

Russia has declared a state of emergency over Siberian wildfires



A view of a wildfire seen from an amphibious aircraft - TASS via Getty

Russia has declared a state of emergency in five regions in Siberia after a million people signed petitions demanding that the government does something about the unprecedented wildfires.

Three million hectares of forest are burning and 12 million have already been destroyed, according to the *Financial Times*. Smoke from the wildfires is blowing over some cities, including Novosibirsk, Russia's third-largest. People in the worst affected regions say the smoke is blotting out the sun and making it hard to breathe.

Firefighters have been trying to put out a few of the fires, but the vast majority were only being monitored. Efforts are being stepped up following the declaration, but it is unclear whether Russia has the capacity to tackle such

extensive fires in remote regions.

On Monday, Alexander Uss, the governor of the Siberian region of Krasnoyarsk, had said there was no point even trying. “This is a normal, natural phenomenon. It’s pointless to fight it and perhaps even in some places also harmful,” the RIA news agency reported him as saying.

There have been dozens of massive wildfires across northerly latitudes since June, thanks to hot, dry conditions. Forests are burning in many parts of Alaska and Canada as well as in Siberia, with many wildfires burning in the far north, above the Arctic circle.

In some places, it appears that dried-out peat is burning, not just the trees. That means carbon accumulated over hundreds or even thousands of years is being released into the atmosphere.

It is estimated that the fires in Siberia have released 300 megatonnes of carbon dioxide in July, the most since satellite records began around two decades ago. This will fuel further climate change, although the amounts are relatively small compared with the 40,000 megatonnes of carbon dioxide emitted by human activities each year.

The soot from fires can also cause local warming by absorbing sunlight, warming the surrounding air, or the snow or ice it falls on. This will add to existing global warming in the Arctic, which is already heating up much faster than most regions.

The planet as a whole has just experienced the hottest June ever recorded. Hot air from the recent record-breaking European heatwave has now reached the Arctic, warming the region even further.

Source:

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2212070-russia-has-declared-a-state-of-emergency-over-siberian-wildfires/>

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