

Forest Fire Blazes Near Ukraine Front Line, Killing 9

By [AFP](#)

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At least nine people have died and 14 others have been injured in forest fires in eastern Ukraine near the front line of Kiev's conflict with Moscow-backed separatists, the emergency services said Thursday.

Ukraine has sent 1,200 firefighters to battle the blaze which officials in one village near the frontline said was detonating unexploded shells previously fired over by pro-Russian separatists.

Investigators were trying to determine the cause of the fire that has forced the evacuation of more than a hundred residents from nearby villages since it broke out on Wednesday following unusually hot weather.

Water-bombing planes and a helicopter were fighting the flames that have spread over 11,000

hectares (27,000 acres), regional officials said.

Nine people have died during the fires and 14 people have been hospitalised, emergency services said, without giving details.

More than 20 villages were under threat from the fire, fanned by dry conditions and strong winds.

The fire was blazing just a few kilometres from an area where fighting between Kiev forces and Russian-backed separatists erupts sporadically.

A ceasefire brokered two months ago has largely held and the authorities have not said whether the fire has affected the fighting.

Local officials in one village near the frontline, Stanytsa Luganska, said that numerous unexploded shells fired over by **Russia**-backed separatists were detonating due to the high temperature of the fire, threatening firefighters and local residents.

Regional officials said they had temporarily closed a crossing point into separatist-held territory due to the approaching fire.

The Ukrainian presidency said in a statement that it was important to establish what started the fire and how it had spread so quickly.

Ukraine has been hit by unprecedented heat waves this year, fuelling fires that are hard to bring under control.

"This is not the best year for our country in terms of natural disasters and other tragedies," Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said at a briefing on Thursday.

In July, forest fires in the Lugansk region killed five people and injured around 30.

Scientists predict that climate change will increase the frequency and severity of extreme weather events such as catastrophic fires.

Fires in April ravaged more than 66,000 hectares in the exclusion zone around Chernobyl in northern Ukraine, the scene of one of the world's worst nuclear accidents in 1986.

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