

# One year on, deadly Greek wildfire haunts survivors

July 23 2019, by Marina Rafenberg

---



The deadly fire on Mati killed more than a hundred people and gutted many homes

Twelve months on, you can still see it in the faces of the survivors: the deadly wildfires that killed 102 people in the Greek coastal town of Mati

has left its mark on local people.

They have not forgotten the panic as the fire, fed by [strong winds](#), swept through their community, catching people in their homes and vehicles and leaving only charred remains.

The July 23 disaster, at the coastal resort some 40 kilometres (25 miles) from Athens, made headlines around the world.

"We think a lot of that day," said Maria, a local resident. "Before and after the 23rd."

She and other [local people](#) attended one of the local churches on Sunday for a memorial service to mark the approaching anniversary. Joining them were many of the people who regularly took their holidays in the town.

Many dressed in black, they lit candles and threw white roses into the sea. A year earlier, several people fled into the sea with just the clothes on their backs to escape the inferno.

"We grew up here, we spent the summers of our childhood here," said Emmie, who hid her tears behind her sunglasses.

"We associated this place with joy and with holidays and now it's come to mean pain," she added.

Also at the service was Civil Protection Minister Michalis Chryssochoidis, who said he would work hard to ensure such a tragedy would not happen again.



People gathered on the beach Sunday for a memorial ceremony in memory of the victims of the wildfire

"A certain number of problems have not been resolved, from urbanism plans to questions of health," he acknowledged, promising to tackle these issues.

The vegetation in and around Mati still has not grown back—nearly 120,000 trees were destroyed in the fire—and the burnt-out houses still have not been rebuilt.

## **Criminal prosecutions**

The owners of the houses destroyed in the fire have so far received up to 6,000 euros (\$6,700) in government compensation but the permits to rebuild have been slower in coming.

Caritas Hellas, the Greek charity, gave 1,500 euros to 110 of the most vulnerable households. Medecins du Monde (Doctors of the World) has arranged free consultations with psychologists for the 1,679 affected by the fires.

But between 70 and 80 people are still lodged in an army centre, deprived of their home—and anger is growing among the locals who accuse the previous Tsipras government of having mismanaged the crisis.

At the time, the government stressed the difficulty of organising the evacuation on the day of the fire with winds blowing at nearly 120 kilometres an hour (75 mph).

But in the aftermath of the disaster, the police and fire services gave conflicting accounts of what had gone wrong.



Although some local people have received some compensation, permits to clear them to rebuild have been slower in coming

The minister responsible for the police resigned within weeks, following accusations that police had not secured the area quickly enough nor alerted the fire service to the scale of the fire.

Then in March, Athens prosecutors filed criminal charges including manslaughter against 16 people for their negligence over the fire.

Those facing prosecution include senior officials in the fire service, the port police and in civil protection.

The officials include the governor of the Attica region and the mayors of

two towns, Marathonas and Rafina, hit by the fire.

And a 65-year-old man is accused of having started a [fire](#) on the neighbouring Mount Penteli which the winds blew down towards Mati.

But the trial has not started, leaving those hit by the disaster in suspense.

Residents of Mati wrote to the new conservative Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis after he was elected earlier this month, alerting him to the "serious problems" they were experiencing a year on.

"We are going to need your help and that of your government to overcome obstacles and rapidly find a normal life again," they wrote.

© 2019 AFP

Citation: One year on, deadly Greek wildfire haunts survivors (2019, July 23) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-07-year-deadly-greek-wildfire-survivors.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--