

Brazilian Amazon records worst August for fires in 12 years

September 1 2022



Aerial view of a burnt area in the Amazon rainforest, near the Lago do Cunia Extractive Reserve, on the border of the states of Rondonia and Amazonas, northern Brazil, on August 31, 2022.

The Brazilian Amazon recorded its worst month of August for forest

fires since 2010, with an 18 percent rise from a year ago, according to official data released Thursday.

The Brazilian INPE space agency said its satellites had recorded 33,116 fires in the rainforest, a key buffer against global warming, in August this year, compared to 28,060 in the same month last year.

At least 3,358 fires were recorded on August 22 alone, the highest number for any 24-hour period since September 2007, it said.

The number was nearly triple that recorded on the so-called "Day of Fire"—August 10, 2019—when farmers launched a coordinated plan to burn huge amounts of felled rainforest in the northern state of Para.

Then, fires sent thick, gray smoke all the way to Sao Paulo, some 2,500 kilometers (1,500 miles) away, and triggered a global outcry over one of Earth's most vital resources burning.

Between January and August, the INPE recorded 46,022 fires—a 16 percent rise from the same period in 2021.

The Amazon had not burnt more in a month of August—usually the worst for fires in the Brazilian dry season—since 2010, when 45,018 were recorded.

All the worst August figures since then—30,900 fires in 2019, 29,307 in 2020, 28,060 in 2021 and 33,116 in 2022—happened during the four-year term of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who will be seeking re-election next month.

"This uncontrolled increase in fires in the last four years is closely related to the increase in deforestation," said Mariana Napolitano of WWF Brazil.

"The Amazon is a humid rainforest and, contrary to what happens in other biomes, fire does not arise spontaneously. Fires are always linked to human action," she added.

According to experts, fires are mainly caused by farmers who illegally clear land by burning vegetation.

Deforestation in Brazil is also at an historic high: in the first half of 2022 some 3,988 km² were lost, a record since INPE's Deter satellite monitoring system began collecting data in 2016.

Bolsonaro, an agribusiness ally, faces international criticism for a surge in Amazon destruction on his watch.

But he rejects the censure.

"None of those who are attacking us have the right. If they wanted a pretty forest to call their own, they should have preserved the ones in their countries," he wrote on Twitter last month.

"The Amazon belongs to Brazilians, and always will," said Bolsonaro.

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