



Fighting forest fires in Europe – how it works

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

(Updated on 10/08/2017)

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

Joint and coordinated response

When national capacities to respond to forest fires are surpassed, European countries often show solidarity by sending assistance in the form of water bombing planes, helicopters, fire-fighting equipment and personnel. There is a structured way of doing this at European level.

The [Emergency Response Coordination Centre](#) (ERCC) is the emergency response hub of the European Commission. It coordinates pan-European assistance through the **European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism** and ensures that all participating states in the mechanism are quickly informed of needs from an affected country during a crisis. The decision to activate the **Civil Protection Mechanism** is not made by the Commission, but has to be made by the national authorities of the affected country.

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism also facilitates and co-finances the transport of assistance to the affected area.

Prepared for the forest fire season

The ERCC actively monitors forest fire risk and occurrence across Europe and connects together civil protection authorities across Europe

It does this through:

- national monitoring services and tools such as the [European Forest Fire Information System](#) (EFFIS), which provides an overview of the data that European countries collect through their national forest fire programmes.
- Organising regular meetings with all the Participating States in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism before the forest fire season in order to have an exchange of information on the state of preparedness.
- 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.

Tackling forest fires

The European Civil Protection Mechanism is frequently activated (as either a pre-alert or due to a request for assistance) as a result of forest fires inside Europe and also overseas.

During the **2012** forest fire season there were 9 requests for assistance and one pre alert: Bulgaria, Montenegro, Albania, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece and Portugal requested aerial support and Spain opened a pre alert case. In **2013**, the Mechanism was activated to respond to requests for assistance for forest fires in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Portugal. In **2014**, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was activated as a result of a request for assistance from Sweden and Greece and for a pre-alert in Norway. In **2015 and 2016**, Greece, Cyprus, France, and Portugal activated the mechanism in the context of forest fires. The **2017** summer season has been marked by an exceptionally high activity in terms of forest fires. As of 8 August 2017, the mechanism has been activated by Portugal, Montenegro, France, Albania, and twice by Italy.

The EU [Copernicus Emergency Management Service](#) satellite mapping service has also been activated repeatedly in response to forest fires related emergencies.

About the EU Civil Protection Mechanism

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism facilitates the cooperation in disaster response among 34 European states (28 EU Member States, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway Serbia and Turkey). These Participating States pool the resources that can be made available to disaster-stricken countries all over the world.

The Commission does not send planes or equipment itself, but works to coordinate the response of participating states in the mechanism.

Since its launch in 2001, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism has monitored over 400 disasters and has received almost 300 requests for assistance. It intervened in some of the most devastating disasters the world has faced, including the floods in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014), the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2014), the conflict in Ukraine (2014), the earthquake in Nepal (2015), the conflict in Iraq (2016) and hurricane "Matthew" in Haiti (2016).

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism legislation was revised in 2013 to include significant innovations. One such innovation is the creation of the European Emergency Response Capacity (EERC), which consists of a voluntary pool of Participating States' pre-committed response capacities. The voluntary pool, which was launched in October 2014, increases the predictability and reliability of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism's response to disasters and also facilitates better planning and coordination of response operations.

Forest fire prevention

The primary responsibility for prevention as well as response lies with the country where the disaster occurs. The Commission's main role is to coordinate a quick and efficient response through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism when activated. In addition, the Commission works with national civil protection authorities to support, complement and coordinate their efforts in forest fire prevention and preparedness and risk management planning.

This is done through:

- Supporting Participating States by financing prevention and preparedness projects.
- Experts may be deployed on request to assess the risks, provide advice and support local or national authorities.
- The Commission organises yearly meetings with Member States to discuss the challenges of the forest fire season in Europe, and to see how it can best accompany Participating States in their prevention and response efforts.
- The Commission draws lessons learned and elaborates good practices from its prevention and preparedness activities.

Project examples:

In January 2017, a two-year preparedness project was launched in the field of forest fires, "the Mediterranean Forest Fire Fighting Training Standardisation". This project is funded by the European Commission with a contribution of €325,732. The *Escola Nacional de Bombeiros* in Portugal is one of the partners. In the past, Portugal participated in other similar projects, such as during the Spanish-Portuguese Meteorological information system for trans-boundary operations in forest fires (SPITFIRE), launched in 2014. Supported by the EU with nearly €500 000 , the project aimed to improve information exchange on meteorology and forest fire risk in the border area between Portugal and Spain (Ref. http://ec.europa.eu/echo/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection-europe/selected-projects_en).

Decision 1313/2013/EU introduced for the first time obligations on Member States in the field of disaster prevention. It tasks Member States to develop risk assessments and share a summary of results, and to carry out and share the assessment of their risk management capability.

For more information

[The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection](#)

[The European Forest Fire Information System](#)

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