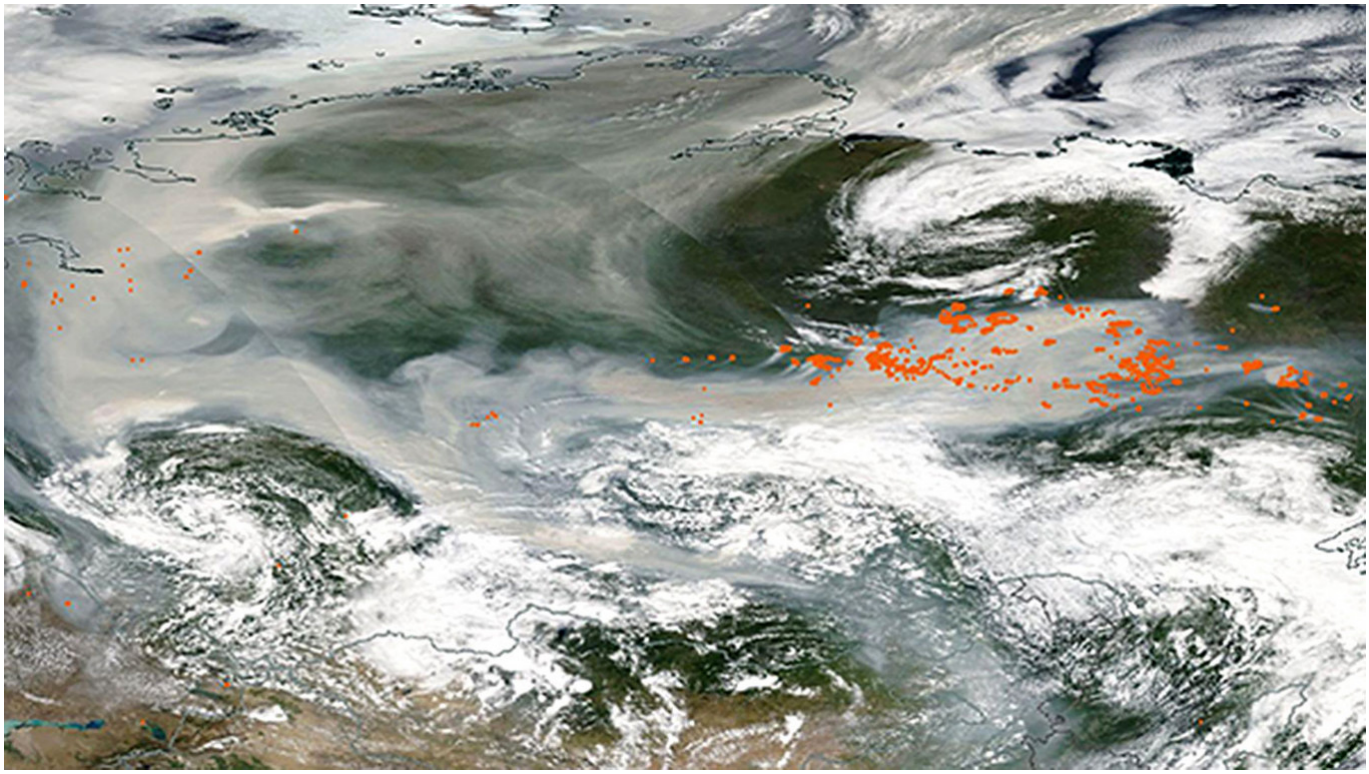
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Siberian Wildfire Smoke Reaches North Pole in Historic First

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Satellite images captured “only a small part” of the smoke stretching 3,200 kilometers east to west and 4,000 kilometers north to south. **MODIS Land Rapid Response Team, NASA GSFC**

Smoke from wildfires burning across Russia’s largest and coldest region has reached the North Pole for what is believed to be the first time in known history last week, according to satellite observations.

The European Union’s Copernicus satellite monitoring service has said that the forest fires in the Siberian republic of Sakha (Yakutia) — fueled by hot weather and a 150-year record drought — have already emitted a record 505 megatons of carbon dioxide with several weeks remaining in the fire season.

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“This week, wildfire smoke has traveled more than 3,000 km (1,864 mi) from Yakutia to reach the North Pole, a feat that appears to be a first in recorded history,” NASA’s Earth-monitoring

tool MODIS said Saturday.

The thick smoke had blanketed vast swathes of Siberia before reaching the North Pole, sparking evacuations, concerns over deteriorating air quality and orders to clear fire trails of dead wood and fallen trees around endangered settlements.

Smoke has been detected in 1,300 towns and settlements in the Krasnoyarsk region west of Sakha alone, emergency officials said Saturday.

MODIS, or Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer, said its satellite has captured "only a small part" of the smoke stretching 3,200 kilometers east to west and 4,000 kilometers north to south Friday.

Citing media reports, it said that the smoke has clouded the skies in locations as far-flung as Mongolia, western Greenland and Nunavut, Canada.

But reaching the North Pole "is continental scale by definition," University of Maryland atmospheric scientist Santiago Gassó told Reuters.

The EU's Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service forecast Wednesday that the Russian and North American wildfires will continue spreading across the Arctic Ocean "for the next few days."

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