

Wildfire reaches Los Alamos nuclear facility

Thousands of residents have fled the town of Los Alamos, but officials say all radioactive materials at the lab are safe

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The wildfire near the nuclear facility in Los Alamos, New Mexico. Photograph: Adolphe Pierre-Louis/AP

A raging forest fire threatened the Los Alamos nuclear laboratory in [New Mexico](#) on Monday and led to the evacuation of thousands of nearby residents.

The fire started in Santa Fe national forest on Sunday and has so far burnt 200 sq km (78 sq miles). The Las Conchas blaze started a 4,000-sq-metre "spot fire" on the sprawling property where scientists worked on the first atomic bomb 50 years ago. So far several thousand people have fled the town of Los Alamos, which has a population of about 12,000.

According to local authorities firefighters were able to douse the fire at the nuclear facility. Los Alamos National Laboratory officials said all radioactive materials stored at the lab were safe from flames. The lab has been closed while firefighters monitor the blaze.

The wildfire is being driven by 60mph winds. The fire is believed to be several miles from the laboratory's essential structures. The 100-sq-km property's plutonium facility is on the north-east side of the complex, while the fire seems to be moving south and east, lab spokesman Kevin Roark told Reuters. The fire has so far destroyed properties outside Los Alamos but has not entered the city itself.

The laboratory, which ensures the safety and reliability of the US nuclear stockpile, was set up in 1943 as part of the Manhattan project to create the first atomic bomb and still maintains the nation's largest nuclear weapons arsenal.

In a 2009 report, the US department of energy said Los Alamos county firefighters were not sufficiently trained to handle the unique fires they could face with hazardous or radioactive materials at the site.

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