

Nearly 700 firefighters with aircraft battle blaze in southern France

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In Bessèges, Gard, firefighters struggle against the fire, July 7. (Photo by AFP)

Paris, July 8 (RHC)-- People in the villages of Bordezac and other small settlements in the Bessegés area have been evacuated, with local officials saying around 100 had to be put up for the night.

Firefighters were drawn from neighboring regions to battle the flames while 12 firefighting planes and two helicopters were also deployed, reports said.

The operation "is continuing, but the fire is advancing more slowly and fortunately is no longer threatening any homes," a spokesman for the local fire service was quoted as saying early Friday, adding that several fire fronts remained "inaccessible." According to the fire service, more than thousands of hectares of forests in the area are at risk of fire this summer.

Several other fires have broken out in different parts of the area, some of which have been extinguished by firefighters. An early heat wave along with a sharp decrease in rainfall at the end of June has engulfed southern European countries, including France and Spain.

While the heat wave in Spain has been accompanied by numerous fires, weather experts in France have warned of a record high of 40 degrees in the coming days. "This is the first early heat wave that has been recorded in France since 1947, and it is the result of the consequences of climate change," a climate and meteorology expert in France was quoted as saying in reports.

The heat wave in France, especially in the southern and southwestern parts of the country, caused 14 regions to be put on red alert, and students in these regions were prohibited from leaving their homes and going to schools.

Meanwhile, according to local officials, a strong fire accompanied by wind and heat waves burned nearly 9 thousand hectares of forest land in "Sierra de la Culebra", located northwest of Spain.

In the northeast of Spain, the region of Catalonia has also faced numerous fires. According to the regional government, the most serious of these fires occurred in Lerida province, during which more than 940 hectares of forest were destroyed.

Officials in Lombardy, located in northern Italy, said they are preparing to declare a state of emergency to face unprecedented heat and drought that threatens agricultural products in the region.

The United Nations has in recent weeks called for "urgent action" by all countries to deal with drought and desertification to prevent a "human disaster." According to experts, the frequency, increase, and prolongation of heat waves, which are exacerbated by the emission of greenhouse gases, show the obvious consequences of climate change and global warming.

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