

France matches dry spell record of 31 days without rain

February 21 2023, by Julien MIVIELLE



The dry spell has raised concerns about water levels.

France has matched its record dry spell of 31 days without significant rainfall, the country's weather service said Tuesday, amid concerns over water reserves in parts of Europe still reeling from last year's severe

drought.

With rainfall over the entire country of less than one millimeter a day since January 21, weather service Meteo France said the absence of precipitation equals the record set in the spring of 2020.

Winter is normally a crucial period for recharging groundwater levels with rainfall.

This number of days without rain has "never been seen" in winter before in records going back to 1959, Meteo France said Tuesday.

Last month was the third-warmest January on record in Europe, with temperatures on New Year's Day reaching all-time highs in some parts of the continent, according to the European Union's Copernicus climate monitor (C3S).

That came after Europe endured its second-hottest year ever in 2022, with France, Britain, Spain and Italy setting new average temperature records, compounded by severe drought.

Crops withered in European breadbaskets and the historic drought, unprecedented in centuries, drove record wildfire intensity and placed severe pressure on the continent's power grid and water reserves.

The World Weather Attribution service last year calculated that the agricultural and ecological drought over the Northern Hemisphere was at least 20 times likelier because of human-caused climate change, warning that such extreme dry periods would become increasingly common with global heating.

Water restrictions

In Spain, one of the European countries most exposed to the risk of drought, there is also concern about current water reserves.

Barcelona and large swathes of Spain's northeastern region of Catalonia have imposed water restrictions due to the lack of rain.

The measures include banning the use of drinking water to wash the exterior of houses or cars or to fill swimming pools, and reducing the amount of water used for irrigation.

But the country's 1962 record of 79 days with no more than 1 mm of rainfall still stands.

In Italy, the warmer weather has led to a reduction in snow cover and related water resources.

The Italian Alps had 53 percent less snow than usual, reducing the amount of meltwater for the Po Valley, the country's main agricultural hub.

The flow rate of the Po River was nearing all-time lows in at least two cities last week, according to the national body overseeing land and irrigation resource management.

Nationwide, snow-related water resources were 45 percent lower in mid February than the 10-year average, according to Fondazione CIMA, a research institute.

Meteo France said the current dry period in the country was not expected to last much longer, with rain forecast in the south of the country on Wednesday.

The previous record for a winter dry spell in France was 22 days in

1989.

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