

Greece asks EU for air support to battle fires

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Greece is asking Europe for four CL-415-type water bombers to help tackle its forest fires

Greece on Tuesday pleaded for assistance from European neighbours to help battle wild fires including a blaze ravaging a forest near Athens.

In total 146 fires have broken out across Greece since Sunday, and while most have been brought under control, authorities are worried about three on the coast near Athens, in the western Peloponnese and on the island of Zakynthos.

The government "has asked for the activation of the European civil protection mechanism for air support ... because of the danger posed by the fires," [fire](#) service spokeswoman Stavroula Malliri told a press conference.

She said Greece was asking for four CL-415-type water bombers, which are built for aerial firefighting and can fly up to 322 kilometres per hour (200 miles per hour) and scoop up 1,620 gallons (6,000 litres) of water in about 12 seconds.

Malliri said Cyprus had already offered 60 firefighters, while France said it could not contribute any manpower or air support because it is battling its own fires in the south and Corsica.

French authorities said a blaze in the southern town of Luceram, near Nice, had finally been brought under control Tuesday after burning for 48 hours.

Greece called in the army to assist firefighters around Kalamos, 45 kilometres (30 miles) east of Athens, where a fire has been burning since Sunday.

Nearly 300 firefighters, 100 soldiers, five air bombers and seven helicopters had been mobilised in the Attiki region, home to Athens, where fires are smouldering in a zone of forest and scrubland dotted with vacation homes.

At least five properties were destroyed and three others evacuated, authorities said, as smoke from the blaze clouded the skies over the capital on Tuesday morning.

Firefighters were also battling flames near the town of Amaliada in the western Peloponnese and on the tourist island of Zakynthos, where

several fires were raging—some thought to have been started deliberately.

Authorities have ordered the evacuation of vulnerable people, children and the elderly.



Soaring temperatures and tinder-dry forest floors across southern Europe have led to a rash of devastating wild fires

"Such a situation is unheard of," regional fire chief Vassili Matteopoulos told local media on Monday.

"We had 22 fires on Zakynthos just in the last 24 hours."

Political backlash

Efforts to control the blazes were complicated by winds reaching speeds of 40-50 kilometres per hour, according to the fire service.

The blazes also sparked controversy between the opposition and the cash-strapped government, which was accused of negligence, with local officials decrying a lack of air support.

"In this crucial hour, the priority" is to battle the fires, the office of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said. "The time for review will come later."

Soaring temperatures and tinder-dry forest floors across southern Europe have led to a rash of devastating wildfires, notably in Portugal, where 64 people died in a massive inferno in June.

On Tuesday some 1,450 Portuguese firefighters were battling at least four blazes in the central Santarem and Castelo Branco regions, emergency services said.

And there were fresh fires in Albania, according to the interior ministry, where more than 5,000 hectares (12,000 acres) of Albanian forest have been torched since July.

French authorities said the fire in Luceram had resulted in no evacuations or property damage, but had burned 150 hectares (370 acres) of forest.

At least 300 firefighters had worked to tackle the blaze, the biggest of several to hit the Alpes-Maritimes region of France this summer.

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