

Europe sizzles on sixth day of deadly heatwave

June 29 2019



Montpellier, southern France, has witnessed some of the hottest weather in France this year

Europe sweltered Saturday on the sixth day of a widespread, deadly heatwave that has fuelled record-breaking temperatures, huge blazes and

pollution peaks.

With France, Italy, Spain and some central European nations posting all-time high temperatures, officials pleaded with people to take precautions, with promise of reprieve from Sunday.

The heat has officially claimed four lives in France, two in Italy and another two in Spain, including a 17-year-old harvest worker, a 33-year-old roofer and a 72-year-old homeless man.

The hot spell sparked several blazes, including in Spain where firefighters were again battling high flames in strong winds and blistering heat Saturday just after they managed to contain another inferno after nearly 72 hours.

A fire that started Friday in the central Spanish town of Almorox burnt at least 1,600 hectares (4,000 acres), spilling over into the Madrid region and forcing the evacuation of a village, emergency services said.

In France, about 40 fires were reported, razing about 600 hectares and dozens of houses in the Gard department in the country's south.

Like a 'blowtorch'

This is the same region where a new French record of 45.9 degrees Celsius (114.6 degrees Fahrenheit) was set Friday, prompting the Meteo France weather service to issue its highest alert level of red for the first time.



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It is not only humans struggling in the heat.

Winegrowers in the south of France said their precious crops have been badly burnt.

"Some vines seem to have been hit with a blowtorch," Jerome Despey said, while Catherine Bernard likened it to the effects of a hairdryer.

"I've been a winegrower for 30 years. I have never seen a vine burnt by a sudden onset of heat like yesterday," Despey added.

France is the seventh European country to ever register a plus 45-degree temperature, along with Bulgaria, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Greece and North Macedonia, Meteo France said.



People sought refuge from the heat near a water atomizer on a central square in Strasbourg on Thursday



Festival-goers were enjoying the heatwave at the Glastonbury festival in southwestern England

'Avoidable deaths'

France remains haunted by the memory of the devastating heatwave of August 2003 in which nearly 15,000 people were estimated to have died.

"I want to appeal to the sense of responsibility of citizens—there are avoidable deaths in every heatwave," French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said.

Meteorologists point to a blast of hot air from northern Africa for the scorching early European summer, but the extreme heat is expected to

subside from Sunday.

Scientists warn that global warming linked to human fossil fuel use could make such scorchers more frequent.



"Umbrellas" by Greek sculptor George Zongolopoulos provide little respite from sizzling June temperatures

In Germany, the national weather service said temperatures were more than four degrees higher in June than an international reference period of 1981-2010.

The mercury will start dropping for France and Spain from Sunday, but

still rise in Germany, with temperatures as high as 39 C in some places before cooling down from Monday.

The stifling heat caused air quality to nosedive in some European cities, prompting local authorities to take anti-pollution measures.

In Paris, Lyon and Marseille, authorities have banned the most polluting cars from the roads in recent days.

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