

Heatwave grips France and Spain as temps set to rise

June 17 2022, by Tom Barfield, With Mathieu Gorse In Madrid



Temperatures climbed across much of France Friday, including in Paris.

A punishing heatwave broke a string of records in France and Britain on Friday as Spain battled to contain forest fires that forced hundreds from their homes.

The hot weather is in line with warnings from scientists that heatwaves will be more intense and hit earlier than usual thanks to climate change.

In Spain, forest fires burned nearly 9,000 hectares (22,240 acres) of land in the northwest Sierra de la Culebra region Friday, forcing some 200 people from their homes, regional authorities said.

And more than 3,000 people were evacuated from the Puy du Fou theme park in central Spain due to a fierce fire nearby.

Firefighters were battling fires in several other regions, including woodlands in Catalonia where weather conditions complicated the fight.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez praised firefighters "who risk their lives on the frontline of fires" on Friday, which is also World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought.

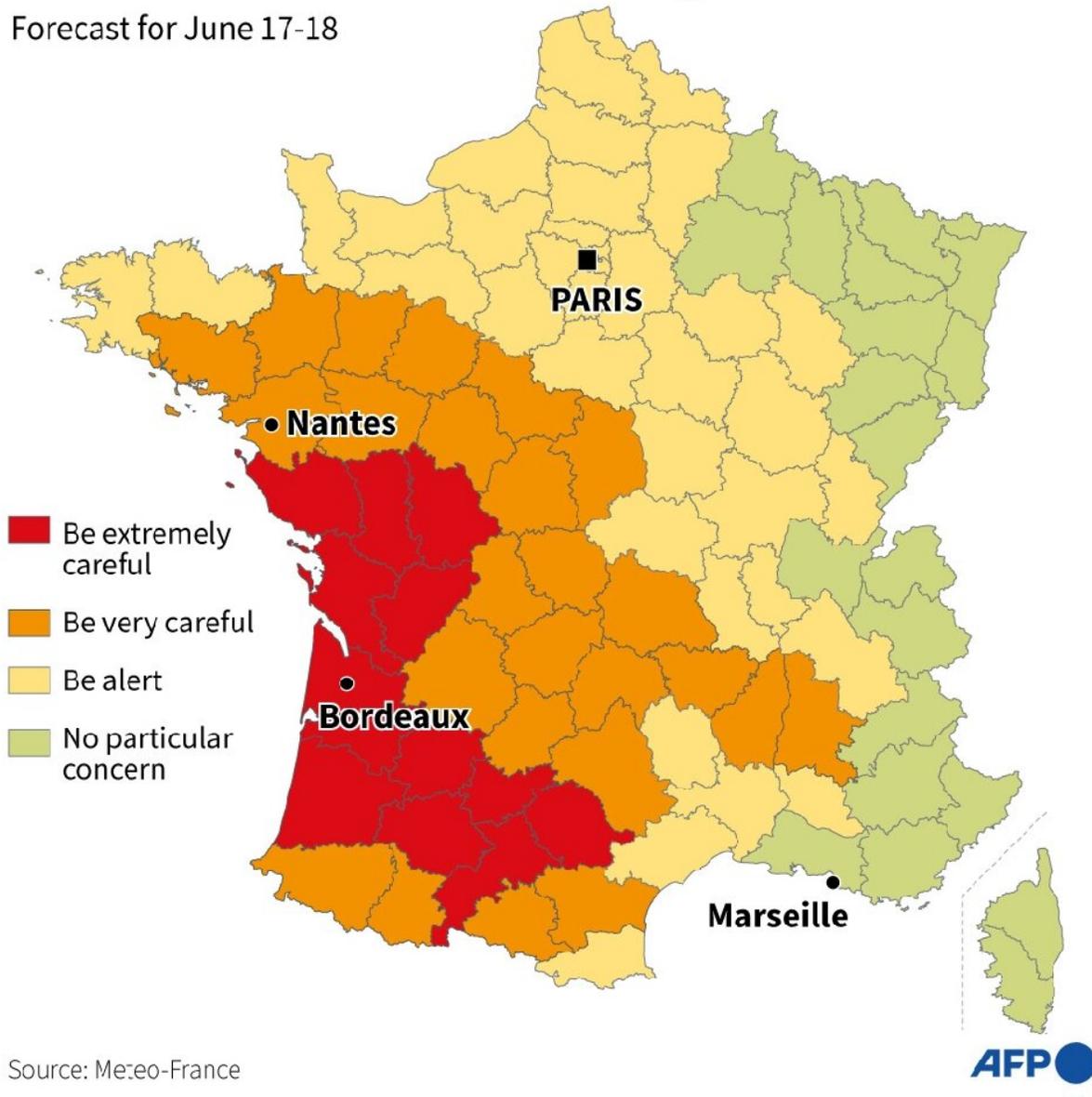
Temperatures were above 35 Celsius (95 Fahrenheit) Friday in most parts of the country and will top 40C in some areas.

Hospitals full

In France, temperatures also climbed Friday with more than half of French departments at the highest or second-highest heat alert level by the afternoon.

France heatwave warnings

Forecast for June 17-18



France heatwave warnings.

Much of the country's southwest will see thermometers top 40C, prompting warnings for the vulnerable.

"Hospitals are at capacity, but are keeping up with demand," Health Minister Brigitte Bourguignon told reporters in Vienne, near Lyon in the southeast.

Schoolchildren were told to stay at home in departments at alert level "red" and the health ministry activated a special heatwave hotline.

Meanwhile rock and metal fans at the giant Hellfest in western France were sprayed with water from hoses and enormous vaporisers in front of the stage as they headbanged or bounced to an opening-day line-up including Deftones and The Offspring.

"This is the earliest heatwave ever recorded in France" since 1947, said Matthieu Sorel, a climatologist at weather authority Meteo France.

With "many monthly or even all-time temperature records likely to be beaten in several regions," he called the unseasonable weather a "marker of climate change".

Meteo France said temperatures were expected to reach their peak on Saturday before slowly declining.

The heatwave has spread up from north Africa through Spain, also affecting Italy and the United Kingdom.



Forest fires raged in several parts of Spain this week.

Several towns in northern Italy have announced water rationing and the Lombardy region may declare a state of emergency as a record drought threatens harvests.

The UK recorded its hottest day of the year on Friday with temperatures reaching over 30C in the early afternoon, meteorologists said.

It was the third day in a row that temperature records had been broken in the UK, where it was over 28C on Wednesday and 29.5C on Thursday.

Climate change

Experts warned that the high temperatures were caused by worrying climate change trends.

"As a result of climate change, heatwaves are starting earlier," said Clare Nullis, a spokeswoman for the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva.

"What we're witnessing today is unfortunately a foretaste of the future" if concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere continue to rise and push global warming towards 2C from pre-industrial levels, she added.

In France, special measures have been taken in care homes for elderly people, still marked by the memory of a deadly 2003 heatwave.



Spain has been hit by a week-long heatwave.

Buildings are being sprayed down with water to cool them and residents are being rotated through air-conditioned rooms.

"We're taking even more care than usual with the old folks. It's tough for them. They're often alone, worn down physically and unable to act independently," said Sarah Jalabert, a nurse making home visits in the Tarn department.

In the Gironde department, which includes Bordeaux, authorities said all public events outdoors or in non-air-conditioned venues would be banned from 2:00 pm (1200 GMT) on Friday, a measure set to be broadened across the region.

And speed limits in several regions, including around Paris, have been reduced to limit the concentration of harmful smog or ozone in the heat—although official air monitor Prev'Air reported levels ozone above recommended limits in several regions.

Paris police chief Didier Lallement said only the least polluting vehicles would be allowed to drive in the capital on Saturday due to fine particle pollution.

Electric grid operator RTE said increased use of fans and air-conditioners was also driving up power consumption.

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