

High winds feared as Rhodes fire rages

July 23 2023



Crews were battling a wildfire scorching part of Greece's Rhodes island.

High winds forecast for Sunday are expected to hamper firefighters' battle to contain a blaze burning out of control on the Greek island of Rhodes, where some 30,000 people have been forced to evacuate.

The [flames](#) have burned for nearly a week on the island as Greece has

been battered by an extended spell of extreme heat that has made it challenging to contain the blaze.

Local officials on Rhodes said on Saturday they had moved 30,000 people threatened by wildfires to safety—including more than 2,500 who had to be ferried off beaches.

"The wind is expected to become more intense from 12 to 5 pm, without excluding the possibility that could happen earlier," said fire department spokesman Vassilis Vathrakoyiannis.

The fires during the night reached the village of Laerma and were burning houses and a church there, while many hotels were damaged by the flames that at some occasions reached the sea.

Authorities have warned that the battle to contain the flames, raging in the middle of peak tourism season for heavily visited Rhodes, will take several days.

Another fire brigade spokesman, Yannis Artopoulos, told Greek TV that the main fronts of the [fire](#) were were in areas south of the village of Apollon.

Thousands of people, locals and tourists were evacuated on Saturday from at least six villages.

In Athens, the [foreign ministry](#) said it had activated its crisis management unit to facilitate the evacuation of foreign citizens in Greece due to the ongoing forest fires.

Tourists and some locals spent the night in gyms, schools and hotel conference centres on the island while firefighters battled the blaze.

In addition, three passenger ferries have been moored at the port of Rhodes to accommodate those rescued.

"It is an unprecedented situation for the island," Panagiotis Dimelis, head of the Archangelos [village](#) council, told Skai TV, adding that many locals had rushed to help the tourists.

From the moment the evacuation alert sounded early in the afternoon, tourists headed for the beach, pulling their suitcases behind them.

A large part of the island was without electricity as the public power utility PPC shut down the local plant in the south for [safety reasons](#).

More than 200 firefighters fought the blaze during the night, while the air support started early on Sunday.

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