

Rescuers continue search for missing in Italian Alps glacier collapse

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The collapse of the Marmolada glacier in the Italian Alps killed at least six people and injured several [Borut Zivulovic/Reuters]?

Rome, July 4 (RHC)-- Rescuers have resumed a search for survivors after an avalanche set off by the collapse of the largest glacier in the Italian Alps killed at least six people and injured nine others.

Sixteen people were estimated to still be missing on Monday as authorities said they did not know the total number of climbers hit when the glacier collapsed the previous day on Marmolada, the highest mountain in the Italian Dolomites. The avalanche is thought to have swept away two rope teams of six people each, plus their guides.

The disaster struck one day after a record high temperature of 10 degrees Celsius (50 degrees Fahrenheit) was recorded at the glacier's summit. "We hear[d] a loud sound, typical of a landslide, then we saw an avalanche of snow and ice shoot down towards the valley and we knew something very serious had happened," one of the managers of Rifugio Castiglioni, a mountain hut 3km (1.9 miles) from the site of the disaster, told Italy's news agency ANSA.

Carlo Budel, manager of the nearby Capanna Penia, said a catastrophe of similar proportions had not been recorded before. "A glacier that collapses in [a] block, without any signs of instability or sliding, has no precedent on the Dolomites and in the entire alpine range," Budel told Italian newspaper La Repubblica.

Four of the six victims have so far been identified. Authorities said three of them were Italian citizens while a fourth was a Czech national. Among the missing are Italian, German, Czech and Romanian nationals, ANSA reported.

Two of the injured were taken to hospital in Belluno, another in a more serious condition was taken to Treviso and five to Trento. Search operations continued throughout the night with the help of drones equipped with infrared heat-seeking cameras.

Trento's Alpine Rescue said the situation on the mountain remains perilous due to the likelihood of new avalanches. Local authorities have deployed the DaisyBell system, which causes precise blasts for the programmed release of avalanches to lessen the risk for rescuers.

An inquiry has been opened to ascertain what caused the disaster. The team of investigators said in a statement to ANSA the accident was an "unthinkable carnage."

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