

Climate change not to blame for deadly Chile Fires: researchers

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Neither human-induced climate change nor the El Nino weather phenomenon were determining factors in the devastating forest fires that killed more than 130 people in Chile this month, according to the results of an international study [revealed](#) Thursday.

Improper land use had a bigger impact, it found, with the expansion in recent decades of pine and eucalyptus monocultures—much more flammable than [native vegetation](#)—and the growth of informal settlements in forest zones.

"Fire risk is increasing notably due to current land management practices," in the affected zone, said the study by researchers from South America and Europe for World Weather Attribution (WWA)—a scientific project that seeks to quantify how climate change influences the intensity and likelihood of a particular extreme weather event.

On February 2 several fires broke out simultaneously around the coastal town of Vina del Mar in Chile's coastal Valparaiso region.

The infernos claimed the lives of at least 133 people and destroyed some 7,000 homes in the deadliest natural disaster to befall Chile since a 2010 earthquake and tsunami killed about 500 people.

The WWA study found that fire-conducive weather conditions in the area —high temperatures, low humidity and strong winds—had not been significantly altered by climate change, nor by El Nino.

This did not mean the threat of global warming should not be taken seriously, the researchers said.

"Unless the world rapidly stops burning [fossil fuels](#), fire danger... will increase," said a WWA statement summarizing the findings.

"The risk of an increase in dangerous fire weather conditions attributable to human-induced [climate change](#) needs to be taken very seriously."

Chilean authorities are investigating whether the fires were intentionally set.

The WWA said existing measures to mitigate [fire risk](#) were inadequate, and should include "improved spatial planning", better coordination, and getting communities involved in preventing fires.

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