

Spain firefighters make gains in battle against Tenerife blaze

August 17 2023



The blaze has a perimeter of 30 kilometres (19 miles) and has destroyed more than 2,600 hectares (6,400 acres).

Firefighters made headway Friday in their battle against a vast wildfire raging out of control in the forested interior of Tenerife that has forced

4,500 people to flee the Spanish holiday island.

The blaze, which officials say is the most "complex fire" to hit the Canary Islands in 40 years, broke out late on Tuesday in a mountainous area of northeastern Tenerife.

Firefighting efforts during the day "progressed well although the fire is still out of control", Canary Islands leader Fernando Clavijo told reporters in a late-night briefing.

The blaze has so far destroyed 5,000 hectares (over 12,300 acres) of land and has a perimeter of 50 kilometers (30 miles), he said.

Montserrat Roman, head of civil protection for the seven-island archipelago, said more than 225 firefighters would continue efforts during the night to tackle the blaze, which had already affected 10 municipalities.

On Saturday, 19 aerial units would be drafted in to continue the work which was likely to be complicated by high temperatures and "strong gusts of wind in the area of the fire", she said.

More than 4,500 people had been evacuated but the number stuck inside their homes had fallen to just under 1,700 after a confinement order was lifted for some 2,200 residents as conditions eased in La Esperanza near the airport, she said earlier.

During the day, officials said there had been a "favorable evolution" on the main front of the fire, which had advanced more slowly and predictably overnight, making it easier for crews to tackle the flames.

"Overnight the fire and the weather behaved normally," said Clavijo, explaining that the wind, the temperature and the behavior of the fire on

the first two nights had been "highly unusual".

Although air humidity levels rose overnight and the winds eased, helping firefighters' efforts, forecasters warned the mercury was set to soar again over the weekend in Tenerife.



The fire broke out on Tuesday night several days after an intense heat wave hit Spain's Canary Islands.

Visible from space

The fire has generated a pillar of smoke nearly four kilometers high which is visible on satellite pictures and has risen above the summit of

Mount Teide, the volcano that towers over the island.

Reaching a height of 3,715 meters (12,200 feet), Teide is Spain's highest peak and a popular tourist destination, but all roads to the national park were closed on Thursday and would remain shut, the authorities said.

The focal point of the fire lies some 20 kilometers away on the steeply forested slopes below, with the blaze sending clouds of ash across much of the island.

"This is probably the most complex fire we've ever had in the Canary Islands in at least the past 40 years," Clavijo said Thursday, citing the topography of the area, the high temperatures and winds that change direction frequently.

The blaze broke out after the archipelago suffered a heat wave that left many areas tinder-dry.

As global temperatures rise due to climate change, scientists have warned heat waves will become more frequent and intense.

In 2022, a particularly bad year for wildfires in Europe, Spain was the worst-hit nation with nearly 500 blazes that destroyed more than 300,000 hectares, according to the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS).

So far this year, EFFIS figures show almost 76,000 hectares have been ravaged by 340 fires in Spain, one of the European countries most vulnerable to climate change.

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