

Spain's prime minister says more than 500 died due to heatwave

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Flames advance during a wildfire in Ferreras de Abajo in northwestern Spain, July 18 [Emilio Fraile/AP Photo]

Madrid, July 21 (RHC)-- Spain's prime minister has said more than 500 people died during a 10-day heatwave as Europe counts the cost of a record period of extreme temperatures. Climate change protesters said the scorching weather should be a wake-up call for the continent.

This has nothing to do with ideologies, but with a reality, with a climatic emergency that the planet is living through," said Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. Speaking against a backdrop of charred trees and

burned ground in the hard-hit northeastern Zaragoza region, he urged people to exercise “extreme caution,”

Sanchez cited figures released by the Carlos III Health Institute estimating the number of heat-related fatalities based on the number of excess deaths compared with the average in previous years. The institute has stressed these figures are a statistical estimate and not an official record.

The heatwave saw a new all-time record for Britain where the national weather service clocked 40.3C (105F) in eastern England, surpassing the previous high set in 2019.

Grassland fires erupted on Tuesday on the edge of London, with one forcing the evacuation of 14 people as farm buildings, houses and garages were consumed by the flames. Sixteen firefighters were injured around the capital with two taken to hospital, the London Fire Brigade said.

“Yesterday was the busiest day for the fire service in London since the second world war,” the city’s Mayor Sadiq Khan told Sky News on Wednesday, urging the public to remain vigilant despite temperatures now falling.

Khan also accused the Conservative leadership candidates vying to succeed Prime Minister Boris Johnson of ignoring the “elephant in the room” that is climate change.

Hundreds of firefighters were also deployed in western Slovenia Wednesday to battle a blaze that forced the evacuation of several villages, emergency services said. The blaze broke out Tuesday in the spectacular wooded Karst region, where vegetation was dried up by the strong heat, and intensified Wednesday afternoon because of the wind. Residents were forced to flee their homes in several areas and emergency sirens were sounded.

Climate demonstrators triggered a lengthy tailback on Britain’s busiest motorway encircling London on Wednesday as they sought to highlight the need for greater action to reduce greenhouse gases responsible for global heating. Members of the group Just Stop Oil climbed gantries over the M25 motorway, causing police to intervene.

“This is the moment when climate inaction is truly revealed in all its murderous glory for everyone to see: as an elite-driven death project that will extinguish all life if we let it,” the activist group said in a statement.

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