

French firefighters battle Riviera inferno for third day

August 18 2021, by Estelle Emonet



The blaze has scorched some 5,000 hectares in a region known for its forests and vineyards.

Hundreds of firefighters struggled for a third day Wednesday to contain France's worst wildfire of the summer near the glitzy Riviera resort of

Saint-Tropez which has forced thousands of residents and tourists to flee.

The blaze has scorched some 5,000 hectares in a region known for its forests, vineyards and fauna since it broke out in the Plaine des Maures nature reserve on Monday evening.

The [fire](#) "had not spread" during the night but "that does not mean it is under control," said the fire service spokesman for the Var region, Franck Graciano.

"We will carry out the same basic work as yesterday by dropping water on the critical places," he said.

Some 1,200 firefighters were deployed, using high-pressure hoses and water-bombing planes and helicopters to control the flames.

High temperatures and strong winds forced [local authorities](#) to evacuate around 7,000 people from homes and campsites, the Var prefecture said Tuesday, many to the safety of municipal buildings and schools.

Among them were 1,300 people staying at a campsite in the village of Bormes-les-Mimosas down the coast from Saint-Tropez.

Other fled the village of La-Garde-Freinet, but there were not new evacuations overnight, the fire service said Wednesday.

"We started smelling the smoke around 7:00 pm, then we saw the flames on the hill," said Cindy Thinesse, who fled a campsite near Cavalaire on Monday evening.

"We hesitated, but when we saw that, we decided to leave," she told AFP.



Water-dropping planes and helicopters were used to control the flames.

'Battle is ongoing'

"The coming hours will be absolutely decisive" for the firefighting effort, President Emmanuel Macron, who has been taking his summer break on the Mediterranean coast, said during visit to first responders Tuesday evening.

While Macron added that "the battle is ongoing and the fire has not yet been contained, stabilised," he said that the firefighters' courage had managed to "avoid the worst" with no casualties so far.

Large blazes have already ravaged parts of Turkey, Bulgaria, Albania, Northern Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Israel, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco this year.

The Mediterranean basin has long faced seasonal wildfires linked to its dry and hot weather in the summer, but [climate scientists](#) warn they will become increasingly common because of man-made [global warming](#).

The French fire is believed to have started near a motorway stop some 30 kilometres (18 miles) northwest of Saint-Tropez.

"We've never seen it spread with such speed, it was three or four times the usual," Thomas Dombry, mayor of La Garde-Freinet village, told AFP.



Some 1,200 firefighters were deployed to battle France's worst wildfire of the summer.

Authorities were counting the cost to the environment even as the fires still raged Tuesday.

"Half of the Plain des Maures nature reserve has been devastated," Concha Agero, deputy director of the French Office of Biodiversity, said Tuesday.

Charred power lines lay on the ground Tuesday, and many trees were burnt around their trunks but their branches were intact, suggesting the fire had ripped through at speed.

But after a calm night on Tuesday, technicians Wednesday began trying to restore phone and electricity lines.

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