

Greece facing hottest July weekend in 50 years, expert warns

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The Acropolis has cut back its hours due to the scorching temperatures.

Greece is facing its hottest July weekend in 50 years, a top meteorologist warned Friday as the country wilts under a prolonged heat wave set to last well into next week.

Government ministries have advised people to work from home where possible and not to venture out unnecessarily. The exceptional temperatures also mean key tourism sites will be closed during the hottest part of the day.

"This weekend risks being the hottest registered in July in the past 50 years," said Panagiotis Giannopoulos, meteorologist with state broadcaster ERT.

"Athens is going to have temperatures above 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) for six to seven days, through to the end of July," said Giannopoulos.

Such a prolonged spell of scorching temperatures is exceptional for the Greek capital.

Sunday is likely to see the city labor under as much as 44C (111F) with the central region of Thessalia enduring 45C.

A 46-year-old man was meanwhile reported to have succumbed to heatstroke on the central Greek island of Evia after being admitted to Chalkida hospital, which said cardio-respiratory failure following exposure to high temperatures appeared to be the cause.

The national meteorological institute EMY earlier reported temperatures of 41C at Attica, encompassing the capital Athens and forecasting up to 44C in Thessalia.

Yannis Kallianos, meteorologist with private broadcaster Mega, spoke of an "interminable and powerful heat wave".

"According to latest forecasts, the heat wave could last until next Thursday or Friday," Kallianos warned, adding that strong northerly winds could also spark fires.

Authorities meanwhile reported firefighters were still battling 79 forest fires across the country, with their spokesman Vassilios Vathrakoyannis saying Greece would be on a state of alert across the weekend.

Turkey said Friday it was sending two firefighting aircraft and a helicopter to its neighbor, adding to earlier support from Jordan and Israel.

Architectural attractions including World Heritage Site the Athens Acropolis will be shuttered during the hottest parts of the day through to Sunday, the ministry of culture said.

The labor ministry urged people to work from home where possible and the health ministry called on people to avoid venturing out except where strictly necessary.

"We have three difficult days ahead of us," Vassilis Kikilias, minister for civil protection, told ERT. "We must be vigilant."

Athens saw its record temperature to date of 44.8 C (112.6F) in June 2007, according to the Athens national Observatory with nearby Elefsina recording a national record of 48 C (118.4F) in July 1977.

Greece is just one of a swathe of countries battling a prolonged spell of extreme heat around the globe in recent days.

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