

No time to grieve

Wildfires hit emergency workers hard as their families, communities suffer

By JANIE HAR
Associated Press

For the past week, Robert Tierney Jr. has been registering patients at a Northern California hospital in the mornings and checking out possible rentals after work, trying to count his blessings even though his house is one of the more than 1,000 destroyed in a deadly wildfire.

Tierney is among dozens of staff members, including doctors, nurses and others, at Dignity Health Mercy Medical Center in Redding keeping the hospital running despite losing their homes to the flames.

Tierney, 57, choked up briefly as he recalled the moment he learned from a kid on a bicycle that his house and belongings were gone, save for a wedding dress and several hampers of clothes he grabbed before leaving his neighborhood 225 miles north of San Francisco.

“I have to come to work. My wife is disabled and I have to make a living and I have a terrific job and it is my pleasure to be here, so I’m just real fortunate I have a job to come to at a time like this,” he said Thursday.

Mike Mangas, spokesman for Dignity Health North State, said 67 staff and volunteers at the hospital are without permanent shelter, their homes destroyed or too damaged to occupy.

“It’s been amazing,” he said. “There have been people sleeping on the floor at the hospital, people sleeping at relatives’ (homes), or in hotels if they can get them.”

For many Californians, wildfire season has turned into a series of upheavals that starts with terror of approaching flames. The experience soon gives way to an anxious scramble for shelter, followed by tedious but tense days of waiting.

Police officers, physicians and emergency staff often don’t get much time to grieve as they deal with the chaos of evacuations and danger. The police chief in Redding and a sheriff’s deputy in Sonoma County are among those working after losing their homes in the wake of the sixth-most destructive fire in California history that killed six.



Flames from a wildfire advance down a hillside, towering over homes off Scotts Valley Road, Thursday near Lakeport, Calif.



Left: Robert Tierney Jr., right, a patient registration specialist at Mercy Medical Center who lost his home in the recent fires, receives a message Thursday that a citizen wants to offer him a place to live in Redding, Calif. Right: A thank you banner for firefighters, first responders and hospital workers hangs outside Mercy Medical Center in Redding, Calif. Dozens of staff members are keeping the hospital running despite losing their homes to the flames.

The damage to the region is so severe — roads are blocked by downed power poles, bridges are damaged and fires continue to burn — that more than 20,000 evacuees still have not been allowed to return to their homes.

“I think the biggest issue is the infrastructure damage is horrendous,” said Ken Pimlott, California’s top fire official.

So evacuees wait, often relying on the kindness of strangers, friends and relatives.

A young couple set up a gas grill on a Redding street corner and handed out hot dogs and hamburgers to victims. After a local radio station broadcast the couple’s good deed, the intersection soon turned into an impromptu gathering spot for evacuees and donations of additional grills, volunteers and food showed up.

Many worry when things will return to normal.

With the first day of school fast approaching, 16-year-old Saman-

tha Barber has no idea where she will be living when her senior year starts on Aug. 15.

Barber and her mother were barred from returning to their home in tiny French Gulch last month and spent the first five nights in a hotel. They moved on to sharing a spare bedroom in a relative’s home.

“We pretty much had the clothes that were on our back,” said Barber. “It’s just breathtaking not being able to get anything,

Deadly Calif. blaze spawned fire tornado

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A deadly Northern California wildfire burned so hot in dry and windy conditions that it birthed a record-breaking tornado of flame, officials said Friday.

They also warned of worsening conditions throughout the region.

Winds in the “fire whirl” created July 26 near Redding reached speeds of 143 mph, a speed that rivaled some of the most destructive Midwest tornados, National Weather Service meteorologist Duane Dykema said. The whirl uprooted trees and tore roofs from homes, Dykema said.

The whirl measured a 3 on the five-level Enhanced Fujita scale, which scientists use to classify the strength of tornados, he said. California has not recorded a tornado of that strength since 1978.

That fire continues to burn about 100 miles south of the Oregon border as firefighters there and throughout Northern California brace for worsening conditions this weekend.

The weather service issued warnings for critical fire weather conditions into Saturday, saying a series of dry low-pressure systems passing through the region would bring afternoon wind gusts.

“This is a particularly dangerous situation with extremely low humidity and high winds. New fires will grow rapidly out of control, in some cases people may not be able to evacuate safely in time should a fire approach,” the weather service said in its bulletin for the Mendocino area north of San Francisco.

having to wash your clothes every night and go out and get laundry soap and have to buy dinner every night.”

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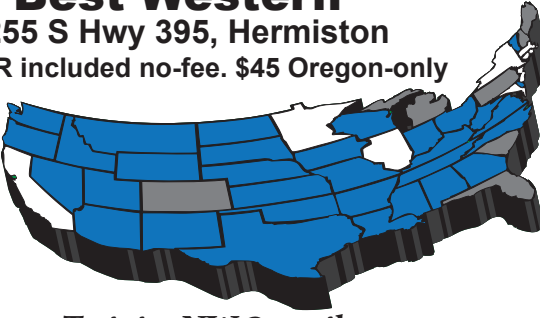
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In order to live up to that goal, CAPECO's employees work hard to develop and deliver different kinds of programs that will address the issues faced by the low-income citizens in our service area. Although CAPECO cannot possibly deal with all of the problems, we want to use the funds we have in the most effective way. We cannot do that without your help. You are the only person who understands the problems that you face daily. You are the only person who can tell us if the programs we deliver are still effective, or need to be changed in order to deal with more current issues.

Representatives will be at the following locations and will host a small group discussion and a survey. See you there!

Milton Freewater

August 3

Milton Freewater Senior Center Luncheon

311 N Main St,

Milton-Freewater, OR 97862

11:15 am - 1 pm

Athena/Weston/Adams/Helix

August 29

Senior Luncheon at Memorial Hall in Weston

210 E. Main St., Weston, OR 97886

11 am - 1 pm

Hermiston

September 18

Community Center

415 S Hwy 395, OR 97838

3 pm - 5 pm

Boardman

August 15

Boardman Chamber Luncheon at Port of Morrow

2 Marine Drive, Boardman, OR 97818

11:45 am - 2:00 pm

Pendleton

August 28

City Hall Community Room

500 SW Dorion Ave,

Pendleton, OR 97801

1 pm - 3 pm

Pendleton

August 27

Senior Center

510 SW 10th St,

Pendleton, OR 97801

11 am - 1 pm

Heppner

September 13

City Hall Conference Room

111 N Main St,

Heppner, OR 97836

10 am to 12 noon, Lunch to Follow

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Partners/service providers visit:

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