

Torrential rains kill one in Greece after wildfires

September 5 2023



Cars and homes taking in water at Volos on Tuesday.

At least one person has died in eastern Greece after torrential rains hit the country, already ravaged for weeks by devastating wildfires, authorities said on Tuesday.

However, officials said firefighters had brought under control the blaze burning for weeks in Dadia national park.

The victim of the rains appeared to have been carried away by flood waters, while a shepherd was reported missing, government spokesman Yannis Artopios told public broadcaster ERT.

Later the Greek coastguard reported that a woman who had been canoeing at sea in the Halkidiki region, further north, was also being sought.

"Storms and heavy rains were hitting Tuesday," said Artopios, adding the dead man was found in central Greece's Magnesia region.

The regional capital Volos has seen 200 millimeters (about eight inches) of rain, while 600 mm have fallen in the neighboring village of Zagora, according to the National Meteorological Service (EMY).

The basement of Volos hospital was flooded and firefighters "are in the process of pumping out the water", said Artopios.

Meteorologist Panagotis Giannopoulos told ERT that "the amount of water that fell in 24 hours is the same as the usual rainfall for the whole of autumn".

Greek police have banned travel to Volos, certain villages on Pelion and the nearby island of Skiathos, where "planes cannot approach the airport" because of the flooding, Savvas Karagiannis, spokesman for Fraport, the German company that manages Greece's regional airports, told AFP.

"The weather conditions are extreme and there are currently many delays in airport connections", he added.

Since Monday, EMY has warned of serious bad weather which could affect the country until Thursday, with "authorities on high alert," according to the government.

"This is an extreme phenomenon", said Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis during a meeting on Tuesday with Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou.



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'Megafire'

On Monday evening, storms also caused landslides in Evia, an island close to Athens, while crops were damaged in Elis in the southwest Peloponnese region, according to local media.

Greece has been devastated by ferocious wildfires this summer.

A massive blaze raging over the last two weeks destroyed swathes of the Dadia national park in the northern Evros region.

Artopios told AFP that the Dadia fire front, raging since 19 August, was "under control and no area was active".

"Firefighters are staying in position to survey the situation," he added.

Classified by experts as a "megafire", the blaze raging in Dadia destroyed more than 81,000 hectares (200,155 acres) of the forested area, protected by the European agency Natura 2000.

The devastation in Dadia accounts for almost half the total area burned by wildfires in Greece since the start of the summer, according to the European climate service Copernicus.

Like several Mediterranean countries, Greece faces fierce wildfires every summer, which this year left 26 people dead and at least 150,000 hectares burned.

Authorities in neighboring Turkey said Tuesday four people had died in flooding there, with at least four others missing.

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