

France appeals for help in fighting Cote d'Azur fires

July 25 2017, by Ambre Tosunoglu, Claudine Renaud



Firefighters work to put out a fire in Biguglia, on the French Mediterranean island of Corsica

France asked for Europe's help Tuesday in fighting wild fires that have consumed swathes of forest in the southeast, one of which is raging near the popular resort of Saint-Tropez.

Over 4,000 firefighters and troops backed by 19 water bombers have

been mobilised to extinguish the flames. At least seven firefighters have been injured since the fires broke out on Monday, according to the authorities.

The blazes have devoured nearly 4,000 hectares (15 square miles) of land along the Mediterranean coast, in the mountainous interior and on the island of Corsica—in the middle of the holiday season.

With strong winds and tinder dry conditions creating a dangerous mix, the government asked its European Union partners to send two extra air tankers—a request immediately fulfilled by Italy, according to the EU.

A [fire](#) in La Croix-Valmer near Saint-Tropez, the resort frequented by the rich and famous, had been contained, local fire chief Philippe Gambe de Vergnes said Tuesday afternoon.

But the blaze had already gutted 400 hectares of coastal forest in an area dotted with homes, he said.

More than 200 people had to be removed from the area.

La Croix-Valmer's deputy mayor Rene Carandante described a desolate landscape of blackened headlands fringed by charred umbrella pines, where green forest had once framed the azure waters of the Mediterranean.

"It's a disaster area. There's nothing left," he said.

Around 80 kilometres (50 miles) inland, 300 hectares of pines and oaks went up in smoke near the village of Saint-Maximin-La-Sainte-Baume.

A local official accused the authorities of failing to regularly remove dry undergrowth, making the forest a fire hazard.

The French island of Corsica, situated midway between France and Italy, was also assessing the damage caused by a towering inferno.

Scores of firefighters worked through the night to tamp down a wall of flames that had threatened homes in the northeastern town of Biguglia.



A firefighter battles a blaze in Biguglia, on the French Mediterranean island of Corsica

A resident, whose house had at one point been in danger, spoke of "apocalyptic" scenes.

In the end, disaster was averted after the wind died down, but the blaze engulfed 1,800 hectares of forest and burned several vehicles.

The Luberon, an area of hilltop villages and lavender fields in Provence,

also fought fires on Monday.

Around 100 homes around the village of Mirabeau and a neighbouring hamlet had to be evacuated, but by Tuesday firefighters had managed to secure residential areas.

Further east, in Carros, north of Nice, a house, three vehicles and a warehouse went up in flames, according to regional authorities.

Speaking to France Info radio, Mayor Charles Scibetta described waking up to a "lunar landscape" and said the inhabitants had a lucky escape.

Southeast France is experiencing an exceptionally hot, dry summer that has made it especially vulnerable to fires.

Riviera becoming 'bushier'

"All of France is mobilised," the head of the fire service in southeast France, Colonel Gregory Allione told France Info, adding that extra firefighters had been drafted in from the north.

Thomas Curt, a director at the Irsea institute for research into the environment and agriculture, said a fall-off in agriculture in southeast France since the 1970s had made it more prone to fires.

"Farmland is contracting and the [forest](#) is naturally expanding, making the area bushier," he said.

A proliferation in the numbers of homes, roads and power lines near forests also increased the fire hazard, he added.

In mid-July, a blaze believed to have been ignited by a cigarette butt tossed out of a car ripped through 800 hectares of land near Aix-en-

Provence.

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