

Greece forest fires death toll hits 20

August 22 2023, by Sakis MITROLIDIS



Firemen battle flames during a wildfire near Prodromos, 100km northeast from Athens.

Eighteen suspected migrants were found dead Tuesday in a Greece forest fire near the Turkish border as scores of firefighters battled to contain the second deadly wave of blazes to hit the country in a month.

Fire department spokesman Yiannis Artopios said the victims were found north of the city of Alexandroupoli.

As no local residents had been reported missing "the possibility that they are people who entered our country illegally is under investigation," Artopios said in a televised address.

The area is a frequent entry point for irregular migrants.

The latest deaths pushed the overall toll from this week's fires to 20, after another suspected migrant was found dead in the area Monday.

An elderly shepherd had also been found dead north of Athens on Monday.

Flames continued to spread unchecked in northeastern Greece as well as the islands of Evia and Kythnos and the region of Boeotia north of Athens, amid a dangerous mix of gale-force winds and temperatures of up to 41 degrees Celsius (106 Fahrenheit).

"It's a similar situation to July," a fire department spokeswoman told AFP, referring to a wave in several parts of the country that left five people dead.

Over 60 fires had erupted in the last 24 hours, and six countries were sending help via the European Union's civil protection mechanism, the fire department said.

Some 120 firefighters from Cyprus, Romania, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany and Serbia will pitch in, fire department spokesman Vassilis Vathrakogiannis told state TV ERT.

A new fire broke out Tuesday at a landfill in the industrial zone of

Aspropyrgos near Athens, covering the area in a noxious black cloud.

Officials shut down the nearest section of the Athens ring road, and advised residents to stay indoors.

Another fire broke out in the foothills of Mount Parnitha near the capitals, prompting evacuations.

Late Monday, an evacuation was ordered at the hospital of Alexandroupolis, a northeastern Greek port city located in an area where fires were raging for a fourth day.

The coastguard said it had moved 65 patients to a waiting ferry at the city harbor.

On the island of Evia, near the capital, officials late Monday evacuated the industrial town of Nea Artaki, where the fire has damaged poultry and pork farms.

The fire near Alexandroupolis is also threatening the national park of Dadia, one of the most important protected areas in Europe that is home to rare birds.

The very hot and dry conditions which increase the fire risk will persist until Friday, according to meteorologists.

Amid a heat wave, a fire that started on July 18 and was fanned by strong winds ravaged almost 17,770 hectares (more than 43,000 acres) in 10 days in the south of Rhodes, a popular tourist island in the southeastern Aegean Sea.

Around 20,000 people, mostly tourists, had to be evacuated.

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