

Deadly wildfires reach Turkish power plant

August 4 2021, by Kadir Demir and Fulya Ozerkan In Istanbul



The mayor of Milas said the staff had been evacuated from the power plant.

A thermal power plant on the Aegean Sea was evacuated on Wednesday as a deadly wildfire that has ravaged Turkey for the past week reached its outer edge.

An AFP team saw firefighters and police fleeing the plant near the

hillside town of Milas, while orange flames lapped at the station's gate as night fell.

"The plant is now being completely emptied," the mayor of Milas, Muhammet Tokat tweeted.

Earlier, local officials said hydrogen tanks used to cool the station had been emptied and filled with water as a precaution.

Officials told AFP that the plant operates using coal and fuel oil. It was still believed to be hooked up to Turkey's energy grid when the fire reached its gates.

More than 180 wildfires have scorched huge swathes of forest and killed eight people since breaking out east of the Mediterranean vacation hotspot Antalya last Wednesday, then spreading west.

The European Union's satellite monitoring service said their "radiative power"—a measure of the fires' intensity—"has reached unprecedented values in the entire dataset, which goes back to 2003".

'No room for politics'

The fires' strength and scale have exposed Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to days of criticism for what some observers say has been his sluggish response to the crisis.



Officials say the plant operates using coal and fuel oil.

Erdogan had just begun a live television interview about the fires as news broke about the evacuation of the plant.

He acknowledged that the efforts of firefighters to save the station were failing in the face of "tremendous wind" fanning the flames.

An AFP team confirmed that strong gusts of wind were spreading the flames, meaning flashpoints were reappearing in places where the fires had been put out only hours earlier.

Erdogan lashed out at Turkey's opposition leaders for trying to score political points by questioning his governments' readiness and response.

Other countries besides Turkey were having similar forest fire problems as a record heatwave grips Europe's southeast, he argued.

Turkey's neighbour Greece is also being ravaged by flames, which officials blame on a heatwave caused by [climate change](#).



Residents are helping fire crews fight the wildfires.

"Forest fires are an international threat just like the Covid-19

pandemic," Erdogan said.

"Like elsewhere in the world, there has been a big increase in the forest fires in our country. There should be no room for politics here."

Rattled

The Turkish government appears to have been rattled by the scale and ferocity of the flames.

Its media watchdog on Tuesday warned broadcasters that they might be fined if they continue showing live footage of the blazes or air images of screaming people running for their lives.

Most rolling news channels were only showing sporadic reports about the unfolding disaster on Wednesday afternoon.

Erdogan himself has been subjected to days of ridicule on social media after he tossed bags of tea to crowds of people while touring one of the affected regions under heavy police escort.

The opposition has also accused the powerful Turkish leader of being too slow to accept offers of foreign assistance—including from regional rival Greece—and for having failed to properly maintain firefighting planes.



Strong winds had hampered efforts to bring the fire under control.



Flames soar close to a power Plant near Oren, in Turkey's Mugla holiday region.

'Be patient'

Erdogan's office blamed the very first blazes near Antalya on arsonists, which pro-government media linked to banned Kurdish militants waging a decades-long insurgency against the state.

But more and more public officials now link them to an extreme heatwave that has dried up reservoirs and created tinderbox conditions across much of Turkey's south.

Experts have warned that climate change in countries such as Turkey

increases both the frequency and intensity of wildfires.

Turkey's Agriculture and Forestry Minister Bekir Pakdemirli said temperatures in the Aegean city of Marmaris reached an all-time record of 45.5 degrees Celsius (114 degrees Fahrenheit) this week.

"We are fighting a very serious war," the minister told reporters. "I urge everyone to be patient."

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