

Dozens of monkeys die in German zoo fire

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A preliminary investigation suggests that flames from flying lanterns might have sparked a fire at the Krefeld zoo that killed dozens of monkeys

Flames from flying New Year's Eve lanterns might have sparked a blaze that killed dozens of monkeys at a zoo in northwestern Germany, management and security services said Wednesday.

The blaze tore through the monkey enclosure shortly before midnight, killing at least 30 animals, police said.

The enclosure housed gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees and marmosets. Only two chimpanzees survived, as well as a family of gorillas in a nearby building.

"Our worst fears have been realised," Krefeld zoo, which specialises in primates, announced on its Facebook page.

Tearful visitors lit candles and left flowers and soft toys at the entrance of the zoo on Wednesday. One of the tributes asked simply "Why?".

Firefighters prevented the flames from spreading to other buildings at the zoo in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Focus on fireworks

Preliminary findings suggest the fire might have been caused by flying paper lanterns, which float into the air when lit.

Three lanterns bearing hand-written New Year's wishes were discovered in the smouldering debris.

These types of devices have been banned in the region since 2009.

Police, who have launched an investigation for "arson through negligence", were contacted late Wednesday by a number of people who may have used these lanterns. Krefeld police said investigators were verifying their statements.



People spent around 113 million euros (\$127 million) this year in Germany for New Year's fireworks, sector federation VPI data shows

The German animal protection association quickly called for all kinds of fireworks to be banned near zoos, farms and kennels.

The deadly blaze was "terrible proof of the dramatic consequences for animals" from "uncontrolled" celebrations, the group said.

Germans often use powerful fireworks to celebrate the New Year and in Berlin, rescue services on Wednesday recorded 22 injuries, some of which required amputations, from the holiday.

That was roughly comparable to levels seen in previous years.

The effect of fireworks on air quality has also begun to spark debate and the federal environment agency UBA estimated that the amount of fine particles released in one night was comparable to two months of highway traffic.

Several major German supermarket and hardware chains have decided to stop selling fireworks.

Demand remains strong for now however, with the people spending around 113 million euros (\$127 million) for New Year [fireworks](#), the same amount as last year, according to sector federation VPI.



The Krefeld zoo would remain closed New Years Day because employees were "in shock", its management said

Around 57 percent of the county's inhabitants would support a ban on firework sales but 84 percent of those questioned also said they looked forward to displays next year.

Krefeld zoo planned to remain closed Wednesday with employees "in shock" owing to the "terrible tragedy", management said.

The zoo has around 1,000 animals and attracts some 400,000 visitors a year.

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