

FOREST FIRES RAGE IN SOUTHWEST EUROPE

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

Checking blaze: Wildfires continue to spread in the Gironde region of southwestern France, forcing 14,000 people to evacuate to temporary shelters. SDIS 33/Reuters SDIS 33/Reuters

Firefighters struggled to contain wildfires sweeping across southwest Europe on Sunday as a heatwave showed no sign of abating, with Britain poised to set new temperature records this coming week.

Blazes raging in France, Greece, Portugal and Spain have destroyed thousands of hectares of land, forced thousands of residents and holidaymakers to flee and killed several emergency personnel since last week.

Second heatwave

It is the second heatwave engulfing parts of southwest Europe in weeks. Scientists blame climate change and predict more frequent and intense episodes of extreme weather such as heatwaves and drought.

A study published in June in the journal *Environmental Research: Climate* concluded it was highly probable that climate change was making heatwaves worse.

Firefighters in France's southwestern Gironde region were fighting to control two forest blazes that have devoured nearly 11,000 hectares since Tuesday.

The wildfires have forced more than 14,000 people — residents and tourists combined — to decamp. Seven emergency shelters have been set up.

Meteo France forecast temperatures of up to 40 degrees Celsius in parts of southern France on Sunday, with new heat records expected on Monday.

"The heat is intensifying. The heatwave is spreading across the country," the weather office said.

France placed 37 departments on orange high alert on Sunday.

Authorities in the French Alps urged climbers bound for Mont Blanc, Europe's highest mountain, to postpone their trip due to repeated rock falls caused by "exceptional climatic conditions" and "drought".

The call comes after a section of Italy's biggest Alpine glacier gave way in early July, killing 11 people.

Spanish officials reported around 20 wildfires in the country from the south to Galicia in the far northwest, where blazes have destroyed around 4,500 hectares of land. Another fire burning in the Mijas mountain range has destroyed about 2,000 hectares of land.

In Portugal, almost the entire country remained on high alert for wildfires despite a slight drop in temperatures, after hitting 47 degrees Celsius — a record for the month of July — on Thursday. Only one major fire was burning on Sunday in the north.

At least 1,000 deaths have been attributed to the heatwave in Portugal and Spain so far.

'Red' alert in U.K.

In Greece, the civil defence service had brought under control a wildfire raging on the Mediterranean island of Crete since Friday.

In the U.K., the weather office issued a first-ever "red" warning for extreme heat, cautioning there was a "risk to life".

The Met Office said temperatures in southern England could exceed 40C on Monday or Tuesday for the first time, leading some schools to say they would stay closed next week.

(With Reuters inputs)

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