

MASS SHOOTINGS IN THE UNITED STATES

Rash of incidents stirs fears heading into summer

BY KATHLEEN FOODY
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Two people were killed and at least 30 others wounded in mass shootings overnight in three states, authorities said Saturday, stoking concerns that a spike in U.S. gun violence could continue into summer as coronavirus restrictions ease and more people are free to socialize.

One person was arrested as of Saturday afternoon in any of the attacks, which took place late Friday or early Saturday in the Texas capital of Austin, Chicago and Savannah, Georgia.

Police have arrested one suspect and are searching for another after a mass shooting on a crowded downtown Austin street left 14 people wounded early Saturday, two of them critically.

The Austin Police Department said in a news release that the U.S. Marshals Lone Star Fugitive Task Force assisted in making the arrest, but it provided no other details other than to say it is continuing to follow up on leads for the suspect still at large.

In Chicago, a woman was killed and nine other people were wounded when two men opened fire on a group standing on a sidewalk in the Chatham neighborhood on the



Blood stains remain on Sixth Street after an early-morning shooting on Saturday in downtown Austin, Texas.

Aaron Martinez/Austin American-Statesman

city's South Side. The shooters also got away and hadn't been identified by mid-afternoon Saturday.

In the south Georgia city of Savannah, police said one man was killed and seven other people were wounded in a mass shooting Friday evening, police said.

Two of the wounded are children — an 18-month-old and a 13-year-old.

Savannah's police chief, Roy Minter, Jr., said the shooting may be linked to an ongoing dispute between two groups, citing reports of gunshots being fired at the same apartment complex earlier in the week.

"It's very disturbing what we're seeing across the country and the level of gun violence that we're seeing across the country," he told reporters Sat-

urday. "It's disturbing and it's senseless."

The attacks come amid an easing of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in much of the country, including Chicago, which lifted many of its remaining safeguards on Friday. Many hoped that a spike in U.S. shootings and homicides last year was an aberration perhaps caused by pandemic-related stress amid a rise in gun

ownership and debate over policing. But those rates are still higher than they were in pre-pandemic times, including in cities that refused to slash police spending following the death of George Floyd and those that made modest cuts.

"There was a hope this might simply be a statistical blip that would start to come down," said Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum. "That hasn't happened. And that's what really makes chiefs worry that we may be entering a new period where we will see a reversal of 20 years of declines in these crimes."

Tracking ups and downs in crime is always complicated, but violent crime commonly increases in the summer months. Weekend evenings and early-morning hours also are common windows for shootings.

Many types of crime did decline in 2020 and have stayed lower this year, suggesting the pandemic and the activism and unrest spurred by the reaction to Floyd's death didn't lead to an overall spike in crime.

The 17 mass shootings in 2020 was the lowest annual total in a decade, according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University.

The database tracks all mass killings including shootings, defined as four or more people dead not including the perpetrator.

According to that definition, there have been 17 mass killings, 16 of those shootings, already this year, said James Alan Fox, a criminologist and professor at Northeastern University.

The Gun Violence Archive, which monitors media and police reports to track gun violence, defines mass shootings as those involving four or more people who were shot, regardless of whether they died. Overall, according to its database, more than 8,700 people have died of gun violence in the U.S. this year.

The GVA also found that mass shootings spiked in 2020 to about 600, which was higher than in any of the previous six years it tracked the statistic. According to this year's count, there have been at least 267 mass shootings in the U.S. so far, including the latest three overnight Friday into Saturday.

"It's worrisome," Fox said. "We have a blend of people beginning to get out and about in public. We have lots of divisiveness. And we have more guns and warm weather. It's a potentially deadly mix."

CALIFORNIA AND THE WEST

Biggest heat wave of the year heightens drought and fire fears

BY HAYLEY SMITH
AND LILA SEIDMAN
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — With a worsening drought gripping the West and wildfire season looming, California is bracing for the most severe heat wave of the year — one that promises to tax the state's power supplies while also offering a grim preview of challenging months to come.

The heat wave will bring triple-digit temperatures to the valleys and inland regions of Southern California as well as many parts of the rest of the state, heightening fire risks. It comes as parts of Northern and Central California are turning to water restrictions as the drought rapidly alters the landscape.

In Lake Oroville over Memorial Day weekend, dozens of houseboats sat on cinder blocks because there wasn't enough water to hold them. At Lake Mead, the largest reservoir in the United States, the water level dropped to about 1,072 feet Wednesday night — a low not seen since it was filled in the 1930s.

The Colorado River, where the reservoir is located, supplies water for 40 million people in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. Officials

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— Bill Patzert, a climatologist who noted that it is "way too early" in the year for such an event

said its water level could fall even farther.

The incoming heat wave can exacerbate that lack of moisture, experts said.

"With high temperatures, we're going to get more evaporation and less water to use later on. We're obviously not going to get much rain anytime soon," said Mike Wofford, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Oxnard. "I'm not sure how much worse it makes it. It's already pretty bad."

The extreme temperatures are atypical in Los Angeles in June, which is usually still mired in a marine layer with clouds and fog, Wofford said.

The heat will be temporary, but the combination of intensely high temperatures and a prolonged dryness will worsen California's critical climate condition.

"Early heat waves and more frequent heat waves this summer will exacerbate an already serious situation," said climatologist Bill Patzert, noting that it is "way too early" in the year

for such an event.

"It crosses many boundaries and really impacts everybody," he said.

The West has always been dry, but recent years have been some of the worst.

According to the Los Angeles Almanac, six of the last 10 years have had below-average rainfall. The parched span from 2011 to 2016 was the driest continuous five years ever recorded in downtown Los Angeles.

Since Oct. 1, downtown L.A. has received a scant 5.8 inches of precipitation — about 41% of normal — putting it on track to be the eighth-driest in the 144 years since records have been kept.

The effects of the latest drought are already playing out across the region.

In the Bay Area this week, Santa Clara County officials declared a water shortage emergency, which could lead to mandatory water restrictions for the county's 2 million residents. Marin County in May declared a drought

emergency, not long after Gov. Gavin Newsom expanded his April 21 drought emergency across a vast swath of the state.

More than 40 of California's 58 counties are now under a drought state of emergency.

And though dwindling water supplies can affect people at a local level, the results can resonate nationwide, particularly because California produces much of the country's agriculture.

Already, many farmers in the Central Valley have declared the outlook for the

year to be grim because of the drought, with some openly questioning their future in the state.


Jeffrey Kightlinger, general manager for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, said the region's water supply comes primarily from the Colorado River and the Northern California Sierra Nevada range. Climate change is reducing the snowpack that feeds both.


"We know we're going to get more droughts, and they're going to be deeper and hotter,

with less supply," Kightlinger said. "We're pretty well-prepared for the world of 2020, 2021, but that doesn't mean we're prepared for the world of 2030."

The imminent heat wave also will strain the energy grid as millions of residents crank up their air conditioners.

During a similar heat wave in August, the California Independent System Operator — the body that runs the electric grid for most of the state — declared a statewide Stage 3 emergency for the first time since 2001.





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