

# UK weather turmoil spurs calls to adapt to climate change

July 20 2022, by DANICA KIRKA and JILL LAWLESS

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A blaze is in the village of Wennington, east London, Tuesday, July 19, 2022. The typically temperate nation of England is the latest to be walloped by unusually hot, dry weather that has triggered wildfires from Portugal to the Balkans and led to hundreds of heat-related deaths. Credit: Yui Mok/PA via AP

Britain's record-breaking heatwave has spurred calls for the government to speed up efforts to adapt to a changing climate, especially after

wildfires created the busiest day for London firefighters since bombs rained down on the city during World War II.

The country got a break Wednesday from the dry, hot weather that is gripping much of Europe as cooler air moved in from the west. Forecasters predict London will reach a high of 26 degrees Celsius (79 Fahrenheit) on Wednesday, down from the national record 40.3 C (104.4 F) set Tuesday at Coningsby in eastern England.

Even so, travel was disrupted for a third day as rail operators repaired damage caused by the heat, and firefighters continue to mop up hotspots at the scene of Tuesday's fires.

Britain needs to prepare for similar heatwaves in the future because manmade [carbon emissions](#) have already changed the climate, said Professor Stephen Belcher, chief scientist at the Met Office, the U.K.'s [national weather service](#). Only aggressive emissions reductions will reduce the frequency of such events, he said.

"Everything is still to play for, but we should adapt to the kind of events we saw yesterday as an occasional extreme event," Baker told the BBC.

Climate scientists have been surprised by the speed at which temperatures in Britain have risen in recent years and the widespread area affected by this week's event. Thirty-four locations around the U.K. on Tuesday broke the country's previous record-high temperature of 37.8 C (100 F), set in 2019.



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The weather walloped a country where few homes, schools or [small businesses](#) have air conditioning and infrastructure such as railroads, highways and airports aren't designed to cope with such temperatures. Thirteen people, including seven [teenage boys](#), are believed to have died trying to cool off after getting into difficulty in rivers, reservoirs and lakes.

Fifteen fire departments declared major incidents as more than 60 properties around the country were destroyed on Tuesday, Cabinet

Office Minister Kit Malthouse told the House of Commons.

One of the biggest fires was in Wennington, a village on the eastern outskirts of London, where a row of houses was destroyed by flames that raced through tinder-dry fields nearby. Resident Tim Stock said he and his wife fled after the house next door caught fire and the blaze rapidly spread.



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"It was like a war zone," he said. "Down the actual main road, all the windows had exploded out, all the roofs had caved, it was like a scene from the Blitz."

The London Fire Brigade received 2,600 calls Tuesday, compared with the normal figure of about 350, Mayor Sadiq Khan said, adding that it was the department's busiest day since the World War II. Despite lower temperatures on Wednesday, the fire danger remains high because hot, dry weather has parched grasslands around the city, Khan said.

"Once it catches fire it spreads incredibly fast, like wildfires like you see in movies or in fires in California or in parts of France," Khan told the BBC.

Phil Gerigan, leader of the National Fire Chiefs Council's resilience group, said wildfires are an emerging threat tied to climate change that is stretching the capacity of fire departments. Britain may need to expand its capacity to fight wildfires, adding more aerial tankers and helicopters, he told the BBC.



A swimmer in water in the Canary Wharf docklands in east London, Tuesday July 19, 2022. Britain shattered its record for highest temperature ever registered amid a heat wave that has seized swaths of Europe. The national weather forecaster predicted it would get hotter still Tuesday in a country ill prepared for such extremes. Credit: Victoria Jones/PA via AP

"As we look towards the future, it's certainly something that the U.K. government and fire and rescue services need to consider," he said. "Have we got the capability, the assets, to be able to meet what is a significantly emerging demand?"

Wildfires continue to spread destruction in other parts of Europe. Nearly 500 firefighters struggled to contain a large wildfire that threatened hillside suburbs outside Athens for a second day as fires burned across a

southern swath of the continent.

A respite from the severe heat helped improve conditions in France, Spain and Portugal, countries that have battled blazes for days.

Britain's travel network also suffered during the [hot weather](#), with Luton Airport briefly shut down by a heat-damaged runway and trains forced to run at reduced speeds because of concerns the heat would warp rails or interrupt power supplies.



A view of low water levels at Roadford Lake in Devon, England, Tuesday July 19, 2022. Britain shattered its record for highest temperature ever registered amid a heat wave that has seized swaths of Europe. The national weather forecaster predicted it would get hotter still Tuesday in a country ill prepared for such extremes. Credit: Andrew Matthews/PA via AP



An ice cream van parked on the banks of Loch Lomond, in the village of Luss in Argyll and Bute, Scotland, Tuesday, July 19, 2022. Britain shattered its record for highest temperature ever registered amid a heat wave that has seized swaths of Europe. The national weather forecaster predicted it would get hotter still Tuesday in a country ill prepared for such extremes. Credit: Andrew Milligan/PA via AP





ADDS TROUPE'S NAME - Members of the Australian cabaret & circus troupe Briefs cool down in a fountain on the Southbank in London, Tuesday, July 19, 2022. Britain shattered its record for highest temperature ever registered Tuesday, with a provisional reading of 39.1 degrees Celsius (102.4 degrees Fahrenheit), according to the country's weather office — and the heat was only expected to rise. Credit: AP Photo/Frank Augstein



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The scene after a blaze in the village of Wennington, east London, Wednesday July 20, 2022. Britain shattered its record for highest temperature ever registered Tuesday amid a heat wave that has seared swaths of Europe, as the U.K.'s national weather forecaster said such highs are now a fact of life in a country ill-prepared for such extremes. Credit: Aaron Chown/PA via AP



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Passengers at Euston station in London, following train cancellations as high temperatures have brought severe disruption to rail services, Wednesday July 20, 2022. Credit: Yui Mok/PA via AP



Passengers check schedules following train cancellations at King's Cross station in London, Wednesday July 20, 2022. Britain's record-breaking heat wave disrupted travel for a third day and firefighters remained on alert Wednesday even as cloudy skies and showers brought relief after two days of scorching temperatures. Credit: Yui Mok/PA via AP

Some disruptions remained Wednesday as crews worked to repair power lines and signaling equipment damaged by [fire](#). Passengers were advised to check before traveling and only travel when necessary.

Among those struggling was Lee Ball, 46, who was trying to travel with his wife, Libby, and 10-year-old daughter, Amelie, from Worcestershire to London to get to Brussels for an Ed Sheeran concert. Their train was cancelled with less than 30 minutes notice, so they drove to another

station—and waited.

"I've been up since 4:30 a.m., anxious, trying to get an answer from anywhere we can," he said.

Communication from the train companies has been "appalling," he said.

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Citation: UK weather turmoil spurs calls to adapt to climate change (2022, July 20) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-07-uk-weather-turmoil-spurs-climate.html>

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