

# *Amazon wildfires spark fears of environmental disaster as São Paulo goes dark from smoke*

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Brasilia, August 21 (RHC)-- In Brazil, public outrage is mounting over massive wildfires that have consumed parts of the Amazon for several weeks. The hashtag #PrayForAmazonia trended Tuesday as images of the raging blazes circulated on social media. The skies over the city of São Paulo went dark for around an hour during the middle of the day Monday, after winds carried in smoke from the forest fires over 1,500 miles away.

The fires are thought to be directly caused or exacerbated by agricultural exploitation and deforestation. Brazil's space research agency has recorded nearly 73,000 wildfires so far this year — an 83% increase from the same period last year.

Far-right Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has worked to deregulate and open up the Amazon for agribusiness, logging and mining since he came into office in January, despite international concerns over the environmental impacts of deforestation.

Recent data shows that Brazil lost more than 1,300 square miles of forest cover this year. Climate scientists say the protection of the Amazon rainforest is crucial in the global effort to fight climate change.

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