

Nearly 100 Wildfires Blazing Across Russia's Republic of Sakha

August 07, 2023



Extinguishing wildfires in Yakutia. **Russian Emergencies Ministry**

Nearly 100 wildfires are currently burning in Russia's Far East republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the local branch of the Russian emergencies ministry [said](#) Monday.

The 98 wildfires have engulfed a combined area of 125,600 hectares (310,364 acres) of land — roughly half the size of the country of Luxembourg, authorities said.

Emergency officials added that they are “continuously monitoring the smoke” from the fires, as several settlements across the region were reported to be blanketed in smoke.

Summer wildfires are an annual occurrence in the republic of Sakha, Russia's largest and coldest region. But these events have become more severe in recent years as Russia's Arctic regions [warm](#) more than twice as fast as the global average.

Grigory Kuksin, an independent wildfire prevention expert, told The Moscow Times that the situation in Sakha this year has been “pretty bad,” and authorities are effectively not required

to take action against their further spread.

Embed:

Работа по тушению 51 пожара на 105 тыс. га ведется в Якутии. Об этом сообщили в министерстве экологии, природопользования и лесного хозяйства республики: <https://t.co/U3yyfHmEn6>

Видео: ГУ МЧС России по Республике Саха (Якутия)/ТАСС
<pic.twitter.com/xPCBYMwf6N>

— ТАСС (@tass_agency) [August 7, 2023](#)

This is because most of the fires are burning in so-called “control zones,” or areas where regional authorities are not required by law to extinguish them because there is no direct threat to residential areas or economically important infrastructure.

“So far [authorities] have been unable to bring fires in these remote areas under control. [They’re] successful only when it starts to rain,” Kuksin added.

Since the beginning of this year’s wildfire season, more than 700 wildfires have been registered in Sakha, impacting a total area of 1.2 million hectares, according to Avialesookhrana, a branch of Russia’s Federal Forest Agency.

Kuksin said that the wildfire situation this year has been challenging not just in Yakutia, but in all regions with large “control zones.”

“Many regions [have been impacted], especially the Far East and northern Siberia — territories where the population is small and where authorities are only required to protect settlements. The decision to reduce the number of ‘control zones’ is already in place, but regions still lack funding for this.”

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He noted that while a number of steps have been taken since last year to reduce the number of control zones, many regions still lack adequate funding to combat fires in non-control zones.

Scientists say that human-induced climate change is making seasonal wildfires more frequent and intense by creating ideal conditions for fires such as more prolonged droughts.

Kuksin said the scale of the wildfires in Yakutia is more or less “standard,” but added that the climate crisis is already showing its wildfire potential in other parts of Russia — especially in the Ural Mountains region.

“This year we’ve seen an abnormal number of peat fires, especially in the Sverdlovsk and Chelyabinsk regions. There has been an abnormal drought [there] for three years now.”

The spread of wildfires in Sakha comes as temperatures in large swathes of Russia continued to [hover](#) at record highs.

But environmental groups have cautioned [against](#) directly attributing wildfires to extreme heat, as the blazes are primarily the result of man-made fires.

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