Wildfires rage as China's Chongqing suffers unrelenting record heat wave

CNN — normal

Thousands of emergency responders are battling to contain fast-spreading wildfires in China's southwestern city of Chongqing amid a weeks-long, record heat wave in the region.

The fires, which have been visible at night from parts of the downtown area, have swept forests and mountains around the mega city in recent days.

On social media, residents in downtown Chongqing complained of smelling smoke inside their apartments, while others posted pictures of burning embers from the fires reaching their balconies.

Since August 18, wildfires had broken out in multiple outlying districts, local

authorities said. The municipality is home to more than 32 million people.

Municipal authorities have not yet reported any casualties and said the fires are being kept under control, according to an update on Tuesday morning.

More than 1,500 residents have been relocated to safe zones, while 5,000 firefighters, police, local officers and volunteers, and seven firefighting helicopters have been dispatched to help combat the blazes, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

As of Tuesday, all districts and counties in Chongqing have issued an order that forbids the usage of fire in the wild and activities that are prone to fires.

The fires in Chongqing were the result of "spontaneous combustion" mainly caused by extremely high temperatures, Bai Ye, a professor at China's Forest and Grassland Fire Prevention and Extinguishing Research Center told state-run Beijing Daily.

The wildfires are another knock-on effect of a crippling heat wave – China's worst since 1961 – that has swept through southwestern, central and eastern parts of the country in recent weeks, with temperatures crossing 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in more than 100 cities.

They are also part of a global trend of wildfires that have ravaged areas from Australia to California, with scientists saying elevated global temperatures due to human-driven climate change increase the risk of these events.

China's heat wave has also brought surging demand for air conditioning and reductions in hydropower capacity due to drought conditions that have hit the country's commercially critical Yangtze River and connected waterways.

Earlier this week, Sichuan province, neighboring Chongqing, extended temporary power outages at factories in 19 of the region's 21 cities. The power cuts will now run until at least Thursday, in a move the local government says will ensure residential power supplies. Last week, the province's capital city Chengdu began dimming lights in subway stations in a bid to save electricity.

Chongqing enacted an order for factories to suspend operations for seven days starting last Wednesday, according to state media.

High temperatures are not set to go anywhere yet.

On Tuesday morning, China issued a red alert heat warning, the highest of four color-coded levels, to at least 165 cities and counties across the country.

According to China's Meteorological Administration, temperatures in these cities are expected to surpass 40 degrees Celsius in the next 24 hours.

Another 373 cities or counties across China issued the second-highest orange alert warning, the administration reported, stressing that temperatures above 37 degrees Celsius are expected in these cities in the next three days.

China's Central Meteorological Observatory in a statement on Tuesday advised people to avoid outdoor activities during high temperature periods and limit work under hot conditions.

Chinese authorities have previously said more than 900 million people across the country have been affected by the heat wave this summer.

CNN's Laura He and Akanksha Sharma in Hong Kong contributed to this report.