

Spain, Portugal brace for wildfire threat as temps soar

August 11 2021, by Barry Hatton



Workers on a construction site stop to have a drink in Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, Aug. 11, 2021. Spain and Portugal are bracing for temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in coming days, as a mass of hot, dry air from Africa moves north into the Iberian peninsula. Credit: AP Photo/Paul White

Spain and Portugal are bracing for temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in coming days, as a mass of hot, dry air from Africa pushes north into the Iberian peninsula.

Portugal's [prime minister](#) warned Wednesday that the hot weather increases the threat of wildfires, which in 2017 killed more than 100 people in his country. Spain's [weather service](#) forecast a heat wave through Monday and said temperatures could surpass 44 degrees Celsius (111 degrees Fahrenheit) in some areas.

A recent [heat wave](#) across southern Europe that was fed by hot air from North Africa contributed to [massive wildfires](#) breaking out in Turkey, Greece, Algeria and elsewhere in the Mediterranean region.

"The maximum and minimum temperatures will reach levels far above the normal for this time of the year," Spain's weather service, AEMET, said in a "special weather warning."

Such peaks of temperature are not unheard of in Spain and Portugal during the summer months. Even so, [climate scientists](#) say there is little doubt [climate change](#) from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas is driving extreme events, such as heat waves, droughts, wildfires, floods and storms.

Researchers can directly link a single event to climate change only through intensive data analysis, but they say such calamities are expected to happen more frequently on our warming planet.



A woman fans herself in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2021. Temperatures are beginning to rise at the start of an oncoming heatwave in Spain which will last up until the weekend with temperatures expected to reach over 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in Madrid and southern Spain. Credit: AP Photo/Paul White

Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa urged people to take special care amid the scorching weather and [wildfire](#) danger, adding that many wildfires start with careless behavior.

Costa said "the terrible images" from Greece and Turkey in recent days brought back Portuguese memories of 2017.

"We don't want to see that scenario here again," Costa said in a

videotaped message at his official residence.

Portuguese authorities say they can deploy more than 12,000 firefighters, some 2,700 vehicles and 60 aircraft during the summer season.

Costa said that over the past three years Portugal has reduced by half the number of wildfires compared with the average of the previous 10 years and cut the charred area by 64%.

Portugal has in recent years reduced by more than half the number of wildfires and amount of charred acreage compared with the average of the previous 10 years, according to the Agency for Integrated Wildfire Management, a government body.



A man walks past electricity pylons at an electricity sub station in Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, Aug. 11, 2021. Electricity prices have hit historic records, according to Spain's Central Bank, just as the country gears up for an extended heatwave that will require more energy-intensive air conditioning and cooling in homes. Credit: AP Photo/Paul White

Authorities enacted a broad range of measures after 2017. They included better forest management, including woodland clearance projects and technical support for people living in rural areas, opening thousands of kilometers (miles) of firebreaks and reacting more rapidly to outbreaks with special firefighting units.

Nobody has died in forest blazes in Portugal since 2017.

In Spain, the [hot weather](#) was widely blamed for a record high in domestic energy prices, as the use of air-conditioning units climbed and wind turbines stood still in balmy [weather](#). Other factors, such as rising prices for [natural gas](#) and for carbon credits under the European Union's emissions trading scheme, were also behind the increase.

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