



Increased prevention efforts needed to curb the growing risk of future wildfires

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The latest Commission report on forest fires shows the need to tackle climate change "to leave a healthier planet for those that follow", as President Jean-Claude Juncker highlighted in his latest State of the Union Address and calls for stronger measures to prevent wildfires.

Today, the European Commission published its annual report on Forest Fires in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa for 2017 [LINK]. It shows that last year, wildfires destroyed over 1.2 million hectares of forests and land in Europe – more than the total surface area of Cyprus. They also claimed the lives of 127 civilians and fire fighters and caused economic damage estimated at almost EUR 10 billion.

Karmenu **Vella**, Commissioner for Environment, said: *"Extreme weather conditions – long lasting droughts and heat waves – exacerbate wildfires and make firefighting more difficult. Over 90% of all wildfires are started by human activities, which is why the EU is working closely with Member States on prevention, ensuring that citizens and decision-makers are more aware of the causes and risks of wildfires. We also need to invest much more in forest management to ensure best practice throughout the EU. As the summer of 2018 has shown us again, much work is needed on prevention and Europe must remain at the forefront in the fight against climate change."*

Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, responsible for the Joint Research Centre (JRC), said: *"JRC scientists are continuously monitoring wildfires in Europe through the European Forest Fire Information System. The data from the past couple of years shows that fires are increasing in number and severity. I am proud that, by collecting and analysing this data, the JRC helps us better understand the changes and provides a basis for national authorities to improve both prevention and firefighting preparedness."*

Europe faces more and more severe fires

The latest report shows a clear trend towards longer fire seasons compared to previous years, with fires now occurring well beyond the dry and hot summer months (July- September). In 2017, the most critical months were June and October, when deadly fires swept through Portugal and Northern Spain.

The Mediterranean region remains the most affected area. However, unusually dry summers in central and northern Europe have recently led to large fires in countries such as Sweden, Germany and Poland, which have historically seen very few.

Finally, in 2017, over 25% of the total burnt area lied within the Natura2000 network, calling for increased efforts of EU countries to restore and manage protected habitats and their ecosystem services, including for the sake of forest fire prevention.

Wildfires can be prevented

Like in previous years, in 2017, most wildfires were caused by human activity. Unsustainable forest management practices, the degradation of ecosystems, as well as the planting of very flammable forest tree species facilitate fire ignition and favour the spreading of wildfires.

Prevention is thus key in tackling wildfires. Adequate forest management and land use practices can reduce fire risks and make forests more resilient to fires. In addition, the report shows that awareness raising and training of local communities, policy makers and stakeholders will increase their preparedness.

Member States and the EU institutions should continue to work hand in hand in providing guidelines on how to act in case of wildfires and how to increase our resilience, building on national experience and best practices.

Background

2017 Annual Forest Fire Report

The report "[Forest Fires in Europe, Middle East and North Africa 2017](#)" drawn up by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the in-house science and knowledge centre of the European Commission, provides a detailed analysis of the wildfires in 2017, including country-specific reports. The report combines data

from the [European Forest Fire Information System \(EFFIS\)](#), managed by the JRC, and the statistics and information provided by EU Member States and neighbouring countries.

EU support during the 2018 summer forest fire season

In 2018, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was activated 5 times to respond to forest fires in Europe. Substantial support was provided to the countries in need, namely Sweden and Greece. In total, 15 planes, 6 helicopters and over 400 firefighters and crew were mobilised this summer. The European Union has funded €1.6 million in transportation costs to mobilise support to the affected countries. Furthermore, over 139 Copernicus satellite maps on forest fires were produced on the request of Member States. In addition, a prevention and preparedness mission took place in Portugal to help boost the country's capacity to deal with forest fires.

Strengthening EU civil protection capacities

The Commission has proposed to strengthen the European civil protection capacities through [rescEU](#), so that when multiple disasters hit, Member States are better prepared. rescEU is based on two fundamental pillars: prevention and preparedness and greater response capacities, including the creation of European reserve capacities to act as a safety net when national capacities are overwhelmed. The rescEU proposal is a central part of President **Juncker's** agenda for a Europe that protects.

For more information

[Forest Fires in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa 2017](#)

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