

Russia battles fires in Siberia, Far East

May 23 2011



The burnt-out trunk of a tree is seen in a forest near a village of Zdorovie, some 60 km east of Moscow in 2010. Russia is battling wildfires spreading across Siberia and the Far East, with officials scrambling to prevent a disastrous repeat of last year's deadly blazes, the emergencies ministry said.

Russia is battling wildfires spreading across Siberia and the Far East, with officials scrambling to prevent a disastrous repeat of last year's deadly blazes, the emergencies ministry said on Monday.

More than 400 wildfires covering over 110,000 hectares of forests and [peat bogs](#) have been registered in the country in the last 24 hours, the emergencies ministry said.

Overall, since the start of the year the ministry has recorded more than 8,500 wildfires covering over 290,000 hectares, nearly twice as much territory compared to the same period last year.

Russia endured the worst heatwave in its recorded history last year. A record drought wiped out the harvest and wildfires spread out of control, killing dozens, burning down thousands of houses and threatening military and nuclear installations.

The 2010 fires left Moscow shrouded in smoke for several weeks, forcing people to leave the capital in droves and causing [mortality rates](#) in the city to double.

Environmental campaigners [Greenpeace](#) warned earlier this month that Russia could again choke in catastrophic wildfires this summer because of the authorities' slow response to the growing threat.

Alexei Yaroshenko, head of Greenpeace Russia's forest programme, said the [forest fires](#) had started earlier this year and were more dangerous.

Last month, President [Dmitry Medvedev](#) warned Russian officials they would be sent to personally douse the blazes if they failed to prevent fires this year.

The European part of Russia, including Moscow, remains largely unaffected so far.

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