

Earliest-ever heat wave in Greece closes Athens Acropolis

June 12 2024, by Marina RAFENBERG with Vassilis KYRIAKOULIS in Thessaloniki



Meteorologists have noted this is the earliest heat wave for Greece in recorded history.

The Athens Acropolis, Greece's most visited tourist site, was closed to

the public during the hottest hours of Wednesday as the season's earliest-ever heat wave swept the country, prompting school closures and health warnings.

The UNESCO-listed archaeological site closed from midday to 5:00 pm (0900 to 1400 GMT), with temperatures topping 43 degrees Celsius (109 degrees Fahrenheit) in central Greece.

Temperatures of up to 44 degrees Celsius are expected on Thursday as the phenomenon peaks, with up to 43 degrees forecast in the capital.

Meteorologists have noted this is the earliest heat wave—which for Greece is temperatures exceeding 38 degrees Celsius for at least three days—in recorded history.

"This heat wave will go down in history," meteorologist Panos Giannopoulos said on state TV ERT.

"In the 20th century we never had a heat wave before June 19. We have had several in the 21st century, but none before June 15," he said.

The climate crisis and civil protection ministry has warned of a very high risk of fires in the Attica region around Athens.

Schools stayed closed in several regions of the country on Wednesday and will do so again Thursday, including in the capital, while the labor ministry has advised public-sector employees to work from home.

The ministry also ordered a pause from midday to 5:00 pm for outdoor work including food delivery, to Thursday.

'Too risky'

Sheltering under a parasol, electrician Fotis Pappous said he had started his workday a few hours earlier, at 6:00 am, on orders from his employer.

"With this kind of heat, it would be too risky otherwise," said the 46-year-old as he tinkered with an electricity meter near Athens's central Syntagma Square.



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But for staff working over the grill in Greece's already-buzzing tourist Plaka district, there was no room for respite.

"We have no choice, it's the start of the tourist season," said kebab store owner Elisavet Robou.

"We have air-conditioning and fans, and staff are allowed to take breaks, but unfortunately the climate crisis is here.

"Heat waves came earlier this year and the season will be difficult," she said.

An air-conditioned hall has been opened at Syntagma metro station in central Athens to give the public somewhere to shelter from the heat, the public transport authority said.

Greece's Red Cross said it had handed out some 12,000 bottles of water in the center of the capital and at the Acropolis.

In Greece's second city Thessaloniki, teachers and pupils said annual school exams were held under difficult conditions.

"There was no air-conditioning in any of the rooms so we used fans, some of whom the teachers brought from their own homes," said Andreas Karagiannis, a 52-year-old mathematician and examiner.

"Exams should not have been held under these conditions," said 17-year-old pupil Yiannis Theodoridis.

The Acropolis was forced to close in July last year during a two-week heat wave that was unprecedented in its duration.

It was followed by fires which according consumed nearly 175,000 hectares (432,000 acres) of forest and farmland.

A record number of almost four million visitors flocked to the site last

year, with its popularity boosted in part due to tourists arriving on cruise ships calling in at the nearby port of Piraeus.

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