

Death Toll in Portugal Forest Fires Rises to 62



Lisbon, June 19 (RHC)-- The number of people killed in the forest fires raging in central Portugal has risen to 62, with 54 others injured, State Secretary of Internal Affairs Ministry Jorge Gomes said Sunday.

Gomes told reporters that among the dead, two are victims of a road accident, while four of the injured are in serious condition. The Portuguese government has declared a state of emergency in the fire area, and also a three-day national mourning from Sunday to Tuesday.

The fires broke out Saturday in Pedrogao Grande, some 150 km northeast of Lisbon, and quickly spread to the towns of Figueird dos Vinhos and Castanheira de Pera in the district of Leiria, where firefighters are still battling the fire.

The huge fires had been caused by dry lightning, Almeida Rodrigues, director of the Portuguese criminal investigation police (PJ), told reporters. A dry thunderstorm is a storm with thunder and lightning, with most or all the rain evaporating before reaching the ground.

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