**News Release:**
August 19, 2026

**Harrowing Wildfire Experiences for Migrant Workers**

(Kelowna, BC,) For 47 Migrant Workers the Bald Range fire is ending with them losing their jobs and being sent home to Queretaro, Mexico, months earlier than anticipated and without the earnings they had anticipated being able to make. Additionally, they are going home without any of the belongings they had gathered while working as cherry pickers in a Summerland orchard. Whether any of their belongings survived the fire is a question they can't answer yet but they know for certain that part of their accommodation camp has been destroyed, as has their employer's crop. Without work, the labourers are forced to return under the terms of their closed work permit.

"It is very hard for them," explains Byron Bucardo, Migrant Support Outreach Worker with KCR Community Resources, who has been helping the Migrant Workers with a variety of supports and has been critical in helping the workers navigate this emergency situation. "Their employer tried to help them locate other positions, but there are none available so they have to go home, without the money they were expecting to bring for their families. Plus many of them are feeling the effects of a scary, traumatic experience that saw them evacuated by helicopter and fleeing the flames from one emergency shelter to another, to find a safe place to sleep."

For many of the Migrant Workers, their day started at 2:00 am on Friday, August 7. The air was thick with smoke but the workers prepared for their regular 4:00 am start. By 6:00 pm that evening, they had picked cherries for over 12 hours when they returned to their camp. Very soon after, BC Emergency personnel came to tell them they had to flee. They only had time to grab their cell phones and passports before being loaded into helicopters along with residents of the area. There was no time to pack the meagre belongings they had gathered since arriving at the farm. It took approximately an hour for the three helicopters to transport everyone to safety and the workers were told by their employer that they could use the company vans to get to the Emergency Shelters. When the workers arrived at the Summerland Arena, they were told that there was no room for them, and were only for Summerland residents. They would have to go to the Penticton shelter, which they proceeded to do. When they arrived, they were once again turned away and told that as they are not BC residents, there would not be room for them. They would need to go to West Kelowna. By now it was past 9:30 pm.

The workers were forced to drive back through the fire zone, flames and fire everywhere. They barely made it through before Highway 97 was closed. It was past 1:00 am before they made it to the West Kelowna Arena.

"Although they did feel welcomed here, they were again told that the shelter was for BC residents and so they would only be able to stay for two nights maximum," explains Bucardo. "It was the Minister of Agriculture who called the shelter authorities and gave them instructions to provide an additional night stay at the shelter, as well as access to meals and snacks until they could be relocated."

The Migrant Workers are clear that they are filled with gratitude for the work of the Salvation Army and Samaritan's Purse at the West Kelowna Emergency Centre, as well as the other organizations that have

helped to look after them, including Willow Park Church, Khalsa Aid, their employer and other farmers in the area. They are especially grateful to Byron from KCR and to Lorena Ordoñez from the Migrant Workers Centre for their constant support during the crisis.

However, the workers are also wanting to raise awareness of the inequity of their status in Canada as Temporary Foreign Workers. Most of them are not eligible for government support during this emergency and they are not able to work for a new employer, which limits their ability to earn enough money for their families. While in Canada they have experienced racism and felt excluded on many occasions including during this emergency. They know their labour is critical to the region and that the work they do is an important part of Canada's economy and food systems. For them, the harrowing wildfire experience ends in more loss and trauma, without the benefits or protection that Canadian workers have access to.

"We hope that highlighting the Migrant Workers' struggles leads to changes for emergency situations and more," said Katelin Mitchell, KCR Community Resources' executive director. "We are thankful that Byron was able to step up and collaborate with Lorena from the Migrant Workers Centre, to really make a difference in helping this group of humans navigate a difficult time. Offering support to immigrants and newcomers to the Okanagan is a critical part of what we do to ensure our community is welcoming to everyone, and especially during stressful times."

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**Contact:**

Katelin Mitchell
Executive Director
KCR Community Resources
M: 236-970-4929

Byron Bucardo
Migrant Support Outreach Worker
KCR Community Resources
M: 250-718-3352

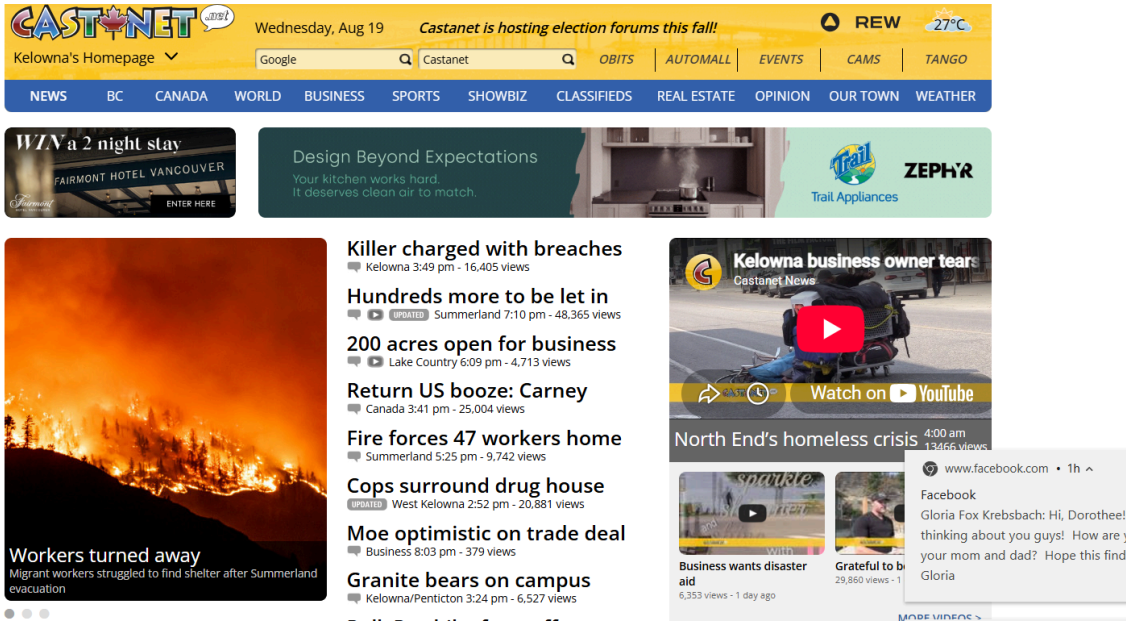
**About KCR Community Resources:**
KCR Community Resources is a not-for-profit, social service agency that actively works to foster diversity, collaboration and resourcefulness by tailoring services to meet community, family and individual needs. In addition to Community, Family & Adoption and Employment Services, we provide a variety of Immigrant Services to support Newcomers, Refugees and Immigrants.

**Attachment:**
Photo of fire along Highway 97 as Migrant Workers travel to West Kelowna shelter
Additional videos and photos of fire and evacuation from Migrant Workers available



**Castanet**

https://www.castanet.net/news/Summerland/628543/Migrant-workers-struggled-to-find-shelter-after-Summerland-evacuation




**Kelowna Now**

https://www.kelownanow.com/watercooler/news//news/Wildfire/Wildfire_forces_Summerland_migrant_workers_back_to_Mexico_months_before_planned

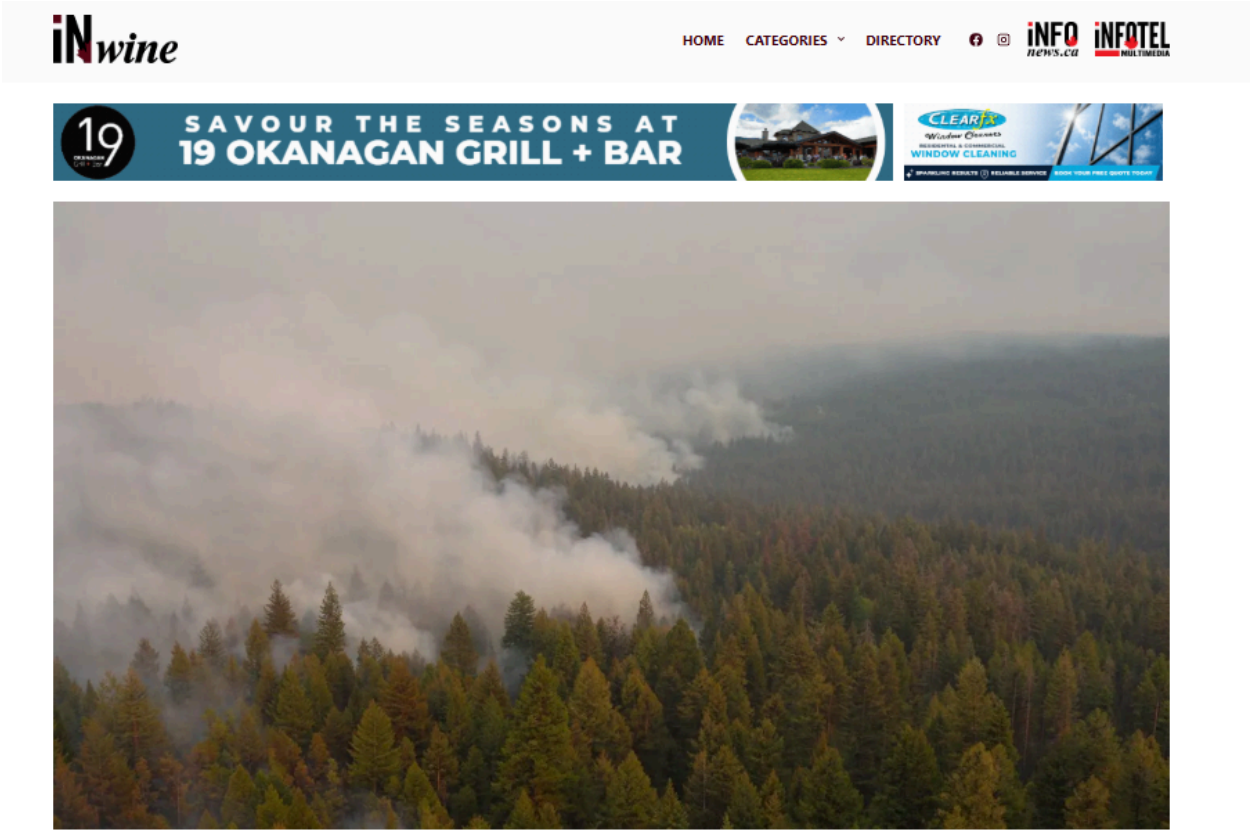


**CBC Radio Interview with Byron Bucardo (9 minutes)**

https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-110-daybreak-south/clip/16233138-a-kelowna-non-profit-says-gaps-need-addressed-temporary

**InfoNews**

https://infonews.ca/inwine/news/8638/wildfire-forces-okanagan-fruit-pickers-back-to-mexico/




The western flank of the Bald Range wildfire, near Summerland B.C., is shown in this Saturday, Aug. 15, 2026, handout photo. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Handout - B.C. Wildfire Service (Mandatory Credit)

## Wildfire forces Okanagan fruit pickers back to Mexico

BY LEVI LANDRY / AUGUST 22 2026 02:00 PM