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THE BLOTTER

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What's on this page? The entry titled "Some Bastrop residents allowed to return home; 1,386 homes destroyed, officials say."

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Some Bastrop residents allowed to return home; 1,386 homes destroyed, officials say

By American-Statesman Staff | Thursday, September 8, 2011, 03:15 PM

BASTROP — Some Bastrop residents were allowed to return to homes in unburned parts of the county at 2 p.m., Sheriff Terry Pickering said today.

Click here for a list of areas that were opened at 2 p.m.

Click here for a map of reopened areas

Officials are still working out a plan for other residents to return home, and some places remain under evacuation, officials said.

An estimated 1,386 homes have been destroyed in Bastrop County, County Judge Ronnie McDonald reiterated at a press conference at 10:45 a.m.

The larger Bastrop fire, dubbed the Complex fire, was 30 percent contained this morning and has burned 35,000 acres, McDonald said at the Bastrop Convention and Exhibit Center.

Firefighters are more concerned about fighting the fire than updating percentage, so that figure could be greater, McDonald said.

The smaller Union Chapel fire, on the west side of the city of Bastrop, has burned about 900 acres but was 90 percent contained Wednesday.

The estimate on the homes destroyed was reached by going "house by house and driveway by driveway," said Mike Fisher, emergency management coordinator for Bastrop County. "That was the count as of last night. We keep stressing that's an estimate."

Officials have released maps showing some of the destroyed homes in the Circle D and KC Estates area and the Pine Forest area.

Officials also updated a partial list of destroyed homes around the county.

More information can be found at Bastrop County's Office of Emergency Management Facebook page.

So far, the death toll remains at two, including Michael Troy Farr, a 48-year-old City of Austin employee who was found Tuesday at his home on Hudson Drive near Smithville. Farr, an electrician who had worked for the city since 2003, worked in the building services division.

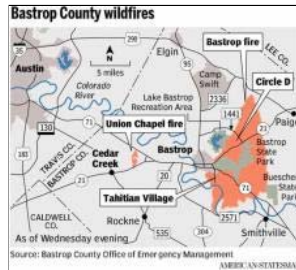
Officials have not released the second person's identity or where he or she was found.

Four shelters remain open for evacuees:

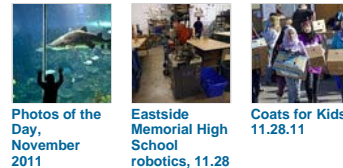
- Celebration Community Church, Cool Water Drive at Longhorn Street, Bastrop; 512-332-2537
Ascension Catholic Church, 802 Pine St., Bastrop; 512-321-2452
Smithville Recreation Center, Texas 95 and First Street, Smithville; 512-237-3282
Elgin Sacred Heart, 302 West 11th St., Elgin; 512-281-3536

The Elgin shelter is scheduled to be closed this afternoon, officials said.

Bastrop County residents living south of U.S. 290 and not in the city of Bastrop are being asked to boil their water before drinking it.



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Firefighters tapping into water lines to fight the wildfires has led to decreased water pressure in Aqua Water Supply Corp. pipes, which allows harmful microbes to enter the pipes, officials said.

Aqua Water's 18,000 customers are being asked to boil their water for two minutes before drinking it. The pipes cannot be repaired until the burn area is safe to enter and chlorinated water is flushed through the system, officials said.

A federal disaster declaration has been signed, though federal dollars have yet to arrive, McDonald said.

Some parts of the burned areas in Bastrop will get power restored as early as today, said Mark Rose, the CEO of the Bluebonnet Power Electric Cooperative. But workers don't have a date for power restoration for the vast majority of the burned area, he said.

The utility has [posted a map online](#) of when areas could have power restored.

Many wires are still down, and poles are burning in some parts of the fire area, Rose said. A full assessment will take another two or three days, he said.

The biggest problem has been access, Rose added.

McDonald said 388 firefighters are working along with local crews to fight the blaze. Aerial tankers, so-called "scooper" planes and Chinook helicopters continue fighting the fire from the air, a Texas Forest Service spokeswoman said.

A converted DC-10 jetliner that can drop 11,000 gallons of fire retardant [remained grounded today](#) because officials have no pilot to fly it and because the pump loading system is still being assembled.

Law enforcement officers are spread out around the county and have set up roadblocks at evacuated areas. The officers are mostly concerned with keeping people safe — which in part means keeping residents out of burning neighborhoods — but they are also trying to prevent looting, McDonald said.

State and local officials today for the first time detailed [why they turned away some volunteer firefighters](#) as the flames raged.

"We may have had some of the world's finest firefighters showing up, but if they weren't properly qualified or trained and had no equipment, we had no choice," said Mike Fisher, Bastrop County's emergency management director.

Mail delivery to evacuated areas or on roads that are impassable or unsafe will be curtailed, officials said, but all post offices not in evacuated areas are expected to be open during normal business hours.

Residents who are unable to receive mail delivery can pick up mail at their local post office, officials said.

"Customers whose homes were destroyed by fire should consult their local post office to arrange for alternative mail delivery until they can establish a permanent residence," the service said in a statement. "The Postal Service will hold mail for up to two weeks before returning to sender."

For more information, call 800-275-8777 or the TTY number 877-889-2457.

Winds are expected to be [slightly quicker today than recent days](#), which could create challenges for crews still battling fires around Central Texas.

**Related story:** [Bastrop resident: 'Nobody has seen a fire like this. Nobody.'](#)

**Photos:** [Wildfires burn across Central Texas](#)

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Full coverage of all Central Texas fires can be found on [statesman.com](#)

Photo: Jay Janner/American-Statesman

Firefighters Myles Zimmerman and Case Martin, left rear, of the Cash Fire Department shovel dirt over hot spots in the Circle D Estates neighborhood of Bastrop on Wednesday.

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