

Putin Alarmed Over 'Unprecedented' Natural Disasters in Russia

By [AFP](#)

August 14, 2021



Ivan Nikiforov / AP Photo / TASS

President Vladimir Putin on Saturday said the scale of natural disasters that have hit Russia this year is "absolutely unprecedented" as local officials ask for Moscow's help to tackle fires and floods.

A former skeptic of man-made climate change, the Russian leader called on authorities to do everything possible to help Siberians affected by the region's gigantic wildfires, as well as Russians living in the flood-hit south of the country.

Speaking at a video conference with the leaders of the affected eastern and southern regions, Putin said he received daily reports on the climate situation in the country.

"In the south (of Russia), the monthly norm of rainfall now falls in a few hours and in the Far East on the contrary, forest fires in drought conditions are spreading rapidly," Putin said.

In Russia's largest and coldest region of Yakutia, this summer's forest fires have already burned through an area larger than Portugal.

Russian weather officials and environmentalists have linked the increasing intensity of Siberia's annual fires to climate change.

"All of this once again shows how important it is for us to deeply and systematically work on the climate and environment agenda," he said.

He called on authorities to be ready to evacuate more people living in areas affected by the fires — especially the elderly — as well as provide economic support for them.

He also asked officials to calculate the effects of the fires and make plans to reconstruct houses.

The Russian leader said it was important to do everything to "save the forest riches" and "minimise damage for animals of the taiga", a word used to describe northern Russian forests.

Hundreds evacuated

Local officials pleaded for reinforcements and Moscow's economic help to deal with the human cost of damage caused by extreme weather.

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Aysen Nikolayev, the head of Yakutia, said firefighters were able to save 230 houses from flames.

He said evacuated villagers had received psychological help, with local children being sent to holiday camps.

He called the scale of the fires a first "in history" and asked for help after the region's harvest was severely affected.

"We will continue to save more houses," he said, thanking Putin for his support.

This week Russia launched a national response centre and deployed additional firefighters to battle the devastating Siberian fires.

The governor of the southern Krasnodar region Veniamin Kondratyev said 132 people — mostly holidaymakers — had been evacuated in the Black Sea resort of Anapa last night amid rising floods.

"We could not predict what would happen at night," he said, adding that the region had "the same rainfall in a day as we usually get in a year."

Kondratyev said that despite difficult climate conditions, the holiday season in resort areas is

"continuing and under control."

The head of Moscow-annexed Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, said that two people have died as a result of floods on the peninsula and that over 3,000 have asked authorities for help.

Heavy smog hung over the regional capital of Yakutsk on Friday, which was declared a non-working day in much of the region over health concerns due to wildfire smoke.

For years Putin was notorious for his scepticism about man-made global warming and saying Russia stands to benefit from it.

But in recent months he has also made statements to the effect that climate change is not just a boon to Moscow.

The Russian leader this year participated in a summit hosted by U.S. President Joe Biden and said Moscow is interested in "stepping up international cooperation" on climate change.

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