

Wine Country death toll – 40, fires still rage

By Joseph Serna, Laura J. Nelson, Chris Megerian and Sonali Kohli, Los Angeles Times

As the death toll rose to 40, firefighters struggled Saturday to get the upper hand against several massive wildfires that have ravaged Northern California for almost a week.

Strong winds kicked up overnight in the central Napa Valley region, causing some fires to spread and triggering evacuations in Sonoma and elsewhere, officials said.

Fire officials feared that winds forecast for Saturday would be similar to those that stoked the first flames last Sunday night, which have since exploded to more than 15 fires that have scorched 220,000 acres, destroyed an estimated 5,700 structures and caused at least 40 deaths.

Despite low humidity and red flag warnings throughout the region, however, the winds appeared to calm down by Saturday afternoon, aiding firefighters who have been battling the fire around the clock since they broke out on Oct. 8, officials said.

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