

Canada's westernmost province declares wildfires emergency

August 15 2018



This satellite image released by the NASA Earth Observatory shows the smokey landscape of British Columbia province in southwestern Canada

British Columbia declared a province-wide state of emergency Wednesday as Canada's military joined firefighters in trying to douse

556 wildfires burning across the craggy region.

The province's public safety minister, Mike Farnworth, said the measure—which allows for officials to take "every action necessary" to protect the public—would be in effect for 14 days.

It is only the second time in more than a decade that it has been used, after a record fire season last year that blackened vast tracts of forest and prompted record numbers of residents to evacuate.

"Public safety is always our first priority and, as [wildfire](#) activity is expected to increase, this is a progressive step in our wildfire response to make sure British Columbia has access to any and all resources necessary," Farnworth said in a statement.

As of Tuesday, there were 566 wildfires burning in British Columbia, and 77 evacuation orders or alerts affecting nearly 22,000 people and 11,000 properties.

Cities from Vancouver on the Pacific coast to Winnipeg in the Prairies region about 2,300 kilometers (1,400 miles) to the east were blanketed with smoke from the fires.

Nearly 3,400 firefighters, including from Australia, Mexico and New Zealand, are battling the flames.

On Monday, the British Columbia government formally requested help from the federal government, which responded by sending 200 troops as well as military aircraft to help contain and "mop up" the wildfires.

"We are challenged with the number of fires in the province," British Columbia Forests Minister Doug Donaldson told public broadcaster CBC.

"It's across the entire province unlike last year where it was concentrated," he explained.

Across Canada, hot and dry weather has fueled a number of wildfires. In July, an indigenous man died while helping to suppress [forest fires](#) in Ontario province.

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