

Lava flowing into sea creates delta, expands Spanish island

September 30 2021



A cloud of gases are seen as lava from a volcano enters the sea on the Canary island of La Palma, Spain, Thursday Sept. 30, 2021. The surface of Spain's La Palma island continues growing as lava from a volcano keeps flowing into the Atlantic Ocean. Authorities were on alert because changing wind direction could sweep towards the island the plumes of toxic gases emerging from the sea. Sept. 30, 2021. Credit: Kike Rincon/Europa Press via AP

The surface of Spain's La Palma island is continuing to expand as lava from a volcanic eruption flows into the Atlantic Ocean and solidifies when it hits the water, European Union scientists said Thursday.

Copernicus, the European Union's Earth observation program, said Thursday that its satellite imagery showed a D-shaped tongue of molten rock building up on the island's western shore that measured 338 hectares (835 acres) by the end of Wednesday.

Trade winds typical of Spain's Canary Islands were helping dispel the plumes of water vapor and toxic gases that result when the lava with a temperature of over 1,000 degrees Celsius (1,800 F) meets the ocean, where the water is 22 degrees Celsius (71.6 F).

But authorities were on alert because Spain's weather forecaster, AEMET, indicated the wind's direction could change later Thursday and bring the toxic plumes toward the shore and farther inland.

The hydrochloric acid and tiny particles of volcanic glass released into the air can cause skin, eye and respiratory tract irritation.

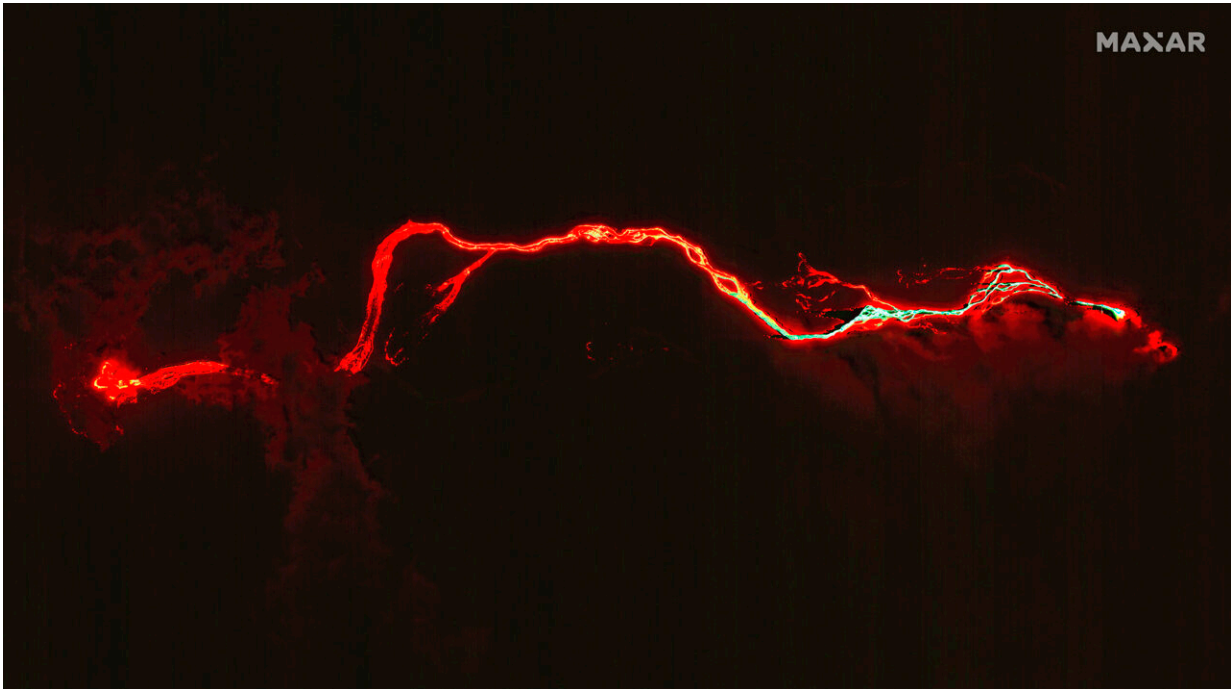
The direction the lava flow could take was also a source of concern. Molten rock emanating from the volcano that first erupted on Sept. 19 was still running downhill like a river and then tumbling over a cliff into the Atlantic. But uneven terrain could make the lava overflow its current path, spread to other areas, and destroy more houses and farmland.



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This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies, shows a general view of lava flowing from the Cumbre Vieja volcano on Spain's La Palma island, Wednesday, Aug. 29, 2021. Credit: Satellite Image ©2021 Maxar Technologies via AP



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Lava from a volcano reaches the sea on the Canary island of La Palma, Spain, Wednesday Sept. 29, 2021. Lava from a volcano that erupted Sept. 19 on Spain's Canary Islands has finally reached the Atlantic Ocean after wiping out hundreds of homes and forcing the evacuation of thousands of residents. Credit: AP Photo/Saul Santos



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Lava from a volcano reaches the sea on the Canary island of La Palma, Spain in the early hours of Wednesday Sept. 29, 2021. Lava from the new volcano on the Canary Island of La Palma reached the Atlantic ocean last night, at the area known as Los Guirres beach, also known as Playa Nueva (New Beach). Credit: AP Photo/Saul Santos

At least 855 buildings and 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) of roads, as well as other key infrastructure, have been wiped out so far. Banana plantations that are the source of income for many islanders have also been either destroyed or damaged by volcanic ash.

Over 6,000 residents have been evacuated so far, and hundreds more were advised to stay home to avoid the possible inhalation of toxic gases. No casualties or injuries have been reported among La Palma residents or visitors since the eruption began.

La Palma, home to about 85,000 people, is part of the volcanic Canary Islands, an archipelago off northwest Africa. The island is roughly 35 kilometers (22 miles) long and 20 kilometers (12 miles) wide at its broadest point.

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