

Drought-hit Spain braces for early heat wave

April 24 2023, by Valentin BONTEMPS



Spain is set for a heat wave as it deals with a serious drought.

Drought-hit Spain was bracing Monday for an unusually early heat wave, prompting fears for wildfires in a nation already so dry that some farmers have opted not to plant crops.

Temperatures are expected to be 15-20 degrees Celsius higher than the

average in some areas, a spokesman for Spain's state weather agency AEMET tweeted.

Spain's civil protection agency warned there was a "high risk" of wildfires due the scorching weather.

The nation led Europe in land burned last year during a record hot 2022 that the government and independent experts said was the product of [climate change](#).

A prolonged drought has caused the wildfire season to start earlier than usual, with March recording the first major fires of the year.

Blazes have ravaged some 54,000 hectares (133,400 acres) of land so far this year in Spain, compared with just over 17,000 hectares during the same time in 2022, according to the European Forest Fire Information System.

The lack of precipitation has been especially severe in the northeastern region of Catalonia where [water reservoirs](#) are at just one-quarter of their capacity.

This has led to water use restrictions, with residents of Barcelona and its surrounding area banned from filling swimming pool.

The weather office said temperatures are expected to drop on Sunday and Monday, "ending this episode of exceptionally high temperatures for the time of year".

'Difficult moment'

The agriculture sector has been hit hard. Many farmers have decided not to plant crops this spring due to the lack of water.

"We are in a difficult moment," Agriculture Minister Luis Planas said last week.

Spain's main farmers' union, COAG, estimates 60 percent of the country's farmland is "asphyxiated" by the lack of precipitation.

Influential [farmers'](#) group ASAJA has warned that cereal and olive oil producers were facing steep losses.

"The intensity of this drought is horrible," it said in a statement.

Parts of Spain are the driest they have been in a thousand years due to an atmospheric high-pressure system driven by climate change, according to a study published last year in the journal Nature Geoscience.

Nearly 75 percent of Spain is susceptible to desertification, according to the United Nations.

Spain must "reconsider" how it manages water, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said last week, calling it "an increasingly rare resource".

Experts say climate change driven by [human activity](#) is boosting the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, droughts and wildfires.

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