

# Colombia declares emergency over raging forest fires

January 25 2024

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Forest fires are raging in Colombia amid record temperatures linked with the El Nino weather phenomenon.

Colombia has declared a state of emergency in two regions as dozens of forest fires burned wide swathes of the country and left the capital

choking on smoke during record temperatures linked with the El Niño weather phenomenon.

Colombia has already extinguished hundreds of fires this month, but 25 continue to burn, according to data from the National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD) on Wednesday.

In the departments of Santander and Cundinamarca—where the capital Bogota is located—the fires have consumed about 600 hectares (1,483 acres) of forest and states of emergency were declared.

The emergency measures free up funds to "quickly address the negative impact on the department's natural resources," said Cundinamarca Governor Jorge Emilio Rey.

More than half of the country's municipalities have been put on "red alert" over the threat of the fires, with the areas around the capital hit hard.

White columns of smoke billowed from the mountains surrounding Bogota on Wednesday, with people in the commercial district seen masking up against the thick haze and ash.

"Because of the burning of the hills, all the smoke is coming to this side, and it is affecting us a lot," said 62-year-old driver Hector Rafael Escudero.

President Gustavo Petro said [global warming](#) was aggravating the El Niño weather—a phenomenon typically associated with increased temperatures worldwide, drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains elsewhere.



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"This may be the hottest year in the history of mankind," he said, calling on "every mayor, every governor and the national government" to prioritize water supplies.

Nine towns in the north, center and east of Colombia posted record temperatures Tuesday of up to 40.4 degrees Celsius (105 Fahrenheit).

## **'Significant deterioration'**

In Bogota, a voracious blaze has engulfed the mountains to the west of

the city since Monday and [wild animals](#) have been spotted sheltering in built-up areas. These creatures include racoon-like animals called coatis, porcupines, birds and frogs, authorities said.

Members of the Colombian Army and volunteers were deployed with hoes, rakes and machetes to clear unburned brush from the sloping hills surrounding the capital as water-ferrying helicopters buzzed overhead.

"Some areas have already been affected by the [fire](#) and some vegetation has not yet been consumed. What we are doing is trying to divide the burned areas from the unburned ones to prevent the fire from continuing to spread," said Daniel Trujillo, a 23-year-old Colombian Civil Defense volunteer.



Colombia, one of the world's most biodiverse countries, has for months been suffering from record high temperatures and drought conditions.



Authorities have warned of a "significant deterioration" in air quality in Bogotá.

Gustavo Andres Betancourt, a member of the Colombian Army, described challenging conditions.

"Some hotspots are still active. They are being contained, but at night, due to the [high altitude](#) and the winds, they start up again, creating new fires," he said.

Authorities have warned of a "significant deterioration" in air quality in the city of around eight million people.

One of the world's most biodiverse countries, Colombia has for months been suffering from record-high temperatures and [drought conditions](#) in the southern hemisphere winter, as climate change wreaks havoc.

These conditions are expected to last through June, forecasters have said.

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Citation: Colombia declares emergency over raging forest fires (2024, January 25) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-01-colombia-declares-emergency-raging-forest.html>

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