Beat: Politics

FRANCE ON FIRE: XXL BLAZE PUSHES 141,000 PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR HOMES IN GIRONDE

PRES. MACRON CALLS IN THE ARMY & EUROPE

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USPA NEWS - MIDNIGHT EMERGENCY: FRANCE IS ON EDGE FACING XXL FOREST FIRES
There is nothing abstract or distant about climate risk when entire regions are told, literally, “everyone must prepare to leave”. In South?West France, the Gironde and the neighbouring Landes have entered an emergency scenario: an XXL forest fire, “convective” and self?feeding according to the Interior Ministry, has already devoured more than 19,000 hectares in Gironde and is now moving east towards the Bordeaux metropolitan area. At least 141,000 people have been evacuated since Wednesday night, 110,000 in Gironde and 31,000 in the Landes, a level described by Interior Minister Laurent Nunez as “a totally unprecedented situation”.
In response, President Emmanuel Macron has asked the Armies “to mobilise in maximum support of civil security”, sending military units to reinforce exhausted fire crews in the field. The health authorities have triggered the plan blanc (The White Plan for Health) in Gironde and the Landes, anticipating the evacuation of several hospitals, care homes and health facilities as the flames approach and smoke affects air quality.

CAP FERRET EMPTIED BEFORE DAWN
In the night from Thursday to Friday 24 July, the very tourist heavy Cap Ferret peninsula was ordered to evacuate. At dawn, the fire that had started on Wednesday near Saumos crossed the D106, the only land access route, cutting off the presqu’île and forcing the evacuation of all eleven villages. Holidaymakers received SMS messages in the early hours instructing them to leave “as soon as possible and without delay”. One mother tells BFMTV she fled Lege Cap Ferret with her children at 4 a.m., guided by firefighters and police “everywhere” checking that residents were really leaving. Another resident describes “a wall of flames” and fears returning only to find ashes where her house of 44 years once stood.

HUNDREAD S OF THOUSANDS OF EVACUATIONS BY ROAD AND SEA: A MASS EXODUS
As the smoke column turned the dawn sky over the D106 into an apocalyptic orange, cars rushed out and buses were mobilised for those without vehicles, redirecting evacuees towards Andernos, Lanton, Biganos or Bordeaux. Around Cap Ferret alone, 40,000 people have already been evacuated in two days, with more following by road and by boat across the Arcachon basin. Maritime shuttles were requisitioned from Grand Piquey, Le Canon, La Vigne and Belisaire to carry hundreds of people to Arcachon, where buses waited to take them on to Bordeaux. For many, the departure felt like “the end of the world”: bags thrown into cars in the middle of the night, pets left behind, and the fear of seeing, on return, only burned beams and collapsed roofs.

FIREFIGHTERS ARE REACHING A BREAKING POINT, ARMY CALLED IN
On the ground, firefighters describe an “apocalyptic fire” that advances several meters per minute, driven by hot, shifting winds and fuelled by extremely dry vegetation after months of drought and successive heatwaves. In Gironde, thousands of firefighters are already deployed, with water?bombing aircraft (Canadair, Dash) and helicopters making constant rotations. The Interior Minister has explicitly acknowledged that this is “the biggest fire of the season”, and that local forces are at their limit.

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BORDEAUX UNDER THREAT, VINEYARDS AT RISK

The most worrying evolution, according to authorities, is that the main convective fire front is now heading towards the Bordeaux metropolitan area, raising the spectre of suburban evacuations and major disruption of transport, power and health services. Local mayors and civil society are coordinating evacuations of residents and tourists from Arcachon, Cap Ferret and popular beaches along the Atlantic coast. Farmers and winemakers in the Bordeaux region are watching the sky with anxiety: ash fall and smoke deposits could affect some of the world's most renowned vineyards, adding economic damage to the already immense human and environmental toll.

HUMAN MADE FIRES IN A HUMAN?WARMED CLIMATE

Authorities estimate that around 90% of forest fires in France have human origins, whether through negligence or arson, and this episode is no exception: fires started near Saumos and Biscarrosse have spread rapidly in hyper?dry pine forests. Climate scientists from the World Weather Attribution group note that the current drought and heat make vegetation and soils much more flammable, and that human?induced climate change amplifies the severity of these events.

Across Europe, 2026 is already the second?worst year in terms of burned area in the EU over the last twenty years, and the worst year on record for France, with Spain and Italy also experiencing extreme seasons. Spain has declared a national state of emergency in the Madrid region and parts of Avila; in Italy, Sicily and other southern regions are battling dozens of fires fanned by hot winds.

FRANCE CALLED FOR EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY ACTIVATED

Recognising that national resources are no longer sufficient, Emmanuel Macron has activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, formally requesting European assistance. Croatia is sending two Canadair, Portugal two Air Tractor water?bombing planes, and Czechia and Slovakia two heavy Black Hawk helicopters, to reinforce French aerial assets. Macron has saluted this "rapid, concrete, operational solidarity" from European partners and reminded that "the situation remains under very strong tension".

In parallel, Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu has convened an interministerial crisis cell at 10:00pm, bringing together the Interior, Armies, Health, Transport and Environment ministries to coordinate response and anticipate the next hours. With more than 50,000 hectares burned nationally since January, nearly three times last year's level at the same date, France is facing a structural fire risk that can no longer be treated as a series of isolated "summer episodes".

DATA BOX, KEY FIGURES (FRANCE WILDFIRES 2026)

Hectares burned in Gironde

More than 19,000 hectares of forest already destroyed in Gironde; over 2,500 hectares additionally burned in the Landes and around 2,700 hectares in the Var.

Evacuations

At least 141,000 people evacuated since Wednesday night: 110,000 in Gironde (including 40,000 around Cap Ferret) and 31,000 in the Landes, plus tens of thousands more in Spain and Italy.

Emergency measures

Plan blanc triggered in Gironde and Landes for hospitals and care facilities; interministerial crisis cell convened at 22:00 with Interior, Armies, Health, Transport and Environment ministries.

European assistance

EU Civil Protection Mechanism activated: 2 Canadair from Croatia, 2 Air Tractor water?bombers from Portugal, 2 heavy Black Hawk helicopters from Czechia and Slovakia en route to reinforce French aerial assets.

European context

2026 already ranks as the second?worst year in terms of burned area in the EU over the last twenty years; it is the worst year on

record for France, with Spain and Italy among the hardest?hit countries.

LIVING WITH FIRE, NOT JUST WATCHING IT ON TV

What is happening in Gironde and the Landes is not only a local catastrophe; it is a warning shot for an entire continent. In a few nights, more than 141,000 people have had to leave their homes, campsites or holiday rentals, sometimes by road, sometimes by sea, while firefighters, soldiers and health workers push themselves to the limit in toxic smoke and shifting flames.

Writing this as a journalist who usually covers diplomacy and disability rights, the images from Cap Ferret and Biscarrosse (already 23, 000 people have been evacuated) feel like another front line: that of ordinary families discovering that climate change is not a chart, but a wall of fire at the end of their street. France can and must learn from this episode, in emergency planning, land use, forest management and social protection, because the “record year” we are living through will not be the last. Sources: BFM tv, lindependant, ouest-france, defense.gouv, government.fr

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