

**BURNING MAN**

# Burning Man 2023: Cell towers coming; no estimate of when vehicles can resume travel

*Climactic burning of 'The Man' postponed as playa remains gripped in mud*



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## 9:30 p.m. update: Burning Man statement: Cell service coming, shuttles available for those who walk the 5 miles to Gerlach

BLACK ROCK CITY -- Burning Man organizers late Saturday said they're deploying temporary cell phone towers and wifi across their muddy city as increasingly concerned attendees struggle to alter travel arrangements and connect with worried family members back home.

In a lengthy post to their website, event organizers reiterated that no one is allowed to drive out of the temporary city in the remote desert north of Reno. But they said people can walk the five miles across the muddy desert to the nearest paved road in Gerlach and take a free shuttle bus from there. And they reminded attendees and the public alike that coming to Burning Man has always required preparation and fortitude.

"We have come here knowing this is a place where we bring everything we need to survive," the organization said. "It is because of this that we are all well-prepared for a weather event like this."

Indeed, most attendees are taking the muddy conditions in stride, partying in the streets and making mud sculptures.

But organizers have also postponed the burning of the Man effigy that gives the event its name, and some attendees begin leaving after its traditional torching on the Saturday before Labor Day. The bulk of attendees typically leave late Sunday or early Monday in a departure known as Exodus.

Attendees are expected to arrive at Burning Man with everything they need to survive while there, from food and water to shelter. The organization itself sells ice, which is being rationed, and provides porta-potties along with emergency medical care. Organizers on Saturday cautioned attendees to ration their food, water and fuel.

Heavy rains that began Friday afternoon turned the normally rock-hard desert floor into a muddy morass that's almost impossible to walk on. Burning Man officials said only four-wheel-drive vehicles with adequate tires have proven able to navigate the slick streets.

Among the updates:

All Burns are postponed.

There's no estimate for letting people drive home. Organizers said Monday late in the day would be possible if weather conditions are favorable, but it could also be sooner or later depending on the rain.

The weather forecast indicates potential rainfall overnight Saturday into early Sunday.

Event workers are staging vehicles capable of traversing the mud around the city, to help ferry medical evacuees and "other urgent situations" to the nearest paved road.

Workers are surveying the roads to check their condition. "Please help us keep streets clear by not driving, so we can set the stage to open the city back up again and begin Exodus," organizers said.

It is possible to walk to the paved Washoe County Road 34, but plan to walk five miles through the mud.

"This isn't a simple solution, but it is a possible one should you need or want to make the trek," organizers said. "We do not recommend walking this distance at night. One can become disoriented by the darkness and doing a search and rescue will delay us from helping the city open back up again."

Listen to Burning Man Information Radio at 94.5 fm, or online at [BMIR.org](http://BMIR.org).

"Get some rest and spend some quality time with your campmates," organizers said. "We will all get out of this, it will just take time."

### **3 p.m. update: Burning Man rationing ice sales; reopening could be days away**

BLACK ROCK CITY, Nevada -- Burning Man has closed its entrance and exits gates and told its approximately 73,000 attendees to conserve food, fuel and water as continuing rains make driving off the Black Rock Desert near-impossible.

There was no estimated time for reopening, and thousands of attendees are facing the potential of missing flights, failing to return rental cars or failing to return to work Tuesday. The event is set to officially end Monday but many people begin leaving Saturday night or Sunday.

"I think it's just a waiting game now," said Max Spooner, who walked through the city with a mattress strapped to his back. Spooner said his tent got wet on Friday night and he retrieved dry bedding from his car via a long, slippery walk. "Survival mode, here we go."

The closures and order to remain in shelter come as the event was supposed reach its zenith on Saturday night with the burning of the giant wooden Man effigy towering over the temporary city. All vehicle traffic within the encampment has been halted, including servicing for the thousands of portable toilets that make the event possible. Organizers have also begun rationing ice sales.

Many attendees appeared to remain in good spirits, playing beer pong in the muddy streets or splashing in the standing water. Techno continued echoing around the encampment, and spontaneous dance parties kept breaking out. Walking was almost impossible Saturday morning, but started to improve as the ground began to dry. Then it began raining again.

Given the conditions, which include forecast rain Sunday, it appears unlikely anyone will be permitted to drive out soon. Burning Man officials have not provided a comprehensive update on conditions, departure timing or even the multiple art burns scheduled for Saturday and Sunday. Longtime attendees said they can't remember a burn with this much rain.

As drizzle began falling Saturday afternoon, Cutter Palacios of Los Angeles hunched on a folding chair outside his camper with an iPad, using a Starlink internet terminal to tell work he wouldn't make it. A medic and intimacy coordinator, Palacios said he had to tell a colleague he couldn't commit to a union gig later this week, costing him \$1,200 in lost wages.

"I have a wedding this weekend and a flight on Friday," he said. "My hope is to get out of here Wednesday because I still need to buy a suit."

Standing outside a bank of portable toilets, Mike Jed and his campmates watched as other attendees ducked inside to dump out bottles of urine. Jed's camp made a bucket toilet so people didn't have to walk to the porta-potties as often. Jed and his friends said they're still enjoying their stay at Burning Man, but hoped there were no health hazards if the toilets begin to overflow.

Still, they also acknowledged that Burning Man is intended to challenge attendees, many of whom have reputations as wealthy, white Californians.

"If it really turns into a disaster, well, no one is going to have sympathy for us," Jed said with a laugh. "I mean, it's Burning Man."

### **Noon update: Burning Man entry shut down for remainder of event**

The Bureau of Land Management released a statement Saturday, saying Burning Man entry is now closed for good:

"Officials from BLM and the Pershing County Sheriff's Office have closed ingress to the Burning Man event effective immediately and for the remainder of the event. Participants inbound for the event should turn around and head home.

"Rain over the last 24 hours has created a situation that required a full stop of vehicle movement on the playa.

More rain is expected over the next few days and conditions are not expected to improve enough to allow vehicles to enter the playa."

The BLM is the federal agency overseeing the public land that Burning Man is held on.

### **10 a.m. update: On a gluey playa, burners make the best of a sticky situation**

Dawn brought a growing realization for attendees that they might not be going home as planned, given rain forecast for later Saturday into Sunday. And while Saturday morning is usually full of anticipation for the Man effigy burn, this Saturday arrived quietly for the 70,000-plus burners in Black Rock City.

Only a few people braved the muddy roads, trying to find their way back to their camps after a night of partying elsewhere. On the playa area in the shadow of the Man effigy, Los Angeles resident "Dirty D" whooped as he wallowed in the mud, smearing it on his face and flinging it into the air.

"I'm doing great," he laughed before taking another dive. Like many Burning Man attendees, he adopted a playa name he uses all week as a way to separate himself from the life he lives in the "default world."

Back in the main camp area, attendees "Dub Kitty" and "Ben Joos" paused for a minute to collect their bearings after a night of dancing with friends.

"This is the ultimate filter of beauty," Dub Kitty said, throwing her arms wide. "We're trying to find my camp and magic along the way."

After using the portapotties, Angelov Franco of Colombia hiked up the garbage bags on his feet and duck-walked across the muddy street toward his camp. This is his 13th burn, he said, and he's never seen anything like the mud. Still, he wasn't going to complain.

"This is going to be fun," he said. "Hopefully the sun will come out after the rain."

### **8:30 a.m. update: Burning Man shelter in place warning remains in effect**

Burning Man organizers are continuing to urge Burners to stay within their camps, and travel in and out of Black Rock City remains prohibited due to muddy conditions.

The National Weather Service is reporting cooler-than-normal temperatures, with a high in the mid-70s during the day Saturday, dipping into the mid-50s tonight.

Intermittent showers are forecast to last through Sunday evening.

#### **Original story:**

BLACK ROCK CITY, Nevada— More than 73,000 Burning Man attendees remain confined to their camps Saturday and are blocked from leaving the event after a slow-moving rainstorm turned their desert playground into a soupy, muddy morass. Organizers banned vehicle traffic from the roads Friday afternoon and kept the exit gates closed as of 5 a.m. Saturday. Even walking was treacherous as thick, slimy mud clung to shoes and anything else it touched. Organizers warned attendees to conserve their food and water, indicating the closures could be lengthy. Dawn revealed puddled water and ruts in the streets, which are just delineated routes along the ordinarily rock-hard desert floor. More rain was expected through Sunday, along with whiteouts, event organizers said.

"No driving is permitted on playa except for emergency vehicles," event organizers said in a 5 a.m. statement. "If you are in (Black Rock City), please shelter in place and stay safe." They added separately: "If you are in BRC, conserve food and water, shelter in a warm space." The road closures appeared to have forced a halt to cleaning and servicing of the thousands of port-a-potties used by attendees who spent Friday night huddled in muddy tents and RVs as the temperature dropped into the low 50s. The conditions immediately drew comparisons to the 2017 Fyre Festival, an ill-fated party in the Bahamas, subject of multiple documentaries. The muddy Burning Man conditions also forced the small airport serving the event to halt operations. While most attendees drive to the event in rural Northern Nevada, commercial flights from Reno or California are available for those willing to pay. The poor weather came just as attendance and activities were beginning to peak, and forced the cancellation of multiple large-scale art burns Friday night. On Saturday night, attendees are

supposed to watch the Man effigy that looms over the encampment burn and explode with fireworks, followed Sunday by the burning of the Temple of the Heart.

The event officially ends Monday in a mass departure known as Exodus. Before the event officially started Aug. 27, organizers closed the gates to early arrivals for several days after the remnants of Hurricane Hilary swamped the area. Burning Man attendees are expected to be completely self-sufficient for the duration of their stay, bringing in all the food, water and shelter they need. Cell phone service is virtually nonexistent at the event, and only a few people have access to satellite internet for updates.

*This is a breaking news story and will be updated.*