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Lithium-ion Batteries Heat Up Again at La Verne Water Facility, Prolonging Evacuations

by Lily Dallow
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Lithium-ion batteries damaged in a fire at a Southern California water treatment facility began heating up again Wednesday morning, forcing firefighters to resume cooling efforts as hundreds of residents remained under evacuation orders.
The latest temperature spike occurred at a second battery storage system at the Metropolitan Water District facility in La Verne, where a fire and explosion Tuesday prompted a massive hazardous materials response.
During a Wednesday morning news conference, La Verne Fire Chief Brandon Coney said crews had stopped spraying water on the damaged batteries shortly before 6 a.m. after temperatures appeared to stabilize overnight. However, temperatures subsequently rose from approximately 70 degrees to 90 degrees, triggering renewed cooling efforts.

Firefighters resumed pouring water on the second storage system while using drones and infrared equipment to monitor temperatures. The original battery unit, which caught fire Tuesday, has remained relatively stable.

Although there were no active flames or hazardous smoke plumes Wednesday morning, officials warned that the situation could change if the damaged batteries reignite.
The primary concern is not another large explosion but the potentially hazardous fumes that could be released if the batteries catch fire again, officials said.

Fire officials explained that the second container sustained enough damage that a large explosion similar to Tuesday's is unlikely. However, smaller explosions involving individual battery cells remain possible.
Crews are attempting to prevent the batteries from entering thermal runaway, a process in which rising temperatures trigger a self-sustaining chemical reaction that can spread from one battery cell to another.
The cooling process has been complicated by the metal enclosure surrounding the batteries, which prevents water from penetrating as effectively as firefighters would like.

Evacuation orders remained in effect Wednesday for approximately 200 homes near the facility, including a mobile home community and two residential neighborhoods. Moreno Avenue generally bounds the evacuation zone to the west, Foothill Boulevard to the north, B Street to the east and Paseo Drive, Winterhaven Drive and Kendrick Drive to the south.
Police have established barricades farther south near Wheeler and Bonita avenues to maintain access for emergency vehicles.
Officers from the La Verne Police Department and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department were going door to door Wednesday to determine how many residents had evacuated and how many remained in their homes.

Residents are being asked to leave the evacuation zone, although limited access is being permitted for those who need to retrieve clothing or other belongings.
Officials have not provided a timeline for lifting the evacuation orders, saying the decision will depend on conditions at the facility.
Grace Miller Elementary School remained closed Wednesday because of its proximity to the evacuation zone. Officials said the closure was a precaution in case conditions worsen and a larger evacuation becomes necessary. Other surrounding schools were open.
Residents can view the **latest evacuation map** or visit the city of La Verne's website for updates.

Air and water quality monitoring continues

Los Angeles County hazardous materials officials said air monitoring conducted since the fire began has not detected the hazardous substances they were testing for.
The South Coast Air Quality Management District has also deployed a mobile sampling vehicle to conduct continuous air monitoring throughout the surrounding community.
Officials said water samples collected from runoff generated by firefighting efforts are undergoing laboratory analysis.

Metropolitan Water District officials emphasized that the Weymouth Water Treatment Plant has continued operating and that the incident has not affected the quality of drinking water being produced at the facility.
The runoff being tested is separate from the treated drinking water supply.
The Weymouth facility is the fifth-largest water treatment plant in the United States, according to Metropolitan Water District Assistant General Manager Shane Chapman. Approximately 350 employees typically work at the site, but staffing has been reduced to essential personnel during the emergency.

What caused the fire?

The fire was **first reported** around 11:40 a.m. Tuesday at a battery energy storage system near a solar panel field at the Metropolitan Water District facility on Wheeler Avenue.
Firefighters arrived to find one of two nearby battery storage systems damaged by an explosion and subsequent fire.
One employee suffered minor injuries and was transported to a local hospital.
Crews spent much of Tuesday battling the fire and cooling the damaged equipment. Although the original fire was brought under control, heat exposure damaged the neighboring battery storage system, raising concerns about another fire.

The solar panels and batteries were installed to help power the treatment plant, reduce its reliance on the electrical grid and support clean energy goals, Metropolitan Water District officials said.
The cause of the initial equipment failure remains under investigation.
This is a developing story. Stay with KTLA for updates.