

# 10 feared dead in Chile forest fires

February 3 2024

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The fires have enveloped Valparaiso in a thick mushroom cloud of smoke.

Chilean firefighters were battling rapidly expanding wildfires Saturday that officials fear have claimed around 10 lives and are threatening hundreds of homes, prompting the president to declare a state of emergency.

About a dozen fires have been raging since Friday.

The blazes are concentrated in the Vina del Mar and Valparaiso tourist regions, where they have ravaged thousands of hectares of forest, cloaked [coastal cities](#) in a dense fog of gray smoke and forced people to flee their homes.

"We have preliminary information that several people have died, around 10," said Sofia Gonzales Cortes, state representative for the central region of Valparaiso.

In the towns of Estrella and Navidad, southwest of the capital, the fires have burned nearly 30 homes, and forced evacuations near the surfing resort of Pichilemu.

"I've never seen anything like it," 63-year-old Yvonne Guzman told AFP. When the flames started to close in on her home in Quilpue, she fled with her elderly mother, only to find themselves trapped in traffic for hours.

"It's very distressing, because we've evacuated the house but we can't move forward. There are all these people trying to get out and who can't move," she said.

## 'Extreme'

On Friday, Chilean President Gabriel Boric decreed "a [state of emergency](#) due to catastrophe, in order to have all the necessary resources" to fight the fires.



A state of emergency has been declared over raging forest fires in Chile.



The blazes are concentrated in the Vina del Mar and Valparaiso tourist regions, where they have ravaged thousands of hectares of forest.

"All forces are deployed in the fight against the forest fires," he said in a message posted to social media platform X.

Emergency services were set to meet Saturday morning to assess the situation.

Around 7,000 hectares have already been burned in Valparaiso alone, according to CONAF, the Chilean national forest authority, which called the blazes "extreme."

Images filmed by trapped motorists have gone viral online, showing

mountains in flames at the end of the famous "Route 68", a road used by thousands of tourists to get to the Pacific coast beaches.

On Friday, authorities closed the road, which links Valparaiso to the capital Santiago, as a huge mushroom cloud of smoke "reduced visibility".

The fires are being driven by a summer heatwave and drought affecting the southern part of South America caused by the El Niño weather phenomenon, as scientists warn that a warming planet has increased the risk of natural disasters such as intense heat and fires.

As Chile and Colombia battle rising temperatures, the heatwave is also threatening to sweep over Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil in the coming days.

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