

# City reeling from mass shooting besieged by fire

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THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — A city reeling from the tragedy of a mass shooting was under a siege of a different sort Friday as raging wildfires on both sides of the city forced widespread evacuations and shut down part of the main freeway to town.

Flames driven by powerful winds torched at least 150 homes in Southern California, burning parts of tony Calabasas and mansions in Malibu and prompting orders for 250,000 people — including some celebrities — to flee as the fire marched across the Santa Monica Mountains toward the sea. The cause of the blazes was not known.

For Thousand Oaks, which had been considered one of the safest cities in the nation before a gunman massacred 12 people at a country music bar, the spasm of violence jolted the city's sense of security. Encroaching flames, despite the near-constant threat of fire in the bone-dry state, presented an entirely different hazard.

"It's devastating. It's like 'welcome to hell,'" resident Cynthia Ball, said about the dual disasters while she was outside the teen center serving as a shelter for evacuees. "I don't even know what to say. It's like we're all walking around kind of in a trance."

A day earlier, the facility had been the location where grieving family members had gathered and received the grim news on the fate of loved ones who had not returned from the Borderline Bar and Grill, where a Marine combat veteran went on a shooting rampage Wednesday before apparently killing himself.

The investigation into what drove Ian David Long, 28, to kill was continu-



**A home burns Friday, as seen from a helicopter in the Calabasas section of Los Angeles. Flames driven by powerful winds torched dozens of hillside homes in Southern California, burning parts of tony Calabasas and mansions in Malibu and forcing tens of thousands of people — including some celebrities — to flee as the fire marched across the Santa Monica Mountains toward the sea. The cause of the blazes was not known.**

AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill

ing even as the city about 40 miles from Los Angeles was under threat from one of three major wildfires burning in the state.

Three-quarters of the city of 130,000 was under evacuation orders — and that likely included people affected by the shooting, said Thousand Oaks Mayor Andy Fox.

"Here we are just a few hours later talking now about another crisis right here in Thousand Oaks," Fox said, making the distinction that the shooting victims and their families had experienced a permanent loss.

"Those lives will never be recovered. Tonight we're talking about a serious fire situation, but thankfully we have not lost a single life. And as difficult as it may be, homes can be rebuilt, property can be reacquired."

Throughout the day, air tankers swooped through the skies, making low passes to



**Jake Green runs down a road from where his father is fighting to save their home up the hill in Malibu, Calif., on Friday.**

AP Photo/Reed Saxon

dump water and flame retardant as firefighters tried to protect homes amid gusts topping 60 mph. The winds and smoky conditions made for difficult firefighting and at times grounded firefighting aircraft.

In addition to the large

hillside homes that ignited and blazed brightly in the middle of the day, the "Western Town" at Paramount Ranch, a popular filming location that included an old West jail, hotel and saloon, burned to the ground.

The entire city of Malibu

— home to Hollywood stars and entertainment moguls — was under a mandatory evacuation order and had lost power in places. Fleeing residents jammed Pacific Coast Highway in a procession that crept along as smoke billowed overhead and mansions on the hills went up in flames.

In Thousand Oaks, flames creeping down a hillside were visible from the teen center on Janns Road — named for the family that originally developed the hilly terrain covered with majestic California oaks into what has become a large bedroom community.

Evacuees described harrowing escapes from flames that picked up unexpectedly Thursday afternoon.

At the Vallecito mobile home park for seniors, the fire came so quickly that residents had no time to gather medications and documents. With flames bearing down,

firefighters carried people from homes and put them in empty seats of their neighbors' cars, said Carol Napoli, 74.

Napoli left with her friend, the friend's son and her mother who is in her 90s and had to leave behind her oxygen tank.

"We drove through flames to get out. They had us in like a caravan," Napoli said. "My girlfriend was driving. She said, 'I don't know if I can do this.' Her son said, 'Mom you have to, you have to drive through the flames.'"

Rich McMillen, 72, had put a few belongings in his car when he noticed smoke picking up and saw flames in the distance.

By the time a cellphone alert told him to evacuate, the flames were nearly upon the trailer park, burning on a hillside.

"You could feel the heat from the flames," said McMillen, who returned Friday and found his home intact but stinking of smoke.

While evacuees arrived at the teen center, firetrucks staged across the street at a command post.

Ventura County Supervisor Peter Foy made a plea at a fire news conference to residents to help their neighbors during this difficult time.

"We appreciate everybody's efforts and kind prayers for all the people from our victims that lost their lives in the shooting to now what's happening with people losing their homes," Foy said.

A section of U.S. Highway 101, the main link between Los Angeles and Ventura and Santa Barbara, was closed because of fire.

The day before under clear skies and no smoke, thousands gathered along the freeway to watch a motorcade carrying the body of a sheriff's deputy who was killed when he rushed in to confront the shooter at Borderline Bar and Grill.

## BRIEFLY

### At least 6 dead as fire incinerates N. California town

PARADISE, Calif. (AP) — A powerful wildfire in Northern California incinerated most of a town of about 30,000 people with flames that moved so fast there was nothing firefighters could do, authorities said Friday. Six people died, including five who were found in their burned-out vehicles.

Only a day after it began, the blaze near the town of Paradise had grown to nearly 110 square miles and was burning completely out of control.

"There was really no fire-fight involved," Capt. Scott McLean of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said, explaining that crews gave up attacking

the flames and instead helped people get out alive. "These firefighters were in the rescue mode all day yesterday."

With fires also burning in Southern California, state officials put the total number of people forced from their homes at 157,000.

President Donald Trump issued an emergency declaration providing federal funds for Butte, Ventura and Los Angeles counties.

### Whitaker led group that may have violated tax-exempt status

WASHINGTON (AP) — Matthew G. Whitaker, the nation's new acting attorney general, repeatedly chided presidential candidate Hil-

lary Clinton in public statements during 2016 while he was speaking for a group that is barred by its tax-exempt status from supporting or opposing political candidates during a campaign.

Before coming to the Justice Department in 2017, Whitaker was president and executive director of the Foundation for Accountability and Civic Trust, a charitable organization that styles itself as non-partisan government watchdog promoting ethics and transparency. The tax-exempt group — known by its initials, FACT — is supposed to serve the public interest under Section 501c3 of the U.S. tax code, without directly or even indirectly supporting or opposing specific candidates for office.

Yet the group has engaged in one partisan pronouncement

after another, mostly directed at Democrats. During the last presidential race, Whitaker argued in July 2016 newspaper opinion pieces that Clinton should be prosecuted for her handling of her private email server — a favorite talking point of Donald Trump. The opinion pieces identified Whitaker as FACT's leader.

In September 2016, Whitaker argued that Clinton had acted shamelessly by appointing her charity's donors to boards of the State Department when she was secretary of state.

"I don't think anybody in the history of our country that served in the administration has been this bold in their private fundraising and their sort of giving favors," he said in a radio interview posted on YouTube by his group.

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