

[Suffolk County Police Say S'Mores May Have Sparked Brush Fires - 27 East](#)

March 8, 2025, update Monday March 10, 2025

Suffolk County Police Say S'Mores May Have Sparked Brush Fires



1 Video & 40 Photos

Stephen J. Kotz and Brendan J. O'Reilly on Mar 8, 2025

UPDATE: Monday, 1:50 p.m.: Suffolk County Police Say S'Mores May Have Sparked Brush Fires

Suffolk County Police issued the following press release:

Following an investigation by Suffolk County Police Arson Section detectives, the cause of multiple ^[1]_[SEP] brush fires on March 8 has been preliminarily ruled accidental. Detectives believe the cause is related to ^[1]_[SEP] a fire that spread following an attempt to make s'mores at a home on North Cozine Road in Manorville. It's believed strong winds spurred additional fires from embers leading to the brush fires. Police are continuing to speak with witnesses and investigate tips.

UPDATE: Sunday, 1:46 p.m.: Westhampton Fire 100 Percent Knocked Down; 22 Percent Contained, County Fire Official Says

The Westhampton wildfire has been 100 percent knocked down and 22 percent contained, according to Rudy Sunderman, the commissioner of the Suffolk County of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services.

Speaking at a press conference at Francis S. Gabreski Airport called by Suffolk County Executive Ed Romaine and attended by numerous elected and emergency services officials on Sunday morning, Sunderman said previous reports that the fire was 80 percent contained were incorrect.

“Knocked down refers to all visible fire. You don’t see any visible fire as we speak,” he said.

“Containment refers to the creation of a fire break around the perimeter.”

Sunderman said State Department of Environmental Conservation rangers were working with Suffolk County and Southampton Town crews to use bulldozers and payloaders to create a safe fire break.

“We’ll be working today until dusk and be back at it tomorrow” until the job is completed, he added.

He said the fire burned about 400 acres and that approximately 600 volunteers from 80 fire departments and 10 ambulance crews turned out to fight the fire.

Westhampton Beach Second Assistant Chief Lewis Scott said two commercial buildings were burned, with one being destroyed and the other suffering serious damage.

Suffolk County Police Commissioner Kevin Catalina said 25 detectives, including arson specialists, had been assigned to investigate the cause of the fire. “We are going to get to the bottom of what happened,” he said, but he refused to speculate as to whether police suspect arson.

DEC Commissioner Amanda Lefton said besides overseeing the latest efforts to contain the fire, her department was monitoring air quality, which, she said, appeared to be good a day after the fire.

Responding to questions, she said the southern pine beetle, which has destroyed large tracts of pine trees across Long Island, played a role in the spread of the fire, but added that fire is a necessary precursor to the forest being able to rejuvenate itself.

Romaine again thanked volunteers and neighboring governments, from town to federal officials, for their help

“We thought this fire would jump the highway and then we’d have big problems because that is where most of the pine barrens are,” he said. “This was a very big fire that could have created big problems if not for all us coming together to solve it.”

U.S. Representative Nick LaLota said the effort had caught the attention of the country.

“The nation’s looking at us. The nation saw some of these flames on TV,” he said. “I got calls and texts from colleagues, from Indiana, California and elsewhere, who, regardless of party, were concerned.”

Southampton Town Supervisor Maria Moore reminded residents that the town’s state of emergency, which includes a ban on outside open fires, remained in effect.

UPDATE: Sunday, 10:20 a.m.: Mop-Up Operations Continue at Fire Scene; Romaine, Emergency Officials To Hold Briefing at 11:30

Suffolk County Executive Ed Romaine and fire, rescue and emergency services officials will deliver an update on the Westhampton Brush fires at Francis S. Gabreski Airport at 11:30 a.m. on Sunday.

Southampton Town Supervisor Maria Moore said Sunday morning that the fire was 80 percent extinguished as of “the close of operations” Saturday night. The goal for Sunday “is to make sure we are 100 percent contained and hopefully also 100 percent extinguished,” she said.

She added that crews trying to contain the fire by using bulldozers and payloaders to encircle the burning areas to create fire breaks.

A town alert on Sunday morning stated: “As of this morning, emergency crews have resumed operations to address the wildfires. We are happy to report that other than some small hotspots, there is no significant visible fire. There are hotspots and smoldering areas being addressed, and emergency management is utilizing drones and air assets to identify these areas to direct response. All roads are currently open. Residents are asked to stay tuned to any updates as they become available. An outdoor recreational fire ban and state of emergency are still in effect.”

U.S. Representative Nick LaLota was at the operations center at Gabreski on Sunday morning.

In a statement released Saturday night, Governor Kathy Hochul, who declared a state of emergency earlier in the day, promised continued state support until the fire was extinguished.

The governor said the weather forecast calls for isolated wind gusts up to 40 mph that are expected to persist through Sunday evening. “Gusts will decrease slightly overnight to approximately 25 mph before picking up again on Sunday morning up to 40 mph,” she said.

“We are deploying resources as quickly as possible, and I have mobilized our agencies, the National Guard and the state police to provide air and ground support to ensure we keep our Long Islanders safe,” the governor said. “I’ve declared a state of emergency to secure resources immediately. This is an evolving situation, and air quality is a concern — New Yorkers need to monitor the latest emergency alerts and prepare to evacuate if necessary.”

The governor said the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control had opened the State Fire Operations Center and activated the state’s Fire Mobilization and Mutual Aid Plan to support any resource requests from local fire departments.

As part of the state response, Hochul said four military helicopters were deployed to drop water and a C-130 plane and state police drones were being used to provide monitoring of the area from the air.

New York State Emergency Management said the fires are affecting air quality in the Westhampton area and advised people to consider wearing a high-quality mask and to avoid the Westhampton

area. For health info, visit health.ny.gov/wildfire. To monitor air quality levels surrounding the wildfires, visit fire.airnow.gov/#7.85/41.168/-72.992.

SEP

UPDATE: Saturday, 9:15 p.m.: County Executive Says Fire Nearly 80 Percent Contained; Governor Expected To Visit

Suffolk County Executive Ed Romaine said just before 9 p.m. Saturday that the Westhampton wildfire was 75 to 80 percent contained.

“We’re hoping it doesn’t flare up again,” he said. “It’s still a threat because of embers and winds and conditions.”

Romaine said helicopters and drones were in the air monitoring conditions and looking for hot spots.

Governor Kathy Hochul, who declared a state of emergency for the area, is expected to visit the scene on Sunday, Romaine said.

The county executive also said the arson squad was investigating the cause of the blaze, but he declined to say whether arson was suspected or not.

Romaine said he was thankful for the overwhelming response from across Long Island to New York City.

“Everyone wanted to come out and put this thing out,” he said. “We know we are all in this together. When there is a crisis like this, we all pull together.”

UPDATE: Saturday, 7:55 p.m.: County Executive Holds Press Conference; Governor Provides Update

Approximately 90 fire and emergency services agencies converged on Westhampton on Saturday afternoon to help battle a series of brush fires that culminated in a massive wildfire west of County Road 31 and north of Francis S. Gabreski Airport.

Suffolk County Executive Ed Romaine, flanked by elected officials and emergency responders, thanked departments and governments, from neighboring towns to New York State, for their prompt and strong response, at a press conference at 5:30 p.m. in Westhampton Beach.

Despite the presence of hundreds of volunteers on the ground and helicopters dropping water from the sky, Romaine said the fire continued to burn.

“It’s not under control as I speak,” he said, “and probably will not be for several hours, probably tomorrow as well.”

Wind gusts of 30 to 35 mph helped fan the flames, which began with brush fires in Center Moriches, East Moriches, and Eastport before the major fire broke out in the Pine Barrens in Westhampton, he said.

Southampton Town Police Chief James Kiernan said no houses were in immediate danger.

“There are no residences that are in the line of fire,” Kiernan said. “We are monitoring that very closely from the air. You will know by telephone, you will know by knocks on the door if that changes.”

Rudy Sunderman, the commissioner of the Suffolk County Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services, said the fire covered an approximately 1-by-3-mile area in the Pine Barrens and was about 50 percent contained. The blazes reported earlier in the day had been extinguished, he said.

Sunderman said one firefighter was airlifted to Stony Brook University Hospital to be treated for second-degree burns to his face, but that there were no other serious injuries or damage to firefighting equipment to report.

Two commercial buildings on the west side of County Road 31 were damaged, but to what extent was unknown.

Both Southampton Town Supervisor Maria Moore and Governor Kathy Hochul declared a state of emergency.

State Assemblyman Tommy John Schiavoni told The Southampton Press after the press conference that the governor’s declaration means she “can use executive action to bring any resources that the locality needs from the state,” including state troopers, the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Air National Guard.

At least three Black Hawk helicopters from the Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base in Westhampton were deployed, among other ANG resources.

“They were actually taking water out of Wildwood Lake and dropping it on the fires,” Southampton Town Councilwoman Cyndi McNamara said.

McNamara advised residents to steer clear of the fires.

“I’ve seen so many posts on social media of people trying to get as close as possible to take videos and pictures,” she said. “Leave that to the press and stay out of the way for our first responders, because a video or a picture is not worth losing your life or putting somebody else’s life at risk.”

Ryan Murphy, Southampton Town’s public safety and emergency management administrator, said that while there were no residential evacuations, there were probably situations where people who were not home when the fires started were unable to go back home because roads had been closed

off. Hampton West Estates was one neighborhood he specified may have been affected because it is off County Road 31, “the corridor that all the emergency services are trafficking up and down.”

He asked for patience. “We just want to make sure that it's safe for them to get in there, and that they're not going to be blocked by firetrucks and other vehicles moving around to fight this fire,” he said.

Moore said that though no residents have been evacuated, they should be aware and stay tuned to the news in case they do need to take action. She noted that the Hampton Bays American Legion has offered space for evacuees should the need arise.

Westhampton Beach Mayor Ralph Urban added that the Westhampton Beach High School has emergency accommodations available, but they have not been activated yet.

“We haven't seen the need to activate anything, but everyone should be alert and aware if things change quickly,” Urban said.

Murphy noted that the town has Reverse 911 systems, a Notify Me system, and wireless alerting available if evacuations were to be ordered.

“As this was going on, we had people prestaged near certain residential neighborhoods to be able to go through the neighborhoods,” he said. Between state troopers, sheriffs, Southampton town fire marshal's office, we had them actually out and about ready to call them and tell them to make notifications to the neighbors in that area if we needed to.”

There were commercial evacuations.

“Some of the commercial spaces near and around Gabreski were evacuated,” Murphy said. The Atlantic Marine Conservation Society was one. “They moved some of their turtles out of there real fast and evacuated their space,” he said.

Amazon's facility was another he believes was evacuated.

In addition to the wind driving the fires, past damage to the Pine Barrens by the invasive pine beetle is suspected to have contributed to the spread.

The decimation of the southern pine beetle and the impact to our area has created a huge fuel load on the floor of the Pine Barrens area. So add those things together, and it's not a great recipe when it comes to fires,” Murphy said.

The governor said during a call-in to CNN at 7 p.m. that she is sending 100,000 N-95 masks first thing in the morning due to air quality concerns, and she said the state is working with local officials on setting up a command center.

“We have 80 agencies and firefighting crews and agents and individuals all over working to put up a wet line, as you say, because wet line is our best defense against this spreading,” Hochul said.

“Now, this is no guarantee. We're in a better place right now, but we are very concerned about the overnight and the increase of winds.”

She said the Blackhawk helicopters can each drop 660 gallons of water at a time.

“That's part of why we've been able to get some control. But again, the control we have right now may not hold, and that is what we're focusing on the overnight,” she said.

The governor also knocked Washington funding cuts to the National Fire Academy, canceling classes today. She said she is not counting on the federal government for assistance.

“This is so unpredictable,” she said. “We've always been able to count on the federal government for training and assistance, and we can't count on it right now. That has to change.”

Hochul urged citizens to pay attention to ensure they can get to safety. There are plans to evacuate people from coastal areas in place, including sending ferries, she said.

“All those images of what happened in the Palisades are so front and center in our minds,” she said. “We need to be proactive, preventative, and try to stop the worst from occurring with all the power that we have, and that's exactly what we're doing.”

Hochul also questioned whether the Federal Emergency Management Agency would assist if the fires become more widespread.

“I don't even know if there's going to be FEMA,” Hochul said. “This spreads, we normally would be applying for FEMA reimbursements if a certain monetary threshold is hit. I don't know that there's going to be a FEMA by the time we would do any cancellation of expenses if this got out of control any further.”

UPDATE: Saturday, 5:15 p.m.: 106th Rescue Wing Evacuates Base

The 106th Rescue Wing Fire Department has joined the effort to contain a large fire in the Pine Barrens along Sunrise Highway.

Two base fire trucks joined the additional fire departments from the surrounding area that have been deployed to contain the blaze this afternoon. An HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter is also assisting in the response.

At 1:45 p.m., the wing initiated the evacuation of personnel from the base as a precautionary measure.

“Our priority is always the safety of our airmen and the surrounding community,” said Colonel Jeffrey D. Cannel, 106th Rescue Wing commander. “We are actively working with local fire departments to contain the fire and ensure everyone remains out of harm's way.”

UPDATE: Saturday, 4:45 p.m.: State of Emergency Declared

Southampton Town Supervisor Maria Moore declared a state of emergency as of 3 p.m. today in response to multiple brush fires in western Southampton Town that have closed Sunrise Highway and other roads to traffic.

“I declared a state of emergency to ensure that our town has the full resources necessary to support the emergency response to the wildfires our brave fire personnel are battling,” Moore said. “Our top priority is the safety of our residents, first responders, and all those in the affected areas.

“I have been in communication with County Executive Ed Romaine and Governor Kathy Hochul, and we are mobilizing an all-of-government response to contain the fire,” Moore continued. “State, county and local agencies are working in full coordination to deploy the necessary resources, equipment, and personnel to protect lives and property.

“We are fortunate to have veteran firefighters among us who fought the 1995 fires. Their experience, training, and dedication are invaluable in this fight, and we stand in full support of their efforts. I want to express my deepest gratitude to all firefighters, emergency responders, and volunteers who are working tirelessly to bring this fire under control.

“I urge all residents to stay informed, follow emergency instructions, and prioritize their safety. We will provide updates as the situation develops, and we appreciate the community’s cooperation during this critical time.”

In her official state of emergency proclamation, Moore wrote: “Dry weather and high winds, along with damage to woodland areas caused by Southern Pine Beetle infestation is exacerbating the conditions for dangerous wildfires. Such conditions threaten and/or imperil the public safety of the citizens of the Town of Southampton due to these^[1]_{SEP} active wildfires and the continued elevated threat of extreme wildfire possibility for our area.”

According to Governor Hochul, a couple of homes have been affected in Westhampton.

One firefighter was medevaced.

Check back for updates.

ORIGINAL STORY:

Numerous fire departments have been battling major brush fires in western Southampton Town on Saturday afternoon.

Reports say the fires have largely been contained to west of the Frances Gabreski Airport in Westhampton, but that they were not under control as of 3:30 p.m.

Sunrise Highway is closed in both directions east of Exit 58. Southampton Town Police said Speonk-Riverhead Road was also closed. A witness reported that County Road 31, which is also known as Old Riverhead Road, had been closed south of Sunrise Highway.

Councilman Bill Pell said that he was told the fire was close to Hampton West Estates and that it was possible residents would be ordered to evacuate. Other people living in the vicinity have reportedly evacuated voluntarily.

Police have asked people to stay out of the area due to the emergency and have noted that additional road closures may be necessary.

Pell said he had been told military aircraft had been called in to dump water on the fires. He added that the fires were being monitored from the air as well.

Captain Cheran A. Campbell of the 106th Rescue Wing of the Air National Guard said Gabreski had been evacuated and that two base fire trucks and an HH 60W Jolly Green II helicopter had been deployed to assist in the firefighting effort.

The fires were reported Saturday afternoon. Town Police said they had been receiving numerous 911 calls reporting brush fires along Route 27 in the western part of the town.

A police spokesman described the scene as “dynamic” at approximately 1:30 p.m., saying there were multiple reports of fires in the area.

An eyewitness who was driving eastbound said she saw signs of more than a dozen fires on both sides of the highway starting at Exit 60 and heading as far east as Exit 64.

“There was a black plume about 400 feet in the air near Westhampton,” she said.

Southampton Town issued the following emergency notice at 2:19 p.m.:

The Town of Southampton instructs all residents to refrain from any and all outdoor recreational fires during the next 24 hours due to high winds and the danger of wildfires.

Suffolk County Executive Ed Romaine was scheduled to hold a press conference at the Westhampton Beach Firehouse at 5:30 p.m. Saturday.

Governor Kathy Hochul issued the following statement:

“Minutes ago, I spoke with County Executive Ed Romaine about the brush fire in the Pine Barrens and informed him that the State of New York is here to provide any resources and support he needs. The New York National Guard has already begun providing air support by helicopter and is coordinating with local law enforcement. I have also deployed personnel from the Office of Emergency Management, Office of Fire Prevention and Control, Department of Transportation, Department of Environmental Conservation, State Parks and the New York State Police to assist Suffolk County’s response to this crisis. Public safety is my top priority, and I’m committed to doing everything possible to keep Long Islanders safe.”

Related Stories

- [Watch: Westhampton Pines Fire Sunday Morning Update](#)
- [Watch: Sunrise Highway Brush Fires Press Conference](#)