

Bushfires reach Melbourne as heatwave fans Australia blazes

30 December 2019



Hundreds of blazes are burning across Australia, which is experiencing a devastating summer bushfire season fuelled by a prolonged drought and climate change

Around 100,000 people were urged to flee five Melbourne suburbs on Monday evening as Australia's spiralling bushfire crisis killed a volunteer firefighter battling a separate blaze in the countryside.

Authorities in the country's second-biggest city downgraded an earlier bushfire emergency warning but said residents should steer clear of the blaze, which has burned through 40 hectares (nearly 100 acres) of grassland.

In Bundoora—just 16 kilometres (10 miles) north of the city centre and home to two major Australian university campuses—the [fire](#)'s spread toward houses had been halted for now but it was yet to be brought under control, said Victoria Emergency.

Local media showed images of water bombers flying over neighbourhoods, and families hosing down their homes in the hope of halting the fire's spread.

A volunteer firefighter died in New South Wales state and two others suffered burns while working on a blaze more than five hours south-west of Sydney, the Rural Fire Service said.

"It's believed that the truck rolled when hit by extreme winds," the agency said in a tweet.

Ten others, including two volunteer firefighters, have been killed so far this fire season.

The crisis has focused attention on climate change—which scientists say is creating a longer and more intense bushfire season—and sparked street protests calling for immediate action to tackle [global warming](#).



Bushfires have brought destruction to millions of hectares of Australia this summer

While conservative Prime Minister Scott Morrison belatedly acknowledged a link between the fires and climate change, he has continued his staunch support of Australia's lucrative coal mining industry and ruled out further action to reduce emissions.

The blazes have also destroyed more than 1,000

homes and scorched more than three million hectares (7.4 million acres)—an area bigger than Belgium.

A heatwave sweeping the country Monday fuelled the latest destruction in Australia's devastating summer fire season, which has been turbocharged by a prolonged drought and climate change.

Conditions worsened on Friday with high winds and temperatures soaring across the country—reaching 47 degrees Celsius (117 Fahrenheit) in Western Australia and topping 40 degrees in every region—including the usually temperate island of Tasmania.

More than a dozen blazes are also raging in Victoria's East Gippsland countryside, where authorities said "quite a number" of the 30,000 tourists visiting the usually picturesque region had heeded calls to evacuate.

Some of the fires were burning so intensely that hundreds of firefighters were pulled back beyond a front estimated to stretch 1,000 kilometres (600 miles).

It was deemed "unsafe" for them to remain in bushland areas, Gippsland fire incident controller Ben Rankin said, describing the situation as "very intense".

Authorities had warned tourists enjoying Australia's summer holidays in East Gippsland that the fires would cut off the last major road still open.

Victoria Emergency Management commissioner Andrew Crisp said residents and holiday makers still in the area faced being stranded as it was now "too late to leave", with his agency warning it was "not possible" to provide aid to all visitors in the area.

Neighbouring South Australia is also experiencing "catastrophic" fire conditions.

The Country Fire Service's Brenton Eden said it would be a "very dangerous" day for people in the state, with "dry" thunderstorms—which produce thunder and lightning but no rain—already sparking a number of fires, including an emergency-level blaze on Kangaroo Island.

"Winds are gusting and unfortunately this is a dry lightning front that is going to move rapidly across South Australia," he told national broadcaster ABC.

Conditions were also expected to deteriorate in worst-hit New South Wales, where 100 fires were burning Monday morning including more than 40 uncontained.

Australia bushfires: Victoria

As of December 30, 14:55pm (local time)



Map of Australia's state of Victoria showing the active fires as of December 30

This season's bushfires have killed 10 people, destroyed more than 1,000 homes and scorched more than three million hectares (7.4 million acres)—an area bigger than Belgium

'Too late to leave'

Sydney and other major cities have been shrouded in toxic bushfire smoke haze for weeks, forcing children to play indoors and causing professional sporting events to be cancelled.

The capital Canberra has cancelled its New Year's Eve fireworks display due to a total fire ban in the Australia Capital Territory, while several regional towns have also followed suit.

A petition to cancel Sydney's famous New Year's Eve fireworks and use the money to fight bushfires ringing the city has topped 270,000 signatures, but officials say the show will go on.

Sydney has spent Aus\$6.5 million (\$4.5 million) on this year's fireworks display—funds that the Change.org petition argues would be better spent on supporting volunteer firefighters and farmers suffering through a brutal drought.

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