

European civil protection: support for preventing, preparing for, and responding to forest fires



Every year there are devastating forest fires in Europe, destroying thousands of hectares of forests. Although the southern European countries are at a higher risk, no European country is immune.

When the fire gets too big for a country to extinguish it on its own, the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) can be activated to ensure a coordinated response.

The Mechanism was activated 17 times in relation to forest fires in Europe in 2017, after an already intense forest fire season in 2016.

Joint and coordinated response

The Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) is the emergency response hub of the European Commission.

Upon activation of the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism by an affected country, the ERCC co-ordinates assistance on the European level and ensures that the help provided is efficient and effective. When national capacities to respond to forest fires are surpassed, European countries often show solidarity by sending assistance in the form of water bombing aircraft, helicopters, fire-fighting equipment and personnel. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism can also be used to facilitate and co-finance the transport of assistance to the affected area.

Facts and Figures: Assistance to Portugal in 2017

According to European Forest Fires Information System (EFFIS) data, the overall seasonal trend in Portugal in terms of areas burned by fires larger than 30 hectares showed an increase of more than 300% in 2017 compared to the annual average in the years 2008-2016: more than 350 000 hectares burnt in Portugal in 2017.

The UCPM was activated three times by Portugal and, in total, 14 firefighting aircrafts, 298 firefighters and 56 vehicles were deployed to Portugal.

Copernicus Emergency Management Service satellite maps were also produced to help Portugal plan response operations.

Prepared for the forest fire season

The ERCC monitors the forest fire risk and incidence across Europe through the **European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS)** - <http://effis.jrc.ec.europa.eu/> -, which provides an overview of the data that European countries collect through their national forest fire programmes.

Before the forest fires season, the ERCC organises meetings with all the Participating States in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in order to have an exchange of information on the state of preparedness for the upcoming forest fires season. Over the summer period, the ERCC organises weekly video conferences with the countries at high risk of forest fires: Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

In addition, experts from the Participating States in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism are seconded to the ERCC every summer. Not only do they contribute to the ERCC's overall work, but they also maintain regular contacts with national civil protection authorities, which is important in case of an activation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

Prevention activities

The EU civil protection legislation goes beyond disaster response to also address disaster risk management, prevention and preparedness actions. The Commission has produced an overview of disaster risks the EU may face, based on the work carried out by Member States in developing National Risk Assessments. The overview of risks contributes to a better understanding of disaster risks in Europe including forest fires.

The Commission's **Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre** - <http://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/> - provides a science-policy interface in risk management, including the management of forest fire risk.

The UCPM funds an annual call for disaster prevention and preparedness projects and exercises for the benefit of EU as well as neighbouring countries, regions and cities. The calls can contribute to enhanced resilience by helping to raise risk awareness, improving local early warning systems, integrating climate change in risk management, etc.