

# *Soaring Mediterranean temperatures bring death and destruction*

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**Burned trees stand in the wake of a forest fire near the town of Melloula in northwestern Tunisia, close to the border with Algeria [Fethi Belaid/AFP]**

Algiers, July 26 (RHC)-- At least 34 people have died in Algeria and thousands evacuated in parts of Europe due to the intense heatwave that has spread through large areas of the Mediterranean and other regions.

Severe fires have raged through the mountain forests of the Kabylia region on the Mediterranean coast, fanned by winds during blistering summer heat that peaked at 48 degrees Celsius (118 degrees Fahrenheit) on Monday.

On Wednesday, Algeria's state TV said the country has managed to contain the wildfire that has been raging in its forests, which also forced the evacuation of some 1,500 residents from their homes. Northern and eastern Algeria battle forest fires every summer, but they have been exacerbated by this year's Mediterranean heatwave.

Serious fires have also raged in recent days in neighbouring Tunisia, especially the northwestern Tabarka region. More than 300 people were evacuated from the coastal village of Melloula by boat and overland. Firefighters are still battling flames in three areas in the northwest – Bizerte, Siliana and Beja.

Extreme weather throughout July has caused havoc across the world, with temperatures breaking records in China, the United States and Southern Europe, sparking forest fires, water shortages and a rise in heat-related illnesses and hospitalisations.

On the Italian island of Sicily, two people were found dead on Tuesday in a home burned by a wildfire that temporarily shut down Palermo's international airport, according to Italian news reports. Regional officials said 55 fires were active in Sicily, amid temperatures in the 40s Celsius.

Further north in Puglia, some 2,000 tourists were evacuated from three hotels in Vieste as flames got perilously close.

In Greece, the fires burning on the island of Rhodes for the past week have forced authorities to carry out the largest evacuation ever undertaken in the country, with more than 20,000 people forced to leave homes and hotels.

The fires will deal a blow to the tourism industry that is a mainstay of the Greek economy. It accounts for 18 percent of Greece's gross domestic product (GDP) and one in five jobs, with reliance on tourism even greater on islands such as Rhodes.

On the island of Evia, a Greek air force water-dropping plane crashed while diving into a wildfire in southern Greece on Tuesday, killing both pilots.

"I will state the obvious: in the face of what the entire planet is facing, especially the Mediterranean which is a climate change hotspot, there is no magical defence mechanism, if there was we would have implemented it," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said.

Scientists rank the Mediterranean region as a climate change "hot spot," with the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warning of more heatwaves, crop failures, droughts, rising seas and influxes of invasive species.

Research published this month said as many as 61,000 people may have died in Europe's sweltering heatwaves last summer, suggesting countries' heat preparedness efforts are falling fatally short.

The heat has caused large-scale crop damage and livestock losses, the World Weather Attribution scientists said, with U.S. corn and soybean crops, Mexican cattle, Southern European olives as well as Chinese cotton all severely affected.

In the US, ocean waters around South Florida soared to typical hot-tub levels this week, according to government data. A weather buoy in the waters of Manatee Bay recorded a high of 101.19F (38.4C) on Monday afternoon, according to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration data. On land, heat warnings were issued for stretches of the desert southwest, in central Texas and north into the Midwest.

Meanwhile, two children swept away in massive flooding in eastern Canada have been found dead, raising the death toll to three.

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