

Wildfire in France's Gironde region reignites amidst record drought, heat wave

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After wildfires devastated France's Gironde region and much of Europe last month, they are again engulfing southwestern France. According to Gironde police prefect Fabienne Buccio, the fire is a continuation of July's fire in Landiras, which "didn't go out" but "went underground." The fire has reportedly rekindled due to "heat, dry air, record drought and the fact that there is a lot of peat in the ground."

Since August 9, the fire has burned an additional 7,400 hectares of vegetation. It is fuelled by extremely dry vegetation amid a record-breaking drought and another heat wave with successive days of temperatures above 35°C (95 degrees F). Around 10,000 people, mostly in the municipalities of Hostens and Belin-Beliet, have been evacuated. Over 1,100 French firefighters are currently tackling the blaze. On Friday, Gironde's deputy prefect, Ronan Leaustic, said that although the fire had not expanded on that day, "the weather conditions are pushing us towards extreme vigilance."

Emergency measures against the fire included the arrival of around 300 firefighters from Romania, Germany, Poland, and Austria, and 6 additional Canadair water bombers from Greece, Italy and Sweden. On Friday evening, French president Macron tweeted that firefighters had even been flown in from French Polynesia—16,000 kilometres away—to tackle the blaze.

The government has also requested that companies give employees with volunteer firefighter training time off to help battle the blaze. Volunteers brought in at short notice are being thrown into the fight against the Gironde blaze alongside better-trained professionals.

However, these measures fall short of those requested by Gregory Allione, president of National Federation of

French Fire Fighters, who after July's fires in Gironde told *Le Monde* that the government "must cover the wages of the volunteers so companies can deploy them more easily to fight fires." He also added that the measures taken by the government after July's fires "just aren't enough."

In July, wildfires in the Gironde region led to the loss of 19,000 hectares (46,950 acres) of vegetation in the Landiras forest area and 7,000 hectares (17,300 acres) at La Teste-de-Buch, as well as the evacuation of around 40,000 residents and tourists in the region. Francis Cros, vice-president National Federation of Forest Communities, told *Le Monde* that the high toll in La Teste-de-Buch was due to the failure to implement standard forest fire safety protocols.

Due to the fire, the A63 motorway, which runs from Bordeaux to the westernmost point of the French-Spanish border, was closed in both directions on Thursday, before partially reopening on Friday. Dozens of trucks from Spain were blocked from entering France on Thursday.

Le Jura, a commune bordering Germany in France's Burgundy region, has also been hit by significant wildfires in the previous two days, with 660 hectares (1,630 acres) lost to two fires. Several smaller fires are still burning elsewhere in France, including in Brittany, Anjou, and in the Ile-de-France region, and have impacted transportation services there.

The expansion of the fire comes amid another heatwave, the fourth of 2022, with temperatures in the high 30s Centigrade (upper 90s Fahrenheit) in the South and West of France from Thursday to Saturday. Wave after wave of extreme heat with little precipitation in-between has caused a record-breaking drought in France and across Europe that is driving a record European wildfire season.

At least 17 homes in Belin-Béliet had been destroyed by Tuesday night. This is the second time in less than three weeks that the village had to be evacuated. A local resident, Karine Monjeau, said: “The nightmare is starting again. When are we going to get out of this?”

Since the beginning of the year, 60,901 hectares (150,490 acres) in France have been lost to wildfires—three times the national average for an entire year and a new record. Recent years with very dry temperatures have seen major wildfires throughout August and into September and October.

The entirety of the Europe has experienced record wildfires in 2022. According to the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS), on August 6, 615,341 hectares (1,520,541 acres) had been burned across Europe; the previous maximum for this date was 380,742 hectares (940,834 acres) burned. As of writing, the EFFIS estimates that 740,583 hectares (1,830,020 acres) have been lost, an increase of 125,000 hectares (308,882 acres) in just one week.

According to a Reuters tracker, 7 people have been killed, 211 injured, and at least 65,000 displaced by wildfires in Europe in 2022 so far. Over the summer months, thousands in Europe have died from successive waves of extreme heat that drove fires across the continent.

These totals are likely to grow further in coming weeks. In Portugal, the Serra da Estrela national park has also been engulfed by a wildfire this week. The fire has destroyed 10,000 hectares (24,711 acres) of woodland so far and is currently being fought by 1,500 firefighters and 12 planes. Britain, which also saw a record wave of fires in July, is facing a new round of extreme heat, with temperatures predicted to reach 36°C (97 degrees F) in coming days.

French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne visited Gironde on Thursday. Speaking near Landiras, she claimed that the government’s mobilization on wildfires was “total” and that the government had never before made available “so many resources.” She pointed to the government’s purchase of seven water-bombing helicopters since July’s fire as evidence of this fact.

However, the current situation in Gironde shows that the Macron government has failed to protect the population from wildfires. Well before the peak of wildfire season, events in July showed that drastic

measures were needed instantly to protect the population of Gironde from fires in the proceeding weeks.

It is well-known what measures are necessary. Leading firefighters and ecology experts have made clear that improved systems of firewalls, fire surveillance, more professional firefighters, and development of transportation infrastructure in high-risk areas can prevent wildfires spreading out of control. Amid record drought and yet another heatwave, more wildfires were clearly inevitable before the end of the summer, yet no adequate action was taken by the Macron government.

The renewal of the deadly fire in Gironde once again, shows that the ruling class in France and across the world are unable to tackle global warming and its effects. Record wildfires are ripping through Europe and Alaska, and significant fires continue to burn in California and North Africa. Since 2020, wildfires have destroyed large parts of Australia, Russia, North Africa and California.

The consequences of the current 1.2°C (2.2 degrees F) of global warming since the pre-industrial age have already claimed uncountable lives in myriad extreme weather events, as well as causing the exodus of millions of climate refugees.

Capitalist governments’ efforts to address climate change, such as the toothless Paris Accord, which only seeks to limit global warming to 2°C (3.6 degrees F) from pre-industrial times, are insufficient to reverse the deadly effects of climate change that are visibly worsening year on year. Global warming and its effects, including wildfires, can only be managed and reversed by the overthrow of capitalist property relations and its replacement with centralized scientific planning of production.



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