

Calif. wildfires – worst may be yet to come

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

Summer officially ends next week, but California's devastating wildfire season will almost certainly rage on.

As of Monday, three enormous blazes – the Valley Fire in Lake, Napa and Sonoma counties; the Rough Fire in the Sierra National Forest in Fresno County; and the Butte Fire, burning in Amador and Calaveras counties – had already charred 270,000 acres, an area 10 times the size of the city of San Francisco.

Experts said at least another month, possibly two, of extreme fire risk remains before hoped-for El Niño winter rains could begin to dampen dry grasses, shrubs and trees all over California.

And, if history is any indication, the most destructive fires can come in October, when conditions are their driest. Major infernos like the 1991 Oakland Hills Fire, which killed 25 people and destroyed 2,843 homes, and the 2003 Cedar Fire and the 2007 Witch Fire, which together burned nearly 3,500 homes in San Diego County, all began in October.

Through Monday, 738,516 acres had burned in California in 2015, a 75 percent increase from the same date last year, and a 37 percent increase when compared to the five-year average.

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