



Edgar McGregor, a 24-year-old amateur climate scientist whose Altadena Weather and Climate Facebook page is being credited with convincing numerous people to evacuate and saving lives in the Eaton fire, photographed near Eaton Canyon on Monday. (Ringo Chiu/For The Times)

By Hailey Branson-Potts, Staff Writer, Jan. 14, 2025 2:14 PM PT

The night the Eaton fire started, Edgar McGregor stood on a darkened Altadena street, held up his cellphone and started recording as the sky glowed orange behind him.

His voice calm, the 24-year-old amateur climate scientist urged people living between the Eaton Wash and Allen Avenue to immediately pack their bags and get ready to evacuate.

Then the wind picked up. It muffled his audio. So he started shouting.

"This is imminent!" McGregor said. "Do not wait for an official evacuation notice. If you think you should leave, get out! Get out!"

At 7:17 p.m., he uploaded the [31-second video](#) to his Facebook page, where he has thousands of followers.

At 10:22 p.m., he posted: "You should not go to sleep tonight. If you are anywhere in the foothills, it's time [to] pull an all-nighter. The fire danger is sky high. Everyone in Altadena, even the western side, should prepare to evacuate."



Wind-whipped embers from the Eaton fire fly over a home on Vinedo Avenue in Altadena on Jan. 7. (Gina Ferazzi/Los Angeles Times)

People took his advice. Now, they say he saved a lot of lives.

McGregor, who lives in his boyhood Altadena home with his parents, turned his passion for weather three years ago into the Altadena Weather and Climate [Facebook page](#), where he writes handy micro-forecasts for mostly neighbors. Given the popularity of the San Gabriel Mountains and its hiking trails, the ranks of his followers grew. And on the night of Jan. 7, his warnings that persuaded people to evacuate elevated him to hero status in Altadena.

Tori Silverman, 37, of Altadena wrote on his page: “Edgar McGregor is an actual American hero.”

“Thank you Edgar McGregor! I didn’t sleep like you told me and I lived,” another follower wrote.

And another: “Edgar absolutely saved my life.”

McGregor studied climate science at San José State University and started his page while in college. He [interned](#) at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory and has [a day job](#) working for the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation as a recreation services leader.

On his Facebook page, he is known for dispassionate detail rather than alarmist hype. So when he said the Eaton fire was life-threatening, his thousands of followers knew he was not exaggerating.

“I’m very careful with my word choice,” McGregor said in an interview. “It’s not just about warning people that conditions are right. Anyone can go online and fearmonger and create scare tactics. I’d never hype up a storm unless it needed to be hyped up.”

The deadly Eaton fire — fueled by wind gusts up to [to 100 mph near Altadena](#) — needed to be hyped.

“I knew this was serious because usually Edgar’s posts are so steady, so when he said be ready, we were,” wrote one follower, among the hundreds who expressed gratitude for his neighborhood forecasts.

Silverman told the Times she has been following McGregor’s page since summer 2023, when [the post-tropical cyclone](#) formerly known as Hurricane Hilary hit Southern California. McGregor, she said, “prepared us for that too, and also kept things factual instead of sensational.”

Last week, when McGregor said that anyone north of Altadena Drive should leave immediately, Silverman said, “that was good enough for me to get gone.”

Her house on Altadena Drive, which had been in her family since 1964, went up in flames. “Had I not left when I did,” she said, “my four pets and I would have burned up.”



Edgar McGregor near Eaton Canyon in Altadena. (Ringo Chiu/For The Times)

McGregor has been obsessed with the weather — even in sunny Southern California — since childhood.

As a kindergartener, he said, he would tell his teachers he needed to go to the restroom so he could go outside and walk in the rain.

He was 11 in December 2011 when he experienced his first major windstorm — a fierce Santa Ana wind event that, [The Times reported](#), “wreaked havoc on Altadena’s Christmas Tree Lane, snapped the top of the 100-foot tree at Americana at Brand in Glendale” and led to emergency declarations in numerous San Gabriel Valley cities.



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“That was the first extreme weather event of my life,” McGregor said. “That was

frightening. That event got me interested in Santa Ana winds.”

As a teenager, McGregor, inspired by the young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, participated in school strikes, demanding action on climate change.

On Jan. 7, as thousands of new followers flocked to his page, growing to more than 7,500 this week, he explained: “Southern California is full of micro-climates where the hottest deserts in the world, the chilly California coastal current, towering snowy mountains, and Mediterranean shrublands all clash together.

“The diversity of our local climate makes it challenging for local weather officials to capture everyone in their forecasts, and that is where I come in — locally, at least.”

With the success of his Facebook page, he recently started writing [Weather McGregor](#), a more in-depth forecast and weather analysis for paid subscribers, on the platform Patreon.

In the spring of 2019, he started what became a viral, volunteer effort to clean up Eaton Canyon.

This week, he will mark 2,000 days coming to the park, bucket in hand, to pick up trash in the heat, rain, snow [and wind](#). In recent days, he has cleaned up just outside the evacuation zone.

Over the years, he has found countless water bottles and candy wrappers on and around popular hiking trails. He has picked up a few passports. Some cash. During the pandemic, a lot of masks. Recently, a lot of vape pens.

Last May, he [posted photos](#) of Eaton Canyon — green, everywhere, after a wet winter — to the social media platform X. What he saw [scared him](#).

“More photos today of how stupid-lush the mountains north of Los Angeles are after our wettest 18-month period in 117 years of weather record keeping,” he wrote. “After these fuels dry out this summer, wildfires are going to go nuclear this fall.”

Over the next seven months, essentially [no rain fell](#).

On Dec. 31, McGregor wrote on Facebook that he was “keeping a close eye on the potential for mountain wave activity” on the night of Jan. 7 into the morning of Jan. 8 in the local foothills.

[Mountain wave wind occurs](#) when gusts rapidly drop down mountain slopes, then gain strength upon hitting a flat landscape, a weather phenomenon that causes short bursts of strong, dangerous winds.

The winds, he figured, would likely be between 40 and 49 mph in Altadena.



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“This particular storm has serious potential,” he wrote, “and my forecast could very well escalate in the coming days.”

On Jan. 5, he predicted gusts of more than 65 mph. In that post, he added: “My fear here is less of the wind and more of the fire danger.”

At 11:01 a.m. on Jan. 7, after the Palisades fire started across the county, McGregor told the people of Altadena to make early plans to evacuate — to find all their important documents and to park their cars in their driveways facing outward.

After seeing that post, longtime follower Janel Foo, who lives near the Altadena L.A. County sheriff’s station, packed her family’s bags — hours before the Eaton fire started — and set them by the front door.

At 6:23 p.m., in all caps, McGregor posted that a fire had ignited in Eaton Canyon.

“THIS IS NOT A DRILL,” he wrote.



Homes burn during the Eaton fire on Jan. 8 in Altadena. (Gina Ferazzi/Los Angeles Times)

Foo, 43, and her husband and 2-year-old son were eating a kielbasa dinner by candlelight, with the electricity already out.

In the kitchen, her husband saw the orange glow outside. Then they heard a neighbor driving down the street, honking, screaming for everybody to get out.

Foo told her frightened toddler to hold on to his blanket and not let go, and the family quickly fled — grateful that their belongings were ready to go, thanks to McGregor.

“As soon as we saw the fire, we got out,” said Foo, whose house survived but was still under a mandatory evacuation order a week later.



CALIFORNIA: Eaton fire victim must start over. He begins by volunteering with the people who helped him, Jan. 14, 2025

“We were able to evacuate with less panic and so much preparation — and get the cat — and it was all because of him.”

That night — after McGregor knocked on a few neighbors’ doors, telling them to leave — he and his mother drove to a friend’s home in South Pasadena. He pulled an all-nighter, posting updates about the wind and flames as he scoured publicly available forecast models and government data, interpreting it in layman’s terms for Altadenans.

At 5:33 a.m. on Jan. 8, McGregor, who did not yet know whether his house survived, [wrote on X](#): “This is the worst night of my entire life.”

On Friday, three days after the fire began, Charles Phillips was outside his home on Sinaloa Avenue with a borrowed chain saw, cutting up pieces of tree branches that had fallen in front of his house.

His house was still under mandatory evacuation order, but he had gotten back in easily — before the National Guard started blocking off streets — and hunkered down.



Charles Phillips outside his home on Sinaloa Avenue in Altadena., (Hailye Branson-Potts/Los Angeles Times)

But that first night? He and his wife and three teenage daughters bolted as soon as they saw McGregor’s Facebook post saying a fire had started.

“Three minutes, and we were gone,” said Phillips, a 49-year-old aerospace engineer. “We didn’t even take anything. We just left. The fire was right there. We have two dogs, two cats — we packed them up.”

Phillips returned home, alone, the next morning. Three doors down, destroyed houses smoldered.

Phillips quoted McGregor’s posts verbatim.

“This guy,” he said, “is responsible for saving so many lives. The climates are so different, neighborhood to neighborhood, and here’s this young kid trying to predict just for us.”

McGregor said all the praise is a little surreal.

Despite his lifelong interest in weather, he long thought he would forge a career focused on long-term climate change issues, not real-time forecasting. He has changed his mind.

“I didn’t want to get into meteorology,” he said. “I didn’t want other people’s safety in my hands.”

But now, he knows, people trust him. And in this tough time, that feels good.



Edgar McGregor is being credited with convincing numerous people to evacuate from Altadena, saving their lives. (Ringo Chiu/For The Times)

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