM,
JANET RAE-DUPREE
AND PAMELA KRAMER
Mercury News Staff Writers

LAGUNA BEACH — Moist air and gentle winds Thursday slowed a string of vicious Southern California wildfires that have scorched an area nearly twice the size of San Jose, as 6,000 weary firefighters raced to control the fires before the expected return of hot, dry winds tonight.

Even as a half-dozen blazes raged largely out of control across a 150-mile front from Ventura County to near San Diego, residents of many of the 600 destroyed homes fought smoke and soot to sift through the rubble of their former lives. Most defiantly vowed to rebuild, even in the steep, narrow canyons that helped spread fire so quickly.

Amazingly, no one is believed to have died in the 13 major fires that erupted in rapid succession Tuesday night and early Wednesday. Officials credited the quick response by firefighters and the cooperation of residents in abandoning their homes for averting fatalities. The picturesque coastal town of Laguna Beach remained evacuated for a second night.

State and federal officials descended on the fire zones, promising emergency aid and help with rebuilding. President Clinton declared disasters in Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, Riverside and San Diego counties; Gov. Pete Wilson asked for a similar declaration in San Bernardino County.

James Lee Witt, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, arrived in Laguna Beach promising that claims centers would open by Saturday. Although FEMA has been criticized for its slow response to the 1991 Oakland hills fire and 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, Witt vowed that applicants would receive their first checks within 10 days.

Wilson also posted a \$50,000 reward for help in catching arsonists suspected of starting many of the blazes, including the Laguna Canyon fire that destroyed up to 330 homes and the 85,000-acre Greenmeadow fire that continued to threaten celebrity homes above Malibu on Thursday night.

For residents of the fire areas, Thursday was a day to assess their losses and think about starting over. Still in shock, many played out incongruous scenes like Clayton and Pauline Howland in Altadena, the San Gabriel Mountains community where 118 homes were destroyed.

As Clayton Howland crawled through smoking shards on hands and knees seeking fragments of their lives, his wife of 43 years waited patiently by the charred remains of their Jaguar. "Oh, yes, we'll rebuild," Pauline Howland said with determination. "It's really beautiful here."

While an eerie calm descended on some areas burned Wednesday, at least three of the fires spread wildly Thursday, prompting new evacuations near Thousand Oaks, northwest of Los Angeles; near Lake Elsinore in Riverside County; and near the San Diego Wild Animal Park.

The weather-granted respite may be brief. Forecasters are predicting the return of dry Santa Ana winds this evening. And while conditions are not expected to be as severe as Wednesday, they could still cause trouble.

"Fire behavior is going to increase with these winds and you could see some rapid rates of spread," said Margaret Gross, lead fire weather forecaster for the National Weather Service in Southern California.

Here's a closer look at the status of major fires Thursday night:

■ **Laguna Canyon.** After scorching 9,000 acres, the blaze that roared down Laguna Canyon was declared contained Thursday evening.

Most of Laguna Beach remained off limits, but some residents were able to walk or bicycle along a smoky Pacific Coast Highway to their homes. Officials said they hoped to set up a pass system by today to allow remaining residents into the fire area.

"Having it happen to my own

town, watching house after house after house go up, is just impossible to believe," said Mayor Lida Lenney.

Joyce Hanson used a handkerchief to dry tears as she viewed two chimneys and a Spanish-tile hot tub — all that remained of her home of 23 years. "I can't believe what fire can do," she said.

"It was a good place to live," Hanson added. "And it will be again. It's just going to take

awhile."

Fire officials confirmed Thursday that they had planned last winter to burn about 100 acres in the path of Wednesday's fire, in an effort to reduce a heavy accumulation of brush and trees. Rain scrubbed the plan, but officials said they could not guarantee that the burned area would have stopped Wednesday's inferno.

■ **Altadena.** As flames continued to rake the hillsides, residents of many of the destroyed

Continued

homes returned to survey the wreckage. Amid the devastation, there were bright spots: a few undamaged homes; pets that miraculously reappeared; koi that continued to live in an ash-filled pond.

Fire officials declared the blaze, believed to have been set by a homeless man trying to keep warm, 30 percent contained. But they offered no estimate on when they might encircle the fire, which had burned more than

5,500 acres.

Crews worked to rewire the hard-hit Kinneloa Canyon neighborhood for electricity.

"We're an intrepid type," Beverly Slocum, 49, said of the people who lived in the densely grown canyon. Slocum and her family were lucky — only the living room of their home was damaged by flames.

Others acknowledged newfound fears. "I'm not sure if we're going to rebuild," said John Lewis, 50, as he looked at the rubble of his home. "First, we have to get through the basics. Where's the underwear? Where's the toothbrush?"

■ **Riverside County.** Favorable winds helped firefighters gain the upper hand over the huge, so-called California fire, which destroyed some 30 homes and blackened 25,100 acres. But 600 firefighters could ring only 60 percent of the blaze in a tenuous line. There was still no estimate of when the fire would be fully contained.

In steep Willow Canyon, on the extreme eastern flank of the fire, Jim Stuller of Auburn and a five-engine, 20-man strike team crawled through dense brush, chaparral and scrub oaks to clean a firebreak and drag hoses. Fanned by erratic winds, the fire was trying to push down the canyon into a development of estate homes.

Behind Stuller, two huge homes that crews had saved Wednesday stood out like white beacons on a black landscape.

"We're in good shape now," he said. "The main fire (in that area) is out, and we just have the dirty work now."

All residents of Laguna Beach ordered to evacuate

OCT 28 1993

From News Services

Los Angeles, Calif. Fed by fierce, dry Santa Ana winds and high temperatures, brush fires exploded over five Southern California counties Wednesday, damaging or destroying more than 300 homes, threatening thousands of others and charring more than 65,000 acres.

The infernos hit hardest in the affluent communities of Emerald Bay in Laguna Beach, 40 miles southeast of Los Angeles, and Altadena, 10 miles northeast of Los Angeles. No deaths were reported, but at least 15 firefighters and nine civilians were reported injured in 13 large fires stretching from Ventura County to the Mexican border.

Authorities ordered the evacuation of all 24,500 residents of the 5.6-square-mile town of Laguna Beach as flames consumed block after block of the town yesterday evening. Officials set up shelters in Dana Point and Corona del Mar for the evacuees.

"I'm watching the helicopters dip their buckets in the ocean to desperately try to get water and it all seems to no avail," said Laguna Beach resident Jan Fisher. "It's really pathetic and sad here."

Smoke and ash eclipsed the sun over downtown Los Angeles, freeways and schools were closed and wind-borne embers picked out homes at random, quickly engulfing roofs in flame.

Damage was expected to exceed hundreds of millions of dollars in one of the most devastating brush-fire outbreaks in memory. The fires fed off vegetation baked to a crisp in the rainless summer.

Gov. Pete Wilson declared a state of emergency for Los Angeles and Ventura counties and prepared to make

Fires continued on page 27A
similar declarations for others.

In exclusive Emerald Canyon, flames destroyed more than 100 homes, many of them multimillion-dollar estates. Schoolchildren were evacuated and the Pacific Coast Hwy. was closed as firefighters fought desperately against stiff afternoon winds to halt the 16-mile swath of flames.

El Morro Beach mobile home park north of Laguna Beach, destroying at least 60 homes. Both blazes were believed to have been deliberately set, officials said.

At least 75 homes and buildings were damaged or destroyed by an early-morning fire that spread rapidly through 4,000 acres in the affluent foothill community of Altadena, authorities said. Late yesterday, a flare-up of that fire prompted police in Pasadena and Sierra Madre to order

hundreds of people to leave their homes. One man was arrested for allegedly looting abandoned homes in Altadena, police said.

In the rugged Eaton Canyon, authorities arrested a homeless man who was booked on suspicion of unlawful use of fire. He apparently was trying to keep warm by a campfire that touched off nearby brush, authorities said.

Fires continued on page 28A

Other major fires charred 21,000 acres between Thousand Oaks and the Pacific Ocean 45 miles northwest of Los Angeles; about 3,000 acres in Escondido, 30 miles north of San Diego, where homes were threatened and officials at the San Diego Wild Animal Park worked frantically to move 26 endangered California condors and four Andean condors, and about 750 acres in the Orange County communities of Anaheim Hills and Orange 40 miles southeast of Los Angeles, where nearly 30 homes were damaged.

A fire had consumed 6,000 acres near Santa Margarita in the Cleveland National Forest by late evening and burned an unknown number of structures, said a U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman.

Wilson flew into Burbank Airport, meeting other elected officials at a fire command center in Pasadena. The Federal Emergency Management Agency said winds are expected to increase today and Friday, and no rain is forecast for the next seven days. Los Angeles County Deputy Fire Chief Paul Blackburn said it could take a week to contain the blazes.

State emergency officials dispatched 40 strike teams and 200 fire engines

partments in the south. The U.S. Forest Service summoned extra help from throughout the West.

Many of the most serious fires remained out of control late yesterday as smoke darkened the skies and white ash fell like mid-autumn snowflakes.

In Laguna Beach, where property damage was most severe, the fire broke out just before noon, quickly jumped a ridge and spread south. Dozens of homes were engulfed in the seaside community of Emerald Bay, where home values reach \$10 million and more. Laguna Beach school officials immediately evacuated three schools.

In downtown Laguna Beach, residents crowded onto rooftops and lined the Pacific Coast Hwy. to gaze at flames snaking down the hills toward the ocean. Helicopters dipped giant buckets in the Pacific, then headed back to drop the contents on homes burning in the canyons.

The Altadena fire, which began near dawn, caught many residents still asleep or eating breakfast as it raced through expensive neighborhoods, pushed by gusts of 50 miles per hour. The fire covered more than 1,000 acres by 10 a.m., climbing canyon walls and spreading embers through the air, fire officials said.

Destroying homes almost as fast as terrified residents could flee, the Altadena fire spread to 4,000 acres by noon. By that time, water pressure to many parts of the area had petered out.

Officials attributed the problem to a five-hour power loss, caused by burned electric poles and lines, that shut down pumps feeding the area's water supply. Desperate firefighters were forced to fill pumper trucks from swimming pools.

Retired maintenance worker Earl Johnson, 65, was one of those who watched his home go up in flames.

"I built this myself, all by myself — and now it's gone," the soot-covered Johnson said as flames danced amid the rubble of the three-bedroom structure, surrounded by tranquil Japanese gardens.

Sandy Bohlen, a longtime resident, fled the house shortly before the fire raged close enough to damage the roof.

"You feel numb," she said afterward, recalling the horror of her evacuation. "I thought, 'What do I grab?'"

But I didn't know what to do. The fire was out of control."

Laurel Magallanas was awakened by a phone call from a relative who had heard about the fire. Looking out from her yard, Magallanas could see soaring flames. She ordered her children to put on their shoes, then threw her most cherished family pictures in a bag before driving away.

A few residents complained bitterly to police that they should be allowed to try to douse the flames before evacuating.

Atop 5,712-foot Mount Wilson, nervous scientists were keeping a close eye on the fire, one ridge to the south. The summit contains an observatory crammed with costly scientific equipment, as well as the transmitters for every major Los Angeles television station and most of the city's FM radio stations and paging services.

In Ventura County, a day-old arson fire swept across 21,000 acres of Santa Monica Mountain back country to the Pacific Ocean. But despite the enormous acreage burned, only four homes were lost.

As the fire spread, officials evacuated the children's unit at Camarillo State Hospital, a psychiatric facility in the county.

13 Fires Sweep Southland 200 Homes Burn; Laguna, Altadena Hard Hit

A1

■ **Inferno:** Thousands of residences are threatened as winds whip brush fires. Hundreds of millions of dollars in damage expected throughout Southern California.

By DAVID FERRELL and ERIC MALNIC, TIMES STAFF WRITERS

Fed by fierce Santa Ana winds and high temperatures, brush fires ran rampant over Southern California on Wednesday, damaging or destroying more than 200 homes, threatening thousands of others and charring more than 65,000 acres in far-flung portions of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego and Ventura counties.

Crowning the Southland in a virtual ring of fire, the infernos hit hardest in the affluent community of Emerald Bay in Laguna Beach and in Altadena, northeast of Los Angeles. No deaths were reported, but at least 14 firefighters and nine civilians were reported injured in 13 separate blazes, fire officials said.

Authorities said two fires were caused by arson and a third was set accidentally by a transient. A suspect was being questioned in a fourth fire.

Damage was expected to run into the hundreds of millions of dollars in one of the most sudden and devastating brush fire outbreaks in memory.

In exclusive Emerald Canyon, flames blamed on a "copycat arsonist" destroyed more than 100 homes, many of them multimillion-dollar estates. Schoolchildren were evacuated and Pacific Coast Highway was closed as firefighters fought desperately against stiff afternoon winds to halt the 10-mile swath of flames. By late afternoon, California Highway Patrol officers and local police were operating hoses because there were too few firefighters for the job.

At least 50 other homes were destroyed by an early morning fire that spread rapidly through 4,000 acres in the foothill community of Altadena, about 15 miles from the Civic Center, authorities said. Only hours after that blaze broke out in rugged Eaton Canyon, authorities arrested a transient who was booked on suspicion of unlawful use of

■ **WILDLIFE THREATENED** — The Laguna Canyon blaze poses a serious threat to the area's wildlife, including the rare California gnatcatcher.

fire.

The man apparently was camping in the hills and his campfire touched off nearby brush, a Los Angeles County Fire Department spokesman said.

Other major fires charred 21,000 acres between Thousand Oaks and the Pacific Ocean; about 3,000 acres in Escondido, where homes were threatened and officials at the San Diego Wild Animal Park worked frantically to move endangered California condors and other species; and about 750 acres in the Orange County communities of Anaheim Hills and Orange, where nearly 30 homes were damaged, two of them seriously.

In Washington, the U.S. Senate interrupted its business Wednesday night to hear brief reports on

Continued from A1

the fires from California Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer.

"There is a potential catastrophe in the making in California," Feinstein said, adding that the Federal Emergency Management Agency was prepared to add more tanker trucks and personnel to the firefighting effort.

Boxer urged Gov. Pete Wilson to ask the federal government for disaster relief. Wilson immediately declared a state of emergency and flew into Burbank Airport, meeting other elected officials at a fire command center in Pasadena. Forecasters said winds were expected to diminish today but increase Friday; no rain is forecast for the next seven days.

Many of the most serious fires remained out of control late Wednesday as smoke darkened the skies and white ash fell on Southern California like mid-autumn snowflakes.

Laguna Beach

The fire that would cause the region's most extensive damage broke out just before noon Wednesday, quickly jumped a ridge and spread south to Emerald Bay.

Dozens of homes were engulfed in the seaside community, where home values reach \$10 million or more. Laguna Beach Unified School District officials immediately evacuated three schools—El Morro Elementary, Thurston Middle School and Top of the World Elementary. Children were shuttled by bus to Laguna Beach High

School.

In downtown Laguna Beach, residents crowded onto rooftops and lined Pacific Coast Highway to gaze at the flames snaking down the hills toward the ocean. Traffic came to a virtual halt.

Overhead, helicopters dipped 150-gallon "Bambi buckets" in the Pacific, then headed back to drop the water on the homes burning in the canyons.

Laguna Beach veterinarian John Hamil, whose animal hospital rests on Laguna Canyon Road, ignored firefighters' warnings to abandon his property and was hosing down shrubbery outside when flames roared down the hill.

He was just one of scores of people forced to make a hasty retreat.

"It was incredible," Hamil said. "The heat was just so intense I couldn't believe it. I've never been that close to a fire."

Altadena

The Altadena fire, which began near dawn Wednesday, caught many residents still asleep or eating breakfast as it raced through expensive neighborhoods pushed by 50 m.p.h. gusts.

The fire covered more than 1,000 acres by 10 a.m., climbing canyon walls and spreading embers through the air, fire officials said.

Destroying homes almost as fast as terrified residents could flee, the Altadena fire spread to 4,000 acres by noon, and about 1,000 firefighters were struggling to contain it. By that time, water pressure to many parts of the area had petered out, leaving many frustrated residents unable to douse their own homes and firefighters unable to refill their pumper units.

"We didn't have the water to fight the fire," County Fire Department Battalion Chief Dave Horn said.

Officials attributed the problem to a five-hour power outage that occurred when fire burned up power poles and electrical lines. The outage shut down the electric pumps feeding the area's water supply. Desperate firefighters were forced to fill pumper trucks from swimming pools.

When the power went out, enough water was left in the lines leading to each hydrant to fill a 500-gallon pumper truck.

"We'd send an engine to a hydrant to get water, they'd fill up and then it was gone," Horn said.

Asked if the lack of water resulted in a loss of homes, Horn said, "I couldn't say that. Someone might say it was a contributing factor."

It was not until about 2 p.m., some residents said, that water again began to flow normally.

On Megular Drive, at least five homes were destroyed and others were badly damaged. Retired maintenance worker Earl Johnson, 65, was one of those who watched his home go up in flames.

"I built this myself, all by myself—and now it's gone," the soot-covered Johnson said as flames danced amid the rubble of the three-bedroom structure, surrounded by tranquil Japanese gardens.

Sandy Bohlen, a longtime resident of the street, fled her house shortly before the fire raged up close enough to damage the roof.

"You feel numb," she said after-

ward, recalling the horror of her evacuation. "I thought, 'What do I grab?' But I didn't know what to do. The fire was out of control."

Laurel Magallanas of Kinneloa Mesa Road was awakened by a phone call from a relative who had heard about the fire. Looking out from her yard, Magallanas could see soaring flames. She ordered her children to put on their shoes, then threw her most cherished family pictures in a bag before driving away.

In the smoke-filled streets, an eerie scene unfolded as her neighbors led their horses to safer ground. One neighbor had tied his two horses to the door handles of his car, one on each side.

"I was scared to death," Magallanas said. "People were running down the street with horses, trying to get them out."

Pasadena resident Susan Seager, 37, who drove to Altadena at 8 a.m., hoped to catch a glimpse of distant flames on the mountain ridge. Instead, she and her husband and two children became engulfed in heavy smoke. They watched in horror as a palm tree half a block from them burst into flame, as if by magic.

"[This] palm tree was like a big red torch," she said.

She said a strange scene unfolded as a nearby convalescent hospital began to disgorge its elderly residents, who were rolled on beds and in wheelchairs, clustering in the smoke-darkened parking lot.

To Seager it appeared "there was no one there to take them away. It was chaos. . . . It was a very frightening scene."

Seager remembered seeing the residents of nearby homes packing cars and turning on sprinklers. Firefighters were scattered throughout the area, but there were no helicopters and no apparent front to battle the encroaching blaze, according to Seager.

"I knew that something bad was going to happen," she said. "I just knew . . . that it was going to go crazy. My husband said, 'We'd better get out of here.'"

At least 50 elderly patients were evacuated from the Marlinda Convalescent Home and Park Marino Convalescent Hospital, which sit side by side on Washington Boulevard.

At first, many patients were wheeled down the street in their beds and placed in an empty storefront. Later, they were taken to nearby St. Luke's Medical Center, then transported—along with other patients—to Huntington Memorial and Arcadia Methodist hospitals.

St. Luke's was shut down, except for a skeleton crew doing cleanup and preparing for injured firefighters.

Many residents who live above the Eaton Canyon Golf Course were angry because fire trucks did not show up until about 9:30 a.m., hours after residents were ordered to evacuate.

Eddy Lool watched helplessly while his neighbor's home, two houses away, went up in flames, apparently touched off by airborne embers.

"Where is the fire engine? It's been burning for two hours!" said the irate Lool, who lives on Villa Highlands Drive. "Why are we just standing here? Why not let the residents fight the fire with hoses and buckets?"

Firefighters finally arrived about 10:40 a.m. Their efforts in some areas were hampered by the low water pressure, authorities said.

A few residents complained bitterly to police that they should at least be allowed to try to douse the flames before evacuating.

Barclay Kamb, a geology and geophysics professor at Caltech, was handcuffed by police and escorted onto the street after he refused to leave his home at 3500 Fairpoint St., said his wife, Linda.

Her husband had wanted to remove palm fronds from his property because they catch fire easily, she said.

Evacuation centers were opened at nearby schools, where worried residents gathered to await word on the fates of their homes.

Mt. Wilson

Atop the 5,712-foot mountain, nervous scientists were keeping a close eye on the fire, one ridge to the south. The summit is the site of an observatory crammed with costly scientific equipment, as well as the transmitters for every major Los Angeles television station and most of the city's FM radio stations and paging services.

If the fire crests nearby Mt. Harvard, scientists will begin work at Mt. Wilson's two 100-foot solar towers, packing away irreplaceable mirrors and lenses and driving them to safety, UCLA astronomer Larry Webster said.

"We would not have the funding to replace them," he said. "If there is smoke or even a small fire, it could damage the optics. If a fire moves through the solar observa-

tory, there would be no hope."

Ventura County

A day-old arson fire swept across 21,000 acres of Santa Monica Mountain back country to the Pacific Ocean. But but despite the enormous acreage, only four homes were lost.

Authorities arrested a person on suspicion of arson but would not reveal details.

The blaze continued to move steadily through dense brush south of Thousand Oaks, spreading east to the Los Angeles County line and west down the face of Point Mugu by noon.

"All we can do is juggle resources and hope we're at the right place at the right time," Ventura County Fire Chief George Lund said. "We can't really prepare, we just have to react."

Two Ventura County firefighters suffered minor injuries battling a section of the Thousand Oaks blaze that destroyed four houses at Deer Creek.

As the fire spread, officials evacuated the children's unit at Carna-

pillo State Hospital, west of Point Mugu, and officials scrambled to evacuate more than 100 exotic animals, including monkeys, birds and three elephants, from the Animal Actors ranch near Yerba Buena Road.

Pacific Coast Highway was closed at 6:30 a.m. just south of Las Posas Road as the fire reached a ridge overlooking the roadway.

"We watched it just sweep down the mountain," said CHP Officer

Mike Robbins. "If you can imagine it, the entire hillside was solid burning flame. It was incredible."

Renee Groux was one of four firefighters from Point Mugu who battled to protect communications

facilities on the hillside. "It came at us and it was intense and it was hot," she said. "At one point we got real nervous, because it was bearing down on us. But we stood our ground."

To the north, a fast-moving fire that broke out near Santa Susana Pass Road in Simi Valley at about 1:30 a.m. Wednesday injured four firefighters—one of them critical.

ly—and consumed more than 2,000 acres of chaparral-covered hillsides by nightfall, fire officials said.

The Los Angeles city firefighters were burned when flames overtook their engine as water pressure failed, the officials said.

The most seriously injured firefighter was taken to Northridge Hospital, where he underwent emergency surgery. Two others were hospitalized at Sherman Oaks Community Hospital Burn Center and the fourth was treated and released, said Phillip J. Weirter, spokesman for the Los Angeles Fire Department.

Authorities were questioning a 27-year-old transient in connection with the blaze, but declined to comment further.

The fire forced the evacuation of about 400 residents and prompted officials to close the Metrolink railway line between the Simi Valley and the San Fernando Valley.

"The situation has really deteriorated out there," Capt. Norman Platt of the Ventura County Fire Department said Wednesday afternoon. "The weather is bad, the temperatures have gone up and the winds have come up."

A fire that started about 2 a.m. Wednesday near Steckel Road in Santa Paula spread west toward the city of Ventura during the day, burning across 2,000 acres of remote hillsides by late afternoon.

The Steckel fire was moving through thick brush in Wheeler Canyon and Allison Canyon, prompting the closure of California 50 and forcing the evacuation of several dozen ranches in the area. About 60 ranch owners waited anxiously at a roadblock for county animal officers to bring out their horses and other livestock.

In Ojai, a fire that broke out about 10 a.m. had scared 800 acres of brushland by midafternoon.

"We're doing what we can," said R. Ranger Dorn, a Ventura County fire captain. "We're about out of equipment. We were down to two engines in the Ojai Valley when we spotted this one."

Orange and San Diego Counties

In Anaheim and Orange, 750 acres burned and seven homes were damaged, two of them severely. Twenty-two others had minor roof damage, officials said. The Anaheim fire was intentional-

Contributing to today's fire coverage were Times staff writers Fred Alvarez, Leslie Berger, Edward J. Boyer, Dwayne Bray, Jeff Brazil, Glenn Bunting, Mike Carlson, Sara Catania, Jack Cheevers, Aileen Cho, Henry Chu, Richard Lee Colvin, David Colker, Marla Cone, Miles Corwin, Aaron Curtiss, Tina Daunt, Poncho Doll, Faye Fiore, Ralph Frammolino, Larry Gordon, Michael Granberry, Carla Hall, Robert Lee Holz, Berkley Hudson, Tracey Kaplan, Daryl Kelley, Chau Lam, Peggy Y. Lee, Myron Levin, Carlos V. Lozano, Jeff Meyers, Joanna Miller, Edmund Newton, Tony Perry, Bob Pool, Mack Reed, Kenneth Reich, David Reyes, Lee Romney, Richard Simon, Stephanie Simon, Constance Sommer, Jocelyn Stewart, Renee Ta'wa, Vicki Torres, Rebecca Trounson and Amy Wallace. Times correspondents who contributed included Mala Davis, Brenda Day, Julie Fields, Robin Greene, Andrew LePage, Tommy Li, James Malella Jr., Patrick McCartney, Jeff McDonald, J.E. Mitchell, Geoffrey Mohan, Matthew Mosk, Jeff Schnauffer, Leo Smith and Richard Winton. Times researchers who contributed included Cecilia Rasmussen, Tracy Thomas, D'Jamilla Salem, Cynthia Viers and Nona Yates.

ly set, they said. About 350 firefighters battled to bring the blaze to 80% containment by midafternoon.

In the brush-covered hills of northeastern San Diego County, a fire that erupted shortly after midnight burned across 6,000 acres, destroying six homes and five other buildings near 1,800-acre Wild Animal Park in the San Pasqual Valley.

Twenty-six California condors and four Andean condors were evacuated from the "condorminium" to the park veterinary hospital two miles away, but none of the endangered birds were hurt. The park assembled trucks, vans and trailers to evacuate other animals if needed. Three cheetahs were crated up for evacuation, and keepers raced to the resting area for the Okapi antelopes because the area was in the fire's path before the wind shifted.

Park spokesman Tom Hanscom said the park's animals seemed

more unnerved by the flights of tankers and helicopters than by the continual rain of smoke and ash. A seven-year program of controlled burning around the park was credited with helping slow the fire's march.

About 750 firefighters from the state Department of Forestry, the U.S. Forest Service and local fire departments fought the blazes amid shifting winds. Air tankers and helicopters from nearby Ramona Airport were pressed into service.

The helicopters scooped water from an Animal Park watering hole normally frequented by European bison, water buffalo and several species of exotic sheep, deer and antelope. Keepers stood by to see that the animals were not injured.

A few hardy foursomes declined to leave the Eagle Crest Golf Course on the west side of the park even though flames came within a few dozen yards of the back nine.

"The safest place to be in a fire is in the middle of a golf course," assistant pro Bill Hughes said. "Green grass doesn't burn. Most of the guys just stayed home but a few decided to play anyway."

co-sponsors of the Administration's legislation. Notable among them—strategically placed in the middle like the cherry on a sundae—was Sen. James M. Jeffords of Vermont, the only Republican co-sponsor and their only claim so far to bipartisan support for the proposal.

Both Clintons spoke of the need for the health care debate to be bipartisan and Republican leaders present at the ceremony promised to work with them. But the Republicans also made clear that the debate will be neither short nor easy.

"The long-awaited presentation of your health reform bill today is just the beginning of a long, tortuous process that must wend its way through the Congress," House Minority Leader Robert H. Michel (R-Ill.) told Clinton.

"As the process begins, we should be clear as to what the debate will be all about. There are substantive and profound policy differences between those who support the concepts at the heart of your bill and those of us like myself who see another possibly different road to health care reform," Michel said. "The real differences cannot be glossed over."

Liberal Democrats, for their part, greeted the plan with complaints that Clinton had already done too much to placate conservative opponents.

As has been the case in other congressional appearances in recent weeks, the ceremony on Capitol Hill became something of a personal triumph for the First Lady as members of Congress, lobbyists and visitors pressed toward her.

When President Clinton decided to entrust to Mrs. Clinton, the First Lady, the responsibility of preparing this legislation, some criticized his judgment in taking so central an issue to his Administration and to the country's future and giving it in the charge of the First Lady of the United States," said House Speaker Thomas S. Foley (D-Wash.). "Nobody questions that judgment today."

As Mrs. Clinton praised her husband for being willing to come to grips with the health care problem, he could clearly be seen mouthing the words "I love you" to her back. Later, on returning to the White House, the couple stood together talking intently at the door to the Oval Office before heading off, separately, to their next appointments.

Times staff writer Karen Tumulty contributed to this story.