

Spain, Germany battle wildfires amid unusual heat wave

June 19 2022, by Joseph Wilson



A firefighter works in front of flames during a wildfire in the Sierra de la Culebra in the Zamora Province on Saturday June 18, 2022. Thousands of hectares of wooded hill land in northwestern Spain have been burnt by a wildfire that forced the evacuation of hundreds of people from nearby villages. Officials said the blaze in the Sierra de Culebra mountain range started Wednesday during a dry electric storm. Credit: Emilio Fraile/Europa Press via AP

Firefighters in Spain and Germany struggled to contain wildfires on Sunday amid an unusual heat wave in Western Europe for this time of year.

The worst damage in Spain has been in the northwest province of Zamora, where over 30,000 hectares (74,000 acres) have been consumed, regional authorities said, while German officials said that residents of three villages near Berlin were ordered to leave their homes because of an approaching wildfire Sunday.

Spanish authorities said that after three days of high temperatures, high winds and low humidity, some respite came with dropping temperatures Sunday morning. That allowed for about 650 firefighters supported by water-dumping aircraft to establish a perimeter around the fire that started in Zamora's Sierra de la Culebra. Authorities warned there was still danger that an unfavorable shift in weather could revive the blaze that caused the evacuation of 18 villages.

Spain has been on alert for an outbreak of intense wildfires as the country swelters under record temperatures at many points in the country for June. Experts link the abnormally hot period for Europe to climate change. Thermometers have risen above 40 C (104 F) in many Spanish cities throughout the week—temperatures usually expected in August.



A police water cannon is in action in a forest fire in Treuenbrietzen, Germany, Sunday, June 19, 2022. The area affected by the forest fire in Treuenbrietzen near Berlin has expanded in the night to Sunday. Credit: Thomas Schulz/dpa via AP

A lack of rainfall this year combined with gusting winds have produced the conditions for the fires.

Authorities said that gusting winds of up 70 kph (43 mph) that changed course erratically, combined with temperatures near 40 C, made it very tough for crews.

"The fire was able to cross a reservoir some 500 meters wide and reach the other side, to give you an idea of the difficulties we faced," Juan Suárez-Quñones, an official for Castilla y León region, told Spanish state television TVE.

The fire in Zamora was started by a strike from an electrical storm on Wednesday, authorities said. The spreading fire caused the high-speed train service from Madrid to Spain's northwest to be cut on Saturday. It was reestablished on Sunday morning.

Military firefighting units have been deployed in Zamora, Navarra and Lleida.



People rest on an air mattress on a hot summer day at the Orankesee lake in Berlin, Germany, Sunday, June 19, 2022. People flocked to parks and pools

across Western Europe on Saturday for a bit of respite from an early heat wave. In Germany, where highs of 38 C (100.4 F) were expected, the health minister urged vulnerable groups to stay hydrated. Credit: AP Photo/Markus Schreiber

There have been no reports of lives lost, but the flames reached the outskirts of some villages both in Zamora and in Navarra. Videos shot by passengers in cars showed flames licking the sides of roads. In other villages, residents looked on in despair as black plumes rose from nearby hills.

In central-north Navarra, authorities have evacuated some 15 small villages as a precaution, as the high temperatures in the area are not expected to drop until Wednesday.

They also asked farmers to stop using heavy machinery that could unintentionally spark a fire.

"The situation remains delicate. We have various active fires due to the extremely high temperatures and high winds," Navarra regional vice-president Javier Remírez told TVE.

Remírez said that some villages had seen some buildings damaged on their outskirts.



A woman walks past a fountain on a hot summer day in Berlin, Germany, Sunday, June 19, 2022. People flocked to parks and pools across Western Europe on Saturday for a bit of respite from an early heat wave. In Germany, where highs of 38 C (100.4 F) were expected, the health minister urged vulnerable groups to stay hydrated. Credit: AP Photo/Markus Schreiber

Some wild animals had to be evacuated from an animal park in Navarra and taken to a bull ring for safe keeping, authorities said.

Wildfires were also active in three parts of northeast Catalonia: in Lleida, in Tarragona and in a nature park in Garaf, just south of Barcelona.

Firefighters said that 2,700 hectares (6,600 acres) were scorched in

Lleida. They added that they have responded to over 200 different wildfires just in Catalonia over the past week.

Germany has also seen numerous wildfires in recent days following a period of intense heat and little rain. The country's national weather agency said the mercury reached 39.2 C (102.6 F) in the eastern cities of Dresden and Cottbus on Sunday.

Strong winds have been fanning a blaze near the town of Treuenbrietzen, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) southwest of Berlin, prompting officials to order three villages evacuated Sunday.



Firefighters work in front of flames during a wildfire in the Sierra de la Culebra in the Zamora Province on Saturday June 18, 2022. Thousands of hectares of wooded hill land in northwestern Spain have been burnt by a wildfire that forced

the evacuation of hundreds of people from nearby villages. Officials said the blaze in the Sierra de Culebra mountain range started Wednesday during a dry electric storm. Credit: Emilio Fraile/Europa Press via AP



Trees burn as flames and smoke engulf the top of a hill in a forest fire in Artazu, northern Spain in the early hours of Sunday, June 19, 2022. Firefighters in Spain are struggling to contain wildfires in several parts of the country suffering an unusual heat wave for this time of the year. Credit: AP Photo/Miguel Oses



Bathers cool off at and in the Isar River, which flows through the middle of the Bavarian capital of Munich, Germany, Sunday, June 19, 2022. Credit: Peter Kneffel/dpa via AP



Villagers help firefighters with a hose during a wildfire in Arraiza, northern Spain, Saturday, June 18, 2022. Firefighters in Spain are struggling to contain wildfires in several parts of the country suffering an unusual heat wave for this time of the year. Credit: AP Photo/Sergio Martin



Flames rage in a field during a fire in Arraiza, northern Spain, Saturday, June 18, 2022. Firefighters in Spain are struggling to contain wildfires in several parts of the country suffering an unusual heat wave for this time of the year. Credit: AP Photo/Sergio Martin



Trees burn as flames and smoke engulf the top of a hill in a forest fire in Artazu, northern Spain in the early hours of Sunday, June 19, 2022. Firefighters in Spain are struggling to contain wildfires in several parts of the country suffering an unusual heat wave for this time of the year. Credit: AP Photo/Miguel Osés



Firefighters work during a wildfire in Arraiza, northern Spain, Saturday, June 18, 2022. Firefighters in Spain are struggling to contain wildfires in several parts of the country suffering an unusual heat wave for this time of the year. Credit: AP Photo/Sergio Martin



A firefight plane drops a fire retardant on a burning area of San Martin de Unx in northern Spain, Sunday, June 19, 2022. Firefighters in Spain are struggling to contain wildfires in several parts of the country suffering an unusual heat wave for this time of the year. Credit: AP Photo/Miguel Oses



A neighbour with a tractor sprays water on a fire in San Martin de Unx in northern Spain, Sunday, June 19, 2022. Firefighters in Spain are struggling to contain wildfires in several parts of the country which as been suffering an unusual heat wave for this time of the year. Credit: AP Photo/Miguel Oses



Flames rise in a vineyard in San Martin de Unx in northern Spain, Sunday, June 19, 2022. Firefighters in Spain are struggling to contain wildfires in several parts of the country which as been suffering an unusual heat wave for this time of the year. Credit: AP Photo/Miguel Oses



A cloud of smoke can be seen from afar not far from the district of Frohnsdorf, Germany, Sunday, June 19, 2022. There, the fire department has been fighting a forest fire for days. Credit: Paul Zinken/dpa/dpa via AP

About 600 people in Frohnsdorf, Tiefenbrunnen and Klausdorf were told to immediately seek shelter at a community center.

"This is not a drill," town officials tweeted.

More than 1,400 firefighters, soldiers and civil defense experts were deployed to tackle the blaze, which also affected a former military training area known to be contaminated with ammunition.

Officials expressed hope late Sunday that thunderstorms moving in from

the west would help put out the fires.

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