

Greece wildfires: Winds fan 2 new blazes outside of Athens

August 16 2021, by Elena Becatoros and Nicholas Paphitis



A resident takes a photograph as a fire burns a forest in Siderina village helicopter about 55 kilometers (34 miles) south of Athens, Greece, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. Greek authorities have deployed dozens of firefighters, as well as six water-dropping planes and four aircraft to a wildfire that broke out Monday morning in the Keratea region southeast of Athens, near the national park of Sounion. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis

Fanned by strong winds, two new big wildfires erupted Monday in hard-hit Greece, triggering evacuation alerts for villages southeast and northwest of Athens—only days after blazes consumed large tracts of forest north of the Greek capital.

Greece has been roiled by hundreds of wildfires this month, on the heels of its most severe heat wave in decades, which left its forests tinder dry. Other Mediterranean countries—Turkey, Italy, Algeria and Spain among them—have suffered similar problems.

Scientists say [there is little doubt that climate change](#) from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas is driving more extreme weather events.

The worst of the two blazes that erupted Monday was in the Vilia area northwest of the Greek capital, which triggered an evacuation alert for eight villages. Greece's minister for public order, Michalis Chrysochoidis, said the flames were coursing through a densely forested area with scattered villages, none of which were in direct danger.

"We are trying to stop the fire from spreading" towards the nearby large village of Vilia, he said.

That blaze was being fought by 240 firefighters—including 143 from Poland—supported by eight water-dropping planes and nine helicopters.

Another fire broke out earlier in the Keratea region southeast of Athens, burning shrubland and threatening a national park in the Sounion area. Three communities were ordered evacuated. Some residents desperately drenched their homes, while volunteers with hoses and branches helped fight the fires. More than 100 firefighters, eight water-dropping planes and 11 helicopters were striving to contain the blaze, which appeared to be on the wane by evening.



An helicopter drops water over a fire in Siderina village helicopter about 55 kilometers (34 miles) south of Athens, Greece, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. Greek authorities have deployed dozens of firefighters, as well as six water-dropping planes and four aircraft to a wildfire that broke out Monday morning in the Keratea region southeast of Athens, near the national park of Sounion. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis

"Right now the situation there has improved, there are scattered active fires within the perimeter and efforts are continuing to contain them," Chrysohoidis said.

Local mayor Dimitris Loukas told Greek television that authorities were investigating reports of arson. He said residents had seen someone in a

car setting a dumpster on fire.

The fire service said 45 wildfires erupted across the country between late Sunday and late Monday. Most were quickly contained.

Two major fires in Greece that began in early August, one on the island of Evia and another in a national park north of Athens, were still smoldering Monday, and firefighters were trying to secure their perimeters. On Evia, water-bombing planes were deployed to assist ground forces.

On Monday, Greece's civil protection chief, Nikos Hardalias, who coordinates the fight against wildfires as well as the country's response to the coronavirus pandemic, was taken to an Athens hospital where he underwent unscheduled heart surgery. A health ministry statement said the operation was successful.



A fire burns a forest near a house in Siderina village helicopter about 55 kilometers (34 miles) south of Athens, Greece, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. Greek authorities have deployed dozens of firefighters, as well as six water-dropping planes and four aircraft to a wildfire that broke out Monday morning in the Keratea region southeast of Athens, near the national park of Sounion. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis



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An helicopter operates during a wildfire in Agios Konstantinos village about 60 kilometers (37 miles) south of Athens, Greece, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. Greek authorities have deployed dozens of firefighters, as well as six water-dropping planes and four aircraft to a wildfire that broke out Monday morning in the Keratea region southeast of Athens, near the national park of Sounion. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis



Police patrol during a wildfire in Agios Konstantinos village about 60 kilometers (37 miles) south of Athens, Greece, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. Greek authorities have deployed dozens of firefighters, as well as six water-dropping planes and four aircraft to a wildfire that broke out Monday morning in the Keratea region southeast of Athens, near the national park of Sounion. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis



Residents gather outside a house during a wildfire in Agios Konstantinos about 60 kilometers (37 miles) south of Athens, Greece, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. Greek authorities have deployed dozens of firefighters, as well as six water-dropping planes and four aircraft to a wildfire that broke out Monday morning in the Keratea region southeast of Athens, near the national park of Sounion. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis



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Residents stand outside their house as a fire burns a forest in Siderina village helicopter about 55 kilometers (34 miles) south of Athens, Greece, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. Greek authorities have deployed dozens of firefighters, as well as six water-dropping planes and four aircraft to a wildfire that broke out Monday morning in the Keratea region southeast of Athens, near the national park of Sounion. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis



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An helicopter operates over Markati village about 60 kilometers (37 miles) south of Athens, Greece, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. Greek authorities have deployed dozens of firefighters, as well as six water-dropping planes and four aircraft to a wildfire that broke out Monday morning in the Keratea region southeast of Athens, near the national park of Sounion. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis

Weeks of wildfires have stretched Greece's response capabilities to the limit. About two dozen European and Mideast countries sent crews, aircraft and vehicles to help. Most have left, although 40 Austrian firefighters remained in the southern Peloponnese region, where two major fires have been burning for days.

Several other Mediterranean countries have suffered intense heat and quickly spreading wildfires in recent weeks, including Algeria, where

wildfires killed at least 75 people; Turkey, where at least 16 people have died and Italy, which saw several fire-related deaths.

Worsening drought and heat have also fueled wildfires this summer in the western United States and in Russia's northern Siberia region.

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