

Southwest France hit by flooding after heavy rains

December 10 2021



Some people were evacuated from their homes as streets flooded Friday in Bayonne, southwest France.

Rivers overflowed their banks across a large swath of southwest France on Friday after heavy rains lashed the region overnight, leading to evacuations of dozens of residents.

Warm southern winds that have melted snowbanks in the Pyrenees mountains in recent days also contributed to the flooding, which could persist for several days.

"Despite one person injured, we have no serious accidents or deaths, with firefighters responding to more than 250 calls in the past few hours," Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin told journalists after discussions with local officials.

The Meteo France weather agency also warned of high avalanche risks in the Pyrenees, which separate France from Spain, where local flooding was also reported.

The regional government in Spain's Navarre region said a woman died Friday in her car after a landslide that followed two weeks of heavy rains.

Eric Spitze, the French government's top official for the Aquitaine region that includes Bordeaux, said that while the situation was "under control," forecasts of more rain to come could see floodwaters rise further in several towns and cities.

In the coastal city of Bayonne, loudspeakers carried warnings for crowds of people who gathered along the banks of the Nive river to take pictures of the torrents.

Authorities cancelled a Friday night rugby match in Bayonne between Aviron Bayonnais and US Montauban, and Mayor Jean-Rene Etchegaray also urged businesses along the Nive river to close.

Classes were called off at several schools and some roads were closed, while train services were disrupted and electricity cuts were reported at hundreds of homes across the region.

Further inland, the flooding caused a landslide in the Pyrenees village of Itxassou, with one resident, a 37-year-old who gave his name as Jean-Claude, said his home was swamped in 40 centimetres (16 inches) of water—for the second time in seven years.

"In 2014, they said it was once-in-a-century flooding, and now it's already happening again," he told AFP.

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