

Weather swinging in firefighters' favor

by UPI

SAN DIEGO -- A huge Santa Ana condition was fading Wednesday, allowing conditions along the Southern California fire lines to swing in the favor of firefighters. "Conditions have improved significantly," said Rick Hutchinson, the deputy incident commander for the Witch fire near San Diego. "The east winds abated quite a bit overnight." At the same time, however, the change in wind direction created a guessing game, as the winds blew flames back into areas that were previously, but not completely, burned. Also, high temperatures and low humidity -- two major contributors to fire danger -- persisted into Wednesday. Officials said the fires from Los Angeles to the Mexican border consumed some 420,000 acres and destroyed at least 1,155 homes, The Los Angeles Times reported. Of particular concern was the Witch fire, which merged early Wednesday with the nearby Poomacha fire to form a dangerous cluster that threatened communities around Palomar Mountain in northern San Diego County. The Witch fire earlier in the week plowed through the northern outskirts of San Diego, consuming several homes in the community of Rancho Bernardo, and threatened to burn to the sea. San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders said the preliminary estimates of damage within the city limits would no doubt top \$1 billion.

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