
CROATIAN FIREFIGHTERS STRUGGLE TO CONTROL BLAZE IN SPLIT AREA

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Croatian firefighters battled for a full day to control a forest fire along the Adriatic coast that has damaged and destroyed buildings in villages around the city of Split, reaching the Split suburbs late on Monday.

Local media reported that the blaze, which started shortly after midnight, has spread across 20 km and first threatened the villages of Srinjine, Sitno Gornje and Sitno Donje. One death has been reported, although it was not clear whether the cause was a heart attack or smoke inhalation.

By the evening hours the blaze had reached eastern suburbs of Split. Some parts of the city were without water or electricity. Visitors were asked to leave two shopping malls as the smoke entered ventilation systems. The fire has also reached the city's waste dumping site.

Authorities prepared places for some 250 people inside a Split sports hall in case there were evacuations.

Citizens were warned not to go near petrol stations threatened by fire on some roads approaching Split.

Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said that if necessary Croatia might consider asking for help from its European Union partners.

Earlier in the day several houses and around a dozen cars were burnt. A church in one of the villages was saved when firefighters extinguished flames heading towards the building.

Defense Minister Damir Krsticevic said some 100 people from the Croatian army joined firefighters in the village of Zrnovnica, east of Split, where children and elderly people were evacuated from an area engulfed by heavy smoke.

Army personnel were also helping firefighters in Split suburbs.

Zrnovnica is the site of an underground army missile compound, but Krsticevic said he did not expect it to be damaged.

Electricity and water supplies have been affected and several local roads have been closed.

Some 400 firefighters struggled to bring the blaze under control in an area largely covered by pine forest and scrubland. Around 20 smaller fires were burning elsewhere in the southern Croatian region of Dalmatia.

The cause of the fire around Split, the second biggest Croatian city and a popular tourist destination, was unknown.

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