

Canaries volcano spews ash after brief pause

September 27 2021



La Cumbre Vieja erupted on September 19, spewing out ash and lava.

A volcano began spewing out ash again Monday after a brief lull in the Canary Islands, where coastal residents are confined to their homes over fears of toxic gases when the lava hits the sea.

La Cumbre Vieja, which straddles a southern ridge in La Palma in the Atlantic archipelago, erupted on September 19, spewing out rivers of lava that have slowly crept towards the sea.

But on Monday morning, the lava and ash flow had stopped, and the week-long rumble of the eruption faded to silence, before resuming its activity several hours later, an AFP correspondent at the scene said.

Smoke had continued to emerge from the top during the lull.

"In the last hours, the volcanic tremor has almost disappeared, as well as the explosive strombolian activity," tweeted Involcan volcanology institute, using the scientific term for a mix of explosions and lava flow.

"Volcanic activity in La Palma has reduced significantly in the last few hours," Madrid's Institute of Geosciences tweeted.

"We must be very vigilant about how it evolves because the scenario can change quickly."

Several hours later, the volcano started pumping out ash again.

Fits and starts

Speaking to AFP after the resumption, Involcan spokesman David Calvo said it was "just ash, for the time being". La Cumbre Vieja had been switching between "explosive episodes and lulls for quite a while", he added.



Experts say the entry of lava into the seawater will send clouds of toxic gas into the air.

Overnight, 300 residents living in coastal areas were ordered to stay at home to avoid harm from the release of toxic gases when the lava finally reaches the sea, the regional government said.

"The population must follow the instructions of the authorities and remain at home, with doors and windows closed," it said.

The lava, moving very slowly, is currently between 800 and 1,000 metres (around half a mile) away from the shore, it said. An evacuation order affecting four areas is in place around Tazacorte, where it is expected to enter the sea.

Officials have also set up an exclusion zone to head off curious onlookers.

Experts say the entry of lava into the seawater will send clouds of toxic gas into the air, causing explosions and a fragmentation of the molten rock like gunshots.

"Inhalation or contact with acid gases and liquids can irritate the skin, eyes and respiratory tract, and may cause breathing difficulties, especially in people with pre-existing respiratory diseases," Involcan warned.



The molten rock has so far scorched its way across more than 235 hectares of land.

Air traffic disrupted

The molten rock has so far scorched its way across more than 235 hectares of land, burning up many banana plantations, devoured 513 properties and destroyed nearly 20 kilometres of road, the European Union's Copernicus Earth Observation Programme said.

And eruption has so far forced more than 6,000 people from their homes, although 160 were allowed to return home on Sunday.

The authorities also said clouds of ash from the volcano had started to affect areas on the eastern side of the island.

At La Palma's airport, where air traffic was halted on Saturday for 24 hours due to the ash, local airline Binter said it had been unable to resume flights.

"We have halted our La Palma operations again after trying to make a first flight today and finding conditions were not safe enough," tweeted the airline, which is based in the Canary Islands, saying it would try again on Tuesday.

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