

<https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/wildfires-leave-migrant-workers-homeless-jobless-eastern-washington/FLIMZU7G2RAOLNMG6VS2GQB37A/>



## **Wildfires leave migrant workers homeless, jobless in Eastern Washington**

Deborah Horne, KIRO 7 News  
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Devastating wildfires have left migrant workers in Washington homeless and in desperate need. Now Latino leaders are calling on the state and the feds to step in.

Latino leaders are calling the wildfire damage a “humanitarian crisis.”

Thousands of farmworkers, most of them Spanish-speakers, have been burned out of their homes and jobs by the wildfires that are still going on in our state.

They say they are the forgotten victims of the wildland fires that have left ash fields on both sides of the mountains.

Migrant workers In Eastern Washington, many far from home, have had their homes, cars and other possessions burned to the ground.

“Ever since the fire started, we’ve been staying at one of my aunt’s house,” said Anai Palacios, “And there’s about 11 people living there.”

Palacios, a leader in the migrant community, says the fires have devastated her family. They have lost everything.

“They recently gave us a small trailer camper, as you can see in the back, where we are temporarily staying,” she said.

And they are among the lucky ones.

Still, the trailers are too small for social distancing during a pandemic that has hit the Latino community especially hard.

“Yes, it fits nine people,” said Palacios. “We’re staying in a small mobile home.”

National and state advocates say this may be the tip of a huge iceberg.

“For example, Cold Springs, which is three miles south of Omak, has 78 homes that were destroyed,” said Diana Perez, Washington State’s League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). “What we don’t know collectively is the labor camps, the labor cabins, that destruction.”

Domingo Garcia, LULAC national president, says the fires have created a humanitarian crisis. And the state and the feds need to help.

“I know that in Texas and Florida, after the hurricanes, FEMA was there and helped out immediately,” said Garcia. “These wildfires are also the result of climate change. And they need immediate assistance also.”

Their plight is raising some troubling questions, too.

“The state really has not assessed the extent of the damage that has happened to our communities,” said David Cruz, LULAC communications director. “I would simply ask, why not? Why hasn’t the state done more to find out the extent of the suffering?”

Late Sunday, the governor’s office said in an email, “We are assessing the situation, trying to determine the scope. More to come.”