

Cyprus: Climate change, rural decline boost wildfire risk

August 13 2021, by Menelaos Hadjicostis



A helicopter drops water over a wildfire in the Monte Castillo area, near Tivoli, just a few miles from Rome, Friday, Aug. 13, 2021. The southern regions of Sicily, Sardinia, Calabria and also central Italy, where temperatures are expected to reach record highs, were badly hit by wildfires. Climate scientists say there is little doubt that climate change from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas is driving extreme events, such as heat waves, droughts, wildfires, floods and storms. Credit: Cecilia Fabiano/LaPresse via AP

The disappearance of rural communities in combination with climate change could make wildfires—like those seen in many Mediterranean countries this summer—more frequent in the future, Cyprus' environment minister said on Friday.

Costas Kadis told The Associated Press that as more people abandon villages, former cultivated areas are taken over by wild growth and cease to be a natural impediment to the spread of wildfires.

"On the contrary, they constitute one of the best areas for the outbreak and expansion of fires since a large quantity of combustible material accumulates there," Kadis told the AP in response to a written questionnaire.

The minister said this problem is compounded by [climate change](#) which is "now unquestionable on a global scale." He said the east Mediterranean is now considered a "[global climate change](#) hot spot" where biodiversity and [forest ecosystems](#) are "intensely negatively impacted."

"Because of the increased frequency and duration of heat waves and droughts, the danger of fires breaking out that are more intense, destructive and frequently occurring increases," he said. "As a result, forest ecosystems cannot recover through the mechanisms to which they were adapted."

Scientists voice little doubt that [climate change](#) from the burning of coal, oil and [natural gas](#) is driving extreme events such as heat waves, droughts and wildfires. Such hardships are likely to happen more frequently as Earth continues to warm, they say.

Cyprus last month suffered what authorities called it's "most destructive wildfire" in many decades. It cost four lives, scorched more than 50

square kilometers (20 square miles) of forest and orchards and destroyed dozens of homes.

Although there has been no scientific study linking climate change to the increase in the frequency of large wildfires in Cyprus, Kadis said empirical evidence shows this to be the case.

Kadis said Cyprus is coordinating efforts among eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries to counter climate change. He said more than 200 scientists from the region and elsewhere are preparing recommendations that will form the basis of an action plan to counter regional [climate](#) change. This plan is expected to be endorsed by regional leaders in Cyprus next summer.

The minister said the Forestry Department is in the process of preparing a study to create "fire safe zones" around rural communities by reducing the amount of combustible material around them.

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