

# Hundreds of Fires Broke Out in Israel Due to Burning Kites From Gaza

Israel's firefighting commissioner says that dealing with these fires has cost about 2 million additional shekels so far.



Fire extinguishing forces in the area of Kibbutz Be'eri this week. Eliyahu Hershkowitz

- Israel will have to retaliate for Gaza's burning kites soon, army warns
- 'This is terrorism': Israeli farmers still reeling from Gaza's burning kites
- Tens of thousands participate in Id al-Fitr prayers along Israel-Gaza border

Incendiary kites launched from the Gaza Strip caused 412 fires in the Gaza border communities, said Fire and Rescue Services Commissioner Brig. Gen. Dedi Simchi on Thursday, during a day of discussions that took place in Kibbutz Be'eri in southern Israel.

One of the discussions was about preparing the firefighting services to handle the threat of the incendiary drones and kites. Simchi said that the wave of fires has been going on for 75 days, and that the cost of handling it was about an additional 2 million shekels (\$550,000).

## >> Burning kites from Gaza cause widespread damage to Israeli fields

"We invested many resources, at a cost of 1.7 million to 2 million shekels beyond the regular budget. Thousands of work hours of firefighters from all the districts who came here as reinforcements," he said. Simchi said that according to estimates of the firefighting services, about 25,000 dunams were burned down. He warned of the possibility of a renewed use of kites in the future, and said: "It's also important for all the communities to learn about fire preparedness, because just as we thought at first that the Qassam rockets would end within a few days,

we have to be prepared for the possibility that there will be kites next summer too.”



A fire-fighting vehicle in the fields of Kibbutz Nir-Am, last week. Eliyahu Hershkowitz

Amir Dahan, who heads the Tax Authority compensation department, said that 65 claims related to the damage caused by the kites have been submitted to the authority. “We estimate the damage at 5,000 dunams of wheat, avocado orchards, jojoba and agricultural equipment, although the Jewish National Fund and the Nature and Parks Authority have yet to submit claims, so we can’t estimate the total extent of the damage. Our estimate of all the damage is about 7 million shekels so far.”

MK Yoav Kisch (Likud), chairman of the Internal Affairs and Environment Committee, said at the end of the day of the discussions that “Maybe we could have reached a better outcome than the 25,000 dunams that were burned, but it’s also important to remember first of all, with all the pain over the fields, that we ended with zero casualties and the Israel Defense Forces managed to prevent the infiltrations at the fence, so that maybe we only lost in hasbara [public relations].”

MK Avi Dichter, chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, said “For two and a half months we’ve been in a different wave of terror, which isn’t simple, but we still would choose it over the more familiar terror.” He referred to the use of kites and added: “They’ve switched to terror that looks like a popularly initiated activity, because they were afraid of our reactions to organized terror, but we know that the terror of the kites is also organized and has a perpetrator.

“To the [outside] world, 100 snipers look worse than people on the fence or people flying kites, but in the end we’re having discussions here about animals and fields being damaged in fires - we’re the ones who are demonstrating sensitivity, and our sensitivity doubles our strength, simply because they couldn’t make us lose it.”

On Friday there were plans to conduct a mass Id al-Fitr holiday prayer in the encampments along the Gaza Strip border to mark the end of Ramadan. Members of the so-called kite builders unit in Gaza threatened on Thursday to send

up 5,000 kites and balloons with flammable materials, and warned that they would expand the scope of their activity to a distance of 40 kilometers from the border. "We'll give the occupation authorities a chance, and if the blockade isn't lifted, the settlers in the Gaza border communities will be under the burning fire," said members of the unit.



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