

France records hottest temperature ever in European heat wave

Will Morrow
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Large portions of Europe were hit by intense heat waves over the past week. Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic all experienced their hottest-ever temperatures for the month of June. France recorded its hottest day ever on Friday, reaching a high of 45.9 degrees Celsius (115 Fahrenheit) at the town of Gallargues-le-Montueux near Montpellier, in the southern Gard region, making it temporarily warmer than California's notoriously hot Death Valley.

At least nine people have already died as a direct result of the heat, with a number of other deaths indirectly, including from drownings.

In Spain, temperatures in Girona, in the north-eastern Catalan region, reached 43.9 degrees Celsius on Friday, the hottest ever in the city. Temperatures exceeded 36 degrees Celsius in the majority of the country, and peaked above 40 degrees Celsius in the center, including Madrid, and the south.

More than 700 firefighters in Spain were struggling to put out a fire that broke out in the central town of Almorox, near Toledo on Friday, and which by Sunday had destroyed more than 5,000 acres in the provinces of Castilla-La Mancha and Madrid. A second fire that began Wednesday in north-eastern Spain had been put out by Friday after having destroyed 15,000 acres and killed hundreds of sheep. It was reportedly the worst fire in the country in 20 years.

While the regions affected were sparsely populated, more than 450 people had to be evacuated. The fire reportedly began after chicken manure in Torre de l'Espanyol combusted in the heat. While the conditions were created by extreme heat and drought, Marc Castellnou, the head of the Catalan fire department, said that poor forestry management had contributed to the ferocity and extent of the fires, according to the *Guardian*.

Germany set its all-time highest June temperature yesterday, reaching 38.9 degrees Celsius, below the national all-time high of 40.3 degrees.

France became the seventh country in Europe to ever record a temperature above 45 degrees Celsius. The previous record of 44.1 degrees Celsius was set in August 2003. The hottest areas were in the south, with four departments (Hérault, Gard, Vaucluse and Bouches-du-Rhône) raised to the highest-level safety warning. More than 4,000 schools were closed across the country.

At least five people have died from heat in France, but the real toll attributable to the heat wave will not be known for many weeks.

On Thursday, two people died in the same town, Cernay, in the far north-eastern department of Haut-Rhin. The local mayor stated that they were an octogenarian and a worker in his thirties. The same day, a young 33-year-old tiling worker in the western region of Ille-et-Vilaine, who was laboring on a roof in the middle of the day, was found unconscious and later died.

In the southern Vaucluse department, where temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius persisted for Thursday and Friday, six people were hospitalized with hyperthermia, one of whom died after having been cycling that day. Another 59-year-old cyclist died in the same department on Wednesday.

Two more people died in Spain. One was a young 17-year-old boy who was reportedly working on a house in Andalusia in the middle of the day on Thursday. After jumping in the pool at the house where he was working, he underwent convulsions and later died of a heart attack. A 93-year-old man also died.

Temperatures have in parts exceeded the catastrophic 2003 European heat wave, which led to Europe's

hottest summer since at least 1540. Statistical analysis of death rates later estimated that anywhere between 30,000 and 70,000 people had died due to the heat waves.

In that disaster, more than 14,800 people died in France alone in the month of August, most of them elderly, after eight consecutive days over 40 degrees Celsius. The death toll exposed the indifference and contempt of the French ruling class, the government of President Jacques Chirac, and the political establishment for the lives of the working class. No precautions were taken, and most of those who died were the elderly living on their own and provided with no assistance. Undertakers were compelled to use industrial freezing facilities for lack of space.

Heat waves across Europe occur due to hot air flows from northern Africa. The latest heat wave occurred as a result of air flows from the Sahara Desert.

While heat waves have always occurred, their frequency and intensity is being increased by climate change, which makes extreme weather events more likely. This raises all the more powerfully the terrible implications of the inaction on environmental issues by the world's major governments. This is not the fault of "humanity," but of the current capitalist economic organization of society, and the associated subordination of society to the profit interests of the capitalist class.

The ever-greater threat to humanity and the environment from climate change poses the urgent necessity of a socialist reorganization of economic life by the working class, and the organization of production on an international scale according to rational scientific planning and social need.

The warmest 20 years in Europe since records began have all taken place in the last 22 years. The years 2015-2018 are the top four hottest years, and 2019 is expected to also be in the top five, meaning that the last five years will be the hottest ever recorded, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

Climate scientist James Hansen of Columbia University told CBS News: "In dry subtropics such as the Mediterranean area," the temperature shift in summer is so large that an "event as extreme as those of 2003 and 2019" are at least 100 times more likely to occur than "in the climate without human influence."

"In other words, the chance of those extreme events

in the pre-industrialized world was not zero, but it was negligibly small compared to the chance today," Hansen continued. "So you can say with a very high degree of confidence that this extreme event is a consequence of human-made climate change."

Stefan Rahmstorf, of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Research, told *Deutsche Welle* that "monthly heat records all over the globe occur five times as often today as they would in a stable climate."



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