

Nine dead, Grand Prix cancelled after flooding devastates northern Italy

May 17 2023, by Alessandro Serrano



Heavy rains have caused major flooding in northern Italy.

At least nine people died in Italy's northern Emilia Romagna region as heavy rains flooded rivers and submerged entire neighbourhoods and farmland Wednesday, prompting the cancellation of this weekend's

Imola Grand Prix.

Downpours that pounded the region's flatlands over two days caused nearly two dozen rivers to burst their banks, putting vast stretches of territory under water and causing thousands of residents to be evacuated.

"We watched from the (second-floor) window as the water gradually rose," Cesena resident Davide Maeldolla told AFP, pausing from mucking out his inundated home, where the water had risen as high as 1.5 metres (five feet).

"The helicopters circled all night to rescue people."

In nearby Forli, southeast of the regional capital Bologna, Mayor Gian Luca Zattini said his city was "on its knees, devastated and in pain."

"It's the end of the world," Zattini said.

Regional authorities confirmed nine dead, with most in the area around Forli and Cesena.

Flooding occurred in 41 municipalities, while an even greater number reported landslides.

Thousands of farms in the fertile agricultural area were affected, but Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida said the water would have to subside before the government could quantify the damage.

Two of the bodies in Forli were recovered by divers on Wednesday morning, as part of a huge rescue effort involving emergency services, armed forces and over 1,000 volunteers.



One of Italy's richest regions, Emilia Romagna had already been hit by heavy rain two weeks ago.

Torrents and thick mud

Television images showed emergency workers carrying residents across flooded streets or transported in inflatable boats, vast parking lots completely submerged in water, while torrents of water rushed through the UNESCO-recognised porticoes of Bologna.

A video taken by Italy's coastguard showed rescuers in a helicopter pulling up two elderly people from the roof of a home where the water level had nearly covered the first-floor windows.

Cars were submerged and in areas where the water had receded, the streets were filled with thick mud and debris.

One of Italy's richest regions, Emilia Romagna had already been hit by heavy rain two weeks ago, causing floods that left two dead.

This time, around 50 centimetres (20 inches) of rain fell within 36 hours in Forli, Cesena and Ravenna—around half the normal annual rainfall, a situation "with few precedents", Civil Protection Minister Nello Musumeci said.

Musumeci said 20 million euros (\$22 million) in emergency funds would be unlocked for the area, on top of the 10 million awarded after the previous flooding.

The flooding caused the cancellation of Sunday's Formula One Emilia Romagna Grand Prix scheduled in Imola, with organisers saying they could not guarantee the safety of fans, teams and staff.

State of shock

Rescue workers had scrambled through the night to save children, the elderly and the disabled from the rising waters.

In Cesena, local man Cristian Salamandri, wearing high rubber boots, was covered in mud by the end of the day.



The civil protection agency urged 'maximum caution', as mayors warned people to stay on high ground.

"We've come to give a hand, to try to save people and animals," Salamandri said.

"The situation is still tough, tragic. We hope it gets better."

Over 10,000 people have been evacuated, authorities said, including some 3,000 in Bologna and 5,000 in Ravenna. Around 50,000 people were without electricity.

In Forli, an AFP photographer saw people in a state of shock as they fled on Tuesday night through floodwaters in the dark in their bare feet.

Drought to deluge

Elsewhere, locals in Cesena swam down a road to rescue a three-year-old child, and a man was seen wading through high water with his cat.

The heavy rains follow a drought that affected much of northern Italy last winter, and a record lack of rain last summer.

"We have to get used to it for the future, because unfortunately in recent years it often happens that these extreme rainfalls arrive," Air Force meteorologist Paolo Capizzi told AFP.

He said it could not directly be blamed on global warming but the "ever-increasing frequency of these phenomenon can obviously be the consequence of ongoing climate change".

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, in Japan for the G7 summit, tweeted her support for those affected and said the government was "ready to intervene with the necessary aid".

Rain over the flooded area was expected to subside on Thursday.

© 2023 AFP

Citation: Nine dead, Grand Prix cancelled after flooding devastates northern Italy (2023, May 17) retrieved 3 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-05-dead-grand-prix-postponed-northern.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.