

'Serious concerns' for new dry summer in France after 2022 fires

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72,000 hectares of France were scorched by wildfires in 2022.

Two-thirds of French water tables are below normal levels for June, Environment Minister Christophe Bechu said Wednesday, stoking fears of a repeat of 2022's tinder dry summer scarred by wildfires.

"There are very serious concerns" especially about southern regions such as the Rhone valley and Mediterranean coast, Bechu told broadcaster CNews, flagging up "the need to conserve more water".

"We have two-thirds of the country where the water table is below [normal levels](#), 66 percent is huge," he added, pointing to some 15 regions where significant water use restrictions have already been imposed.

Last year's wildfires scorched 72,000 hectares across 50 of metropolitan France's 96 departments, triggering evacuations of around 60,000 people.

They were dubbed an "unprecedented climatic event" by President Emmanuel Macron's office earlier this month.

France has stocked up its firefighting resources since last year, including an increase in the number of planes from 38 to 47.

The government also plans to hold 3,600 reserve firefighters ready to deploy to crisis zones.

Although some French regions have seen heavy downpours in recent weeks, "May and June rain is less effective" at restocking the [water table](#) as the moisture is taken up by plants, Bechu said.

As [climate change](#) progresses, "water sometimes falls more strongly, in a more concentrated way, and much of this precipitation is absorbed because of higher temperatures," he added.

Bechu nevertheless said that the lack of water was less widespread than last summer, with [water](#) tables higher than last year in certain regions such as Brittany in the northwest.

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