



## Recommendation 1761 (2006)<sup>1</sup>

# Preventing forest fires

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Forest fires are one of the most negative aspects of the degradation of our environment. Every year fires in woodland and mountain areas deplete our continent's natural heritage, destroying large masses of woodland and undermining biodiversity.
2. They also cause emissions into the atmosphere, destruction of property and loss of human life, both among the populations affected and among the fire-fighting teams. Added to this is the gradual destruction of groundwater storage capacity which exacerbates imbalances in the water system and makes water shortages more common.
3. Forest fires are a reality affecting all the Council of Europe countries, especially the Mediterranean ones, which are the worst hit in terms of the number of fires and surface areas burnt. In the coming years, owing to climate change, drought will increase in southern Europe, with consequences including more frequent forest fires.
4. One of the factors conducive to fires is the rural exodus which has caused a number of agricultural practices that helped prevent forest fires to be abandoned in recent decades.
5. The Parliamentary Assembly unreservedly supports European Parliament Resolution P6\_TA(2005)0334 on natural disasters (fires and floods), which refers to the fires in Europe in 2005.
6. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the member states to:
  - 6.1. promote the development of activities encouraging the use of woodlands in a spirit of respect for the principles of sustainable development and, as far as possible, provide financial and fiscal support for these activities;
  - 6.2. promote policies based on the principle that the best means of combating forest fires is prevention;
  - 6.3. encourage the adoption of fire prevention measures involving forestry techniques such as firebreaks, the intelligent use of controlled burning, etc.;
  - 6.4. develop preventive socio-economic strategies enabling farmers, breeders and foresters – the rural population in general – to continue with their usual activities in areas affected by fires;
  - 6.5. promote scientific research on the potential of raw materials of forest origin, as an important factor for valorising forest exploitation and increasing its profitability;
  - 6.6. organise information campaigns aimed directly at farmers, breeders and foresters on the need and obligation to put an end to practices (whether traditional or otherwise) which entail a fire risk, especially at certain times of the year;

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1. Assembly debate on 30 June 2006 (23rd Sitting) (see [Doc. 10962](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Txueka). Text adopted by the Assembly on 30 June 2006 (23rd Sitting).



- 6.7. adopt strategies for collecting and recycling residual forest biomass and for woodland diversification, planting and regeneration using more fire-resistant species in areas affected by fires, while bearing in mind local bioclimatic and environmental characteristics;
  - 6.8. prevent material benefits or advantages being procured from the use of burnt surface areas or the sale of burnt wood;
  - 6.9. prohibit changes in the use of fire-damaged mountain areas or woodland which prevent the regeneration of plant cover, and extend bans on urban development and construction in burnt areas to a minimum of thirty years;
  - 6.10. provide by law for minimum distances to be observed between housing and forest areas for all new buildings in areas at risk;
  - 6.11. prohibit the lighting of fires in forests in the regions and during the seasons at risk and envisage severe sanctions against offenders;
  - 6.12. step up campaigns to raise awareness of this problem in schools and particularly among communities exploiting and engaging in mountain and woodland leisure activities;
  - 6.13. increase criminal penalties for criminal acts which cause a substantial proportion of forest fires;
  - 6.14. take the measures needed to reinforce the training of fire-fighting departments and teams and provide them with adequate resources;
  - 6.15. set up a pan-European network for specialised further education, focusing on techniques for preventing and fighting forest fires which are more and more necessary to control the size and spread of forest fires;
  - 6.16. set up detection systems and appropriate infrastructure facilities to ensure effective intervention as swiftly as possible, in order to prevent fires from going beyond the control level;
  - 6.17. promote the adoption of co-ordinated intervention protocols and assign responsibility for forest fire management to local and regional authorities;
  - 6.18. strengthen and finance co-ordination and intervention facilities, particularly airborne resources, with transfrontier scope;
  - 6.19. accede, unless they have already done so, to the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement.
7. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
- 7.1. invite the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT) to reinforce the application of the Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent, particularly the measures for preventing disasters such as forest fires, by appropriate planning of forest areas, and to include this issue in its work programme;
  - 7.2. instruct the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Partial Agreement to develop its activities on forest fires, especially in the Mediterranean region, in co-operation with the other partners working in this area such as the European Commission, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Global Wildland Fire Network of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR).
8. The Assembly emphasises that local and regional authorities have a major role and substantial responsibilities in combating forest fires and recommends that the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe look into this issue with a view to devising concerted strategies to be carried out by local and regional authorities at pan-European level.