

# Alberta wildfire displaces 25,000 people

Associated Press

FORT McMURRAY, Alberta — A massive wildfire raging in the Canadian province of Alberta grew to 210,035 acres and officials said Thursday they would like to move south about 25,000 evacuees who had previously fled north, including 8,000 by air.

More than 80,000 people have emptied Fort McMurray in the heart of Canada's oil sands, authorities said.

The Alberta government declared a province-wide fire ban in an effort to reduce the risk of more blazes in a province that is very hot and dry.

"It is a very rare step," Alberta Environment Minister Shannon Phillips said. Phillips called it an offense to ignore the ban and said it can lead to fines.

The government said more than 1,100 firefighters, 145 helicopters, 138 pieces of heavy equipment and 22 air tankers were fighting a total of 49 wildfires, with seven considered out of control. Chad Morrison with AB Wildfire, manager of wildfire prevention, said the blaze grew rapidly, fueled by gusting winds, and he expected the fire to continue to grow Thursday because of dry conditions but it will be away from the community.

The fire has torched 1,600 homes and other buildings in Fort McMurray. There have been no injuries or death from the fires. The province of Alberta declared a state of emergency.

Alberta Premier Rachel Notley said rain is needed. She said she didn't know how much better the evacuation could have been when asked if ample warning was given



A wildfire moves towards the town of Anzac from Fort McMurray, Alberta, on Wednesday. Alberta declared a state of emergency Wednesday as crews frantically held back wind-whipped wildfires. Unseasonably hot temperatures combined with dry conditions have transformed the boreal forest in much of Alberta into a tinder box.

Jason Franson/The Canadian Press via AP

to residents, noting that in 48 hours more than 80,000 people were evacuated from a town that essentially has two roads out of it.

Fort McMurray is surrounded by wilderness and is Canada's main oil sands town. Despite the size of the town and its importance to the Canadian economy, there are essentially only two ways out via car. The region has the third largest reserves of oil in the world behind Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.

Aided by high winds, scorching heat and low humidity, the fire grew from 29 square miles Tuesday to 38.6 square miles on Wednesday, but by Thursday it was almost nine times that — at 328.2 square miles.

The fire remained wrapped around the western and southern edges of the city.

No rain clouds were expected around Fort McMurray until late Saturday, with 40 percent chance of showers, according to online forecasts by Environment Canada. The chances drop to 30 percent on Sunday and Monday, with the skies then clearing up, the service reported.

About 25,000 evacuees moved north in the hours after Tuesday's evacuation, where oil sands work camps were being pressed into service to house people. But the bulk of the more than 80,000 evacuees fled south to Edmonton and elsewhere, and officials said they eventually would like to move everyone south where they have better support for the displaced. Officials are now trying to fly 8,000 evacuees out of the area starting Thursday afternoon and are

hoping the highway becomes safe enough to move people that way.

"Our focus right now is on getting those people south as quickly as possible," Notley said.

Government officials said energy companies in the area were prepared to use their planes in an airlift and a military aircraft was on standby.

Unseasonably hot temperatures combined with dry conditions have transformed the boreal forest in much of Alberta into a tinder box. Morrison said they are investigating the cause of the fire but he said it started in a remote forested area and said it could have been lightning.

A combination of factors conspired to make this wildfire especially ferocious, said Bill Patzert, a climatologist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Labo-

ratory in California. The El Nino global weather system brought Alberta a mild winter and low snowpack, he said. Patzert said the flames sparked at a time between the snowy season and before springtime rains that turn the landscape green, making the region especially vulnerable to wildfire.

The flames are moving so fast that they are nearly impossible to fight, he said.

"In a way, it's a perfect storm," Patzert said. "It's been warm, it's been dry and windy. It's the in-between period before you're in the full bloom of spring."

The fire is driving one of the largest evacuations in North America in recent memory, said Bill Stewart, co-director of the University of California's Center for Fire Research and Outreach at the University of California, Berkeley.

With few exceptions in the United States, an entire town hasn't been threatened on this scale for over 100 years, he said, noting rather that devastation has struck neighborhoods and smaller communities in California.

There is no stopping the advance of a fire such as the wind-driven flames in Alberta, which is spreading embers well beyond fire lines, Stewart said. He noted that the aggressive fire is also unusual for burning so early in the warm season and so far north.

"You could add five times the number of firefighters, but you can't get all the embers,"

he said. "There's no way to put out every ember flying over firefighters' heads."

Fort McMurray resident Fahed Labek, whose relatives from war-torn Syria recently migrated to northern Alberta as refugees, said his family has escaped one fire for another. Labek fled the encroaching wildfire two days ago with family members, who arrived in Canada in late February.

Labek, who made it to Edmonton after a harrowing journey, is concerned the refugees are enduring additional trauma after leaving the Middle East. But he said he's taking solace in the helpfulness of Canadians now assisting the tens of thousands of forest fire evacuees.

The fire has dealt a blow to the region's crude production, with companies curtailing production or stopping it altogether. Notley, the province premier, said the infrastructure for oil and gas production remains largely unaffected. What's slowing down production is that their employees are not there, she said.

The airport only suffered minor damage because of the "herculean" efforts of firefighters, said Scott Long of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. Firefighters have focused on protecting key infrastructure like the water treatment plant, the hospital and the airport.

Morrison said four air tankers from Quebec will arrive Thursday and 100 firefighters are arriving from Ontario.

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## AccuWeather.com Forecast

TODAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
Partly sunny	Very warm with sunshine	Mostly sunny and not as warm	Partly sunny	Nice with clouds and sun

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST

80°	52°	82°	56°	72°	46°	68°	40°	73°	44°
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HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST

85°	55°	88°	60°	77°	49°	74°	44°	78°	43°
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ALMANAC

**PENDLETON**  
through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	68°	50°
Normals	68°	44°
Records	96° (1966)	29° (1904)

**PRECIPITATION**  
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.15"  
Month to date 0.15"  
Normal month to date 0.17"  
Year to date 4.55"  
Last year to date 3.13"  
Normal year to date 5.32"

**HERMISTON**  
through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	71°	54°
Normals	70°	44°
Records	95° (1966)	29° (1982)

**PRECIPITATION**  
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.59"  
Month to date 0.59"  
Normal month to date 0.20"  
Year to date 3.57"  
Last year to date 1.79"  
Normal year to date 4.22"

SUN AND MOON

	New	First	Full	Last
Sunrise today		5:35 a.m.		
Sunset tonight		8:09 p.m.		
Moonrise today		5:54 a.m.		
Moonset today		8:14 p.m.		

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

REGIONAL CITIES

	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Astoria	70	50	s	65	49	s
Baker City	71	45	c	76	44	pc
Bend	68	46	c	75	42	s
Brookings	68	54	pc	65	52	pc
Burns	70	45	c	74	44	t
Enterprise	69	49	t	72	47	pc
Eugene	79	51	pc	79	51	s
Heppner	77	52	pc	80	52	s
Hermiston	85	55	pc	88	60	s
John Day	74	54	c	76	50	pc
Klamath Falls	66	46	t	73	41	pc
La Grande	74	50	c	76	48	s
Meacham	72	48	c	74	46	s
Medford	76	54	c	83	52	s
Newport	65	49	s	62	49	s
North Bend	66	53	pc	62	52	s
Ontario	80	53	c	80	51	s
Pasco	86	57	pc	89	56	s
Pendleton	80	52	pc	82	56	s
Portland	82	55	s	82	53	s
Redmond	72	46	c	78	41	s
Salem	82	52	pc	81	51	s
Spokane	77	54	pc	81	54	s
Ukiah	70	47	c	74	42	s
Vancouver	81	53	s	81	51	s
Walla Walla	80	56	pc	81	58	s
Yakima	86	57	s	89	55	s

WORLD CITIES

	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Beijing	78	48	s	79	48	pc
Hong Kong	89	80	pc	89	79	c
Jerusalem	67	53	pc	68	52	s
London	72	54	pc	73	56	pc
Mexico City	82	51	pc	84	56	pc
Moscow	67	44	s	70	43	pc
Paris	75	53	pc	75	54	pc
Rome	71	51	pc	71	53	pc
Seoul	67	50	sh	72	51	pc
Sydney	77	57	s	76	63	s
Tokyo	71	62	c	75	62	r

WINDS

	Today	Saturday
(in mph)	NNE 8-16	NNE 6-12
<b>Boardman</b>	N 7-14	NW 4-8
<b>Pendleton</b>		

UV INDEX TODAY

1	4	6	6	4	1
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8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m.  
0-2, Low 3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme  
The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

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NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

NATIONAL SUMMARY

A mosaic of rain will affect areas from the Carolinas to southern New England today. Showers and storms will extend from California to the Rockies and along the Canada border in the northern Plains.

**Yesterday's National Extremes:** (for the 48 contiguous states)  
**High 97°** in Chandler, Ariz.      **Low 22°** in Angel Fire, N.M.

NATIONAL CITIES

	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	81	48	pc	69	44	pc
Atlanta	72	51	s	80	61	s
Atlantic City	54	49	r	59	52	c
Baltimore	55	47	r	66	54	c
Billings	64	49	c	68	47	s
Birmingham	74	50	s	82	58	s
Boise	77	57	c	71	53	t
Boston	55	47	c	58	50	c
Charleston, SC	74	54	pc	81	62	s
Charleston, WV	66	46	sh	75	54	pc
Chicago	76	58	s	61	41	t
Cleveland	63	46	c	71	45	t
Dallas	84	62	pc	84	65	pc
Denver	80	58	s	60	40	t
Detroit	70	51	s	69	41	t
El Paso	92	61	s	82	56	s
Fairbanks	61	43	pc	59	38	pc
Fargo	83	42	pc	72	43	pc
Honolulu	84	72	pc	83	71	pc
Houston	83	57	s	83	62	pc
Indianapolis	70	54	s	79	48	pc
Jacksonville	76	52	s	81	56	s
Kansas City	80	60	s	81	60	t
Las Vegas	71	54	t	72	57	pc
Little Rock	78	54	s	85	61	s
Los Angeles	67	55	t	67	56	pc
Louisville	73	55	s	82	58	pc
Memphis	76	56	s	84	64	s
Miami	81	61	s	81	65	s
Millwaukee	73	56	s	57	41	c
Minneapolis	85	55	pc	70	46	s
Nashville	73	50	s	84	62	s
New Orleans	78	60	s	81	63	s
New York City	55	51	r	62	52	c
Oklahoma City	81	58	s	82	62	pc
Omaha	85	58	s	73	53	pc
Philadelphia	57	50	r	66	55	c
Phoenix	78	60	pc	77	62	t
Portland, ME	60	42	c	54	44	c
Providence	58	47	sh	64	49	c
Raleigh	64	49	sh	73	57	pc
Rapid City	82	47	t	63	41	c
Reno	63	48	t	63	49	t
Sacramento	66	53	t	68	53	pc
St. Louis	79	60	s	86	58	pc
Salt Lake City	73	53	t	68	53	sh
San Diego	69	59	t	67	59	c
San Francisco	64	54	t	66	53	pc
Seattle	75	54	s	79	5	