

Cyprus says huge forest blaze fully 'under control'

July 5 2021, by Charlie Charalambous



A picture taken on July 4, 2021 shows destroyed vehicles at Ora village on the southern slopes of the Troodos mountains in Cyprus.

Firefighters in Cyprus said Monday they had brought under full control the island's worst blaze on record, which ripped through mountain

forests and farmland, killing four people and destroying scores of homes.

Water-bombing planes from Greece and Israel and British aircraft from bases on the Mediterranean island helped douse the huge fire, which blackened 55 square kilometres (21 square miles) of the Troodos Mountains.

The Cyprus Forestry Department said Monday that "the fire that broke out on Saturday... came under full control today" at 8:00 am (0500 GMT).

Four Egyptian farm labourers aged in their 20s and 30s were killed by the fire as they tried to escape on foot after their car plunged into a ravine.

The wildfire, described as the worst since the Republic of Cyprus was established in 1960, destroyed 50 homes, damaged power lines and forced the evacuation of 10 villages, authorities reported.

"Everything was a nightmare and pure hell here, the village was surrounded by fire," said Akis Giorgiou, 45, from the hamlet of Arakapas.

The fire, fanned by strong winds and exacerbated by a heatwave that has baked the island in temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), sent up a vast cloud of smoke that was visible from sea and from the other side of the Troodos mountain range.

More than 600 people from the emergency services and army were involved in tackling the blaze, along with a dozen aircraft and 70 fire trucks as well as a reconnaissance drone, the forestry department said.



A firefighter battles the flame in a forest on the slopes of the Throodos mountain chain, as a giant fire rages on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus.

'A tragedy'

Firefighters were still deployed en masse on Monday around the badly-hit village of Arakapas, near Limassol, to tackle any potential new outbreaks, the department said.

AFP reporters had seen hick gnarled trunks of ancient olive trees reduced to smouldering stumps and grey ash replacing yellowed scrub as far as the eye could see.

A 67-year-old farmer was arrested and remanded in custody on suspicion of having unintentionally started the enormous blaze while burning stubble, a charge he denied.

Police said an eyewitness had seen him leaving Arakapas in his car at the time the fire started there. He could face charges of recklessly causing four deaths.

Interior Minister Nicos Nouris said the four Egyptians' charred bodies had been found outside the village of Odos in Larnaca district.

Cyprus



Map of Cyprus locating Arakapas and the Troodos mountains.



A Spanish Air Tractor firefighting plane dumps water on the southern slopes of the Troodos mountains close to Agioi Vavatsinias village as a major fire continues to burn on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus on July 4, 2021.



The fire in Cyprus destroyed 55 square kilometres (21 square miles) of forest and farmland, according to the forestry department.

Their burnt-out vehicle was discovered at the bottom of a ravine and the four bodies were some 600 metres (yards) away.

The Egyptian government said they were farm workers from the North African country, while Nicosia vowed in a tweet to "stand by the victims' families... offering every support".

"It is a tragedy," President Nicos Anastasiades said on Twitter on Sunday.

He described the fire as the worst event since 1974, when the island was divided after Turkey occupied its northern third.

On Monday European Parliament speaker David Sassoli expressed his solidarity with Cyprus and offered condolences to the victims.

"When we work together, we are stronger," Sassoli added, noting that the EU disaster management tool had been made available to Cyprus in its battle against the fire.

© 2021 AFP

Citation: Cyprus says huge forest blaze fully 'under control' (2021, July 5) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-07-cyprus-huge-forest-blaze-fully.html>

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.