

Record heat warning as forest fires rage in Spain and Portugal

August 9 2023



Columns of smoke rise from wildfire in Odeceixe, southern Portugal, as temperatures soar there and in neighboring Spain.

Temperatures soared across Spain and Portugal on Wednesday as the two countries boil under their third heat wave of the summer.

As huge forest fires raged across southern Portugal for the fifth successive day, Spain's weather service warned that the average temperature across the country could hit a seven-decade record.

"This will probably be the hottest five August days in 73 years," said AEMET, the state meteorological agency, with almost the whole country under red weather alerts.

The highest temperatures occurred in Andalusia, according to data from AEMET shortly before 7 pm (1700 GMT), in Roda de Andalucia where the mercury hit 44.6 degrees Celsius (112.3 Fahrenheit), and at the Granada airport where the temperature reached 44.1 Celsius.

"The average temperature" in Spain this Wednesday "will probably be a record since 1950", Aemet added.

Winds and extreme heat are also driving fires that have devastated 15,000 hectares (37,000 acres) of trees in neighboring Portugal over the past few days.

The biggest blazes are in the southern Odemira region, where more than 1,500 people have been evacuated with the fires reaching the Algarve, a hugely popular tourist destination.

Wildfires in Portugal



Source: Effis-Copernicus (data from August 9 at 0900 GMT)
Map data: CSM, NASA, Global Forest Watch



Wildfires in Portugal.

But firefighters tackling the wildfires said they were bringing them under control Wednesday, with a fall in temperatures and greater humidity at the coast helping stem the spread as hot air moves east.

Experts say the recurring heat waves, which have been getting longer and more intense, are a consequence of climate change.

The Iberian Peninsula is bearing the brunt of climate change in Europe, with droughts and wildfires becoming more and more common.

Spanish firefighters used up to a dozen water bombers to slow the spread of the flames around Valencia de Alcantara in Extremadura close to the border with Portugal.

"We evacuated our clients to a hotel in Alcantara," said Joaquin Dieguez, the owner of a holiday cottage. "But we are really worried because we have an enormous forest here with century-old oak trees. It's awful."

The most dangerous fire burning Friday, in Valencia de Alcantara in the southwest, was "stabilized", the regional government reported.

First estimations suggest that 350 hectares of trees have gone up in smoke. The blaze comes after 573 hectares were destroyed in wildfires in Portbou in Catalonia in the northeast, with 450 acres of trees lost by another fire near Bonares in Andalusia in the south.

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