

Smoke shrouds Sydney landmarks as risky bushfire season looms

September 13 2023



A man looks out from his balcony at the Sydney skyline on September 13, 2023, as smoke blankets Sydney Harbour after a ring of controlled blazes burned on the city's fringes.

A smoky haze blanketed Australia's scenic Sydney Harbour on Wednesday, as a ring of controlled blazes burned on the city's fringes in

preparation for the looming bushfire season.

Office workers could taste the smoke as they stepped off trains in the city's business district, while wispy shrouds cloaked landmarks such as the Harbour Bridge and Sydney Opera House.

Air pollution in parts of the city was comparable to Beijing or New Delhi, with residents warned to shut their windows and avoid venturing outside if they could.

The smoke was produced by "hazard reduction burns" on Sydney's forested outskirts, which have been lit by firefighters to reduce fuel loads ahead of risky bushfire conditions this summer.

New South Wales Rural Fire Service Inspector Ben Shepherd said around 30,000 hectares of undergrowth had been burned across the state since the start of July.

"It's fair to say that, after two or three very wet years, the bushfire risk has returned to New South Wales," he told AFP.

"That is likely to lead to increased fire activity."

Authorities have forecast that it will be Australia's most intense bushfire season since the "Black Summer" of 2019-2020, when a series of out-of-control infernos raged across the eastern seaboard.



The Sydney Harbour Bridge is seen shrouded by smoke on September 13, 2023.



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There are fears that unusually [wet conditions](#) since then have accelerated [forest growth](#), increasing the amount of potential fuel for bushfires.

Rural Fire Service Commissioner Rob Rogers said those same damp conditions had hindered hazard reduction burns—meaning authorities had a lot of ground to make up.

"The last few years have been extremely wet and it has slowed down considerably how much burning we were able to do," he told national broadcaster ABC.

"We are so far behind, we have to take advantage now in this drying period."

Australia's national weather bureau has said the coming summer will be "warmer and drier than average", and recently confirmed the country's warmest winter on record.

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