

Earth to Ashes?

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Ongoing heatwaves and insufficient rainfall caused by climate change have put Europe at substantial risk. Fires have been spreading more rapidly in recent years. Already 660,000 hectares of land has been damaged since the beginning of 2022.

The statistics from these fires are truly startling. Since the beginning of this year, Spain has lost over 200,000 hectares of land. France has lost 57,600 hectares of their green land whilst suffering the worst drought they have seen in 70 years. In July, Portugal faced their hottest temperatures in 100 years with 79,000 hectares of forest land demolished. Our lands are being turned to ash and we are just standing by watching. It has been calculated that Tuscany, Italy has encountered an estimate of 279 wildfires in June 2022. This is a 136 percent increase compared to June 2021. In the south of Tuscany, about 2,400 village residents were evacuated.

The forest fires are wiping out essential materials from forest ecosystems, including wood for buildings, paper, and food products such as mushrooms and berries. Forest animals are suffering with their habitats being destroyed, making it much more difficult for animals to survive long term. Biodiversity experts have calculated that “between 0.01% and 0.1% of all species will become extinct each year.” How can we sit back and watch innocent animals suffer?

Forest fires in Europe have also raised the amount of carbon emissions (including CO₂) in the atmosphere. Harmful chemicals and various pollutants are entering our waters. We are voluntarily inserting bacteria infused water into our bodies. As time goes on, these waters will become more poisonous and can lead to severe health issues. How can we allow our family, friends and children to be slowly poisoned?

We know these fires are dangerous to our health, but do we understand the severity? Close to the fire, the smoke can cause eye and respiratory irritation. Inhaling the smoke can cause short- and long-term problems such as reduced lung function. The fine particles in smoke can enter lung-passageways and the bloodstream which can result in long term issues affecting the heart or blood vessels as well as breathing issues. We are unconsciously risking our lives and others around us by not acting on the issue.

There has been a jump in carbon emissions according to the EU’s Copernicus satellite monitoring system. These emissions fueled by global warming are reducing the number of trees available, thus increasing the amount of carbon in our atmosphere which is threatening to our ecosystems. Excess carbon in our atmosphere is contributing to global warming by warming our earth. “Global warming will continue to worsen” Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, former president of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, warned. He stated that we can stop this from happening by “reducing CO₂ (carbon dioxide) emissions.”

These fires have “turned Europe into flint” according to the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS).

Natural factors play a critical role in the spread of fires, but what most of us do not know is that they can also be caused by human activity. What can we do to help reduce these threats to our environment?

It is recommended to pay close attention to weather and drought conditions. These can affect the flammability of vegetation. Another technique is the reintroduction of animal grazing. This can prevent build ups of flammable vegetation on abandoned land. Remember to never leave any outdoor fires such as campfires or disposable barbeques unattended. They must be completely put out, cold to the touch, before being deserted. Another procedure is to recycle efficiently, especially glass materials. Littered glass according to EU data has been a huge factor in fires in Europe.

Our carelessness to our earth is costing us greatly. For a long time, we have unknowingly been destroying our environment with our lack of respect. We have been risking the lives of ourselves and the existence of our planet. Our planet has supplied us with everything we need to survive, and this is how we repay it? Now that we are learning about the consequences of our actions we must change. We must take action now.