

Chile wildfire destroys entire town as death toll rises to 10

27/01/2017 22:26 by admin

Santiago: An entire town has been consumed by flames as Chile witnesses worst wildfire in country's modern history.

International help is coming to Chile following the tragic incident

Flames has completely destroyed the town of Santa Olga as the death toll from the blazes since November rose to 10, officials said on Thursday.

The flames engulfed the post office, a kindergarten, and about 1,000 homes in the town, located 360 km south of the Chilean capital. The body of one person was found under the charred remains of the town, which another 6,000 residents fled unharmed. Officials have not identified the person who died.

“This is an extremely serious situation of horror, a nightmare without an end,” said Carlos Valenzuela, the mayor of the neighboring coastal city of Constitucion. “Everything burned.”

Authorities found another body burned inside a house destroyed in the flames about 140 km south of Santa Olga in the coastal city of Concepcion, said Andrea Munoz, the governor of Concepcion province. Officials later reported that a firefighter also died after a water truck rolled over.

Dozens of teary-eyed firefighters took a moment from battling the blazes to pay homage to one of their colleagues who died in the flames late Wednesday while he evacuated a family to safety. Two police officers also died Wednesday.

The series of fast-spreading blazes have destroyed about 385,000 acres (160,000 hectares) of forest.

The fires have been raging in central and southern Chile, fanned by strong winds, hot temperatures and a prolonged drought. Emergency services have battled the flames non-stop for days with thousands of firefighters on the ground and helicopters and small airplanes in the air.

Residents of some communities have been battling the fires themselves, without any protective gear and often using just branches or bottles of water in a frantic effort to save their homes, pasture and livestock. But those efforts are often undone as winds or smoldering ash spread the fires anew.

The ferocity of the flames prompted President Michelle Bachelet to declare a state of emergency, deploy troops and ask for international help, calling it “the greatest forest disaster” in Chile’s history.

A Boeing 747-400 “Super Tanker” arrived in Chile from the United States on Wednesday to help fight the blazes. The world’s largest fire-fighting aircraft can dump nearly 20,000 gallons (73,000 liters) of fire retardant or water.

Ms. Bachelet said in her Twitter account on Thursday that Chile also had accepted a supertanker plane from the Russian government.

The central regions of O’Higgins and Chile’s top wine-making region of Maule are among those hit worst. But fires are also raging in the south-central Bio Bio and Araucania regions, known for its timber industry and where most of Chile’s Mapuche Indigenous people live.

Interior Minister Mahmud Aleuy more fires are expected with forecasts of hotter temperatures, strong winds and low humidity in the coming days.

- AP inputs