# Israeli authorities declare national emergency as wildfires threaten Jerusalem



Israeli authorities declared a national emergency as extensive wildfires rapidly spread near Jerusalem on Wednesday, causing significant concern for the safety of residents and prompting large-scale evacuation efforts. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that the fires, driven by strong western winds, could reach the city itself, emphasising the urgency of the situation and signalling the deployment of all available resources to defend Jerusalem.

The fires, described by fire chief Eyal Caspi as potentially the largest in Israel in a decade, erupted amid extreme heat and strong winds, causing thick smoke to billow above highways near the capital. Firefighters and military personnel were mobilised to contain the blazes that have injured numerous individuals and threatened multiple communities in the region.

Israel’s Magen David Adom rescue agency reported that around 23 people had received treatment for injuries, with 13 hospitalised mainly due to smoke inhalation and burns. Among the injured are two pregnant women and two infants under one year old. The rescue organisation raised its alert level to the highest tier in response to the ongoing crisis.

Prime Minister Netanyahu, speaking near the city of Modiin where fires were burning on a nearby hillside, stated in a video message: “The western wind can push the fire easily towards the outskirts of [Jerusalem] – and even into the city itself. We need to bring as many fire engines as possible and create firebreaks well beyond the current fire lines... We are now in a national emergency, not just a local one. The priority right now is defending Jerusalem.”

Highways connecting Jerusalem with Tel Aviv were closed, and several thousands of residents living along these routes were evacuated as the fires spread through wooded areas, including zones affected by wildfires only a week earlier. Numerous drivers abandoned their vehicles mid-evacuation as flames rapidly approached.

Eyewitness accounts detailed the severity of the fires. Yuval Aharoni, a resident near Modiin, commented: “It’s just very sad because we knew the weather, we kind of knew that would happen and still we feel like they weren’t ready enough with the big planes that can drop large amounts of water.” Meanwhile, student Yosef Aaron told AFP from the roadside, “A lot of police arrived, a lot of firefighters, but it didn’t really help. The fire had already completely taken over the whole area here.”

Israeli police deployed significant forces around the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway and the Jerusalem Hills, urging the public to avoid travel to these areas. Helicopters and firefighting aircraft were active, though Caspi noted difficulties due to weather, stating at a press conference: “Our aircraft can’t do anything right now due to the weather conditions... Our goal is to save lives.”

Communities approximately 30 kilometres west of Jerusalem, housing thousands of people, were evacuated as the fires swept through wooded terrain near Bet Shemesh and Latrun. The national security minister, Itamar Ben Gvir, suggested that arson might be a cause behind the fires, referencing the arrest of an east Jerusalem resident allegedly attempting to set fire to a field in the city’s southern sector, though no official declaration directly linked this arrest to the wildfires.

Ben Gvir, who oversees the Israeli fire department, visited the affected regions and noted ongoing efforts to bring additional support and facilitate civilian evacuations. Israel’s foreign ministry reached out to neighbouring countries including Greece, Cyprus, Croatia, Italy, and Bulgaria to request firefighting assistance. The Prime Minister’s office confirmed that three aircraft from Italy and Croatia were en route to support the firefighting operations.

Emergency medical services have been strategically positioned near at-risk communities, prepared to provide urgent assistance to those affected. The extreme weather conditions and rapidly advancing fires have constituted a major challenge for Israeli emergency services as they work to contain the blazes and safeguard residents. The Guardian is reporting on these developments as the situation continues to evolve.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://apnews.com/article/e92ceb06b8508bc130886f0109eb645d> - This article reports on a major wildfire near Jerusalem that led to the closure of the main highway connecting Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, with at least 12 people hospitalized due to smoke inhalation.
* <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-calls-for-international-help-as-huge-fires-force-evacuation-of-3500/> - This report details Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's request for international assistance as massive wildfires near Jerusalem forced the evacuation of 3,500 residents.
* <https://www.reviewjournal.com/news/nation-and-world/fire-forces-evacuation-of-tens-of-thousands-in-israel-blamed-on-terror/> - This article discusses the evacuation of tens of thousands in Israel due to massive wildfires, with authorities attributing the fires to 'terror' activities.
* <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-jerusalem-israel-fires-265323d6c8115c6034c6841be49f0200> - This piece reports that Israeli firefighters have brought a major wildfire near Jerusalem under control after a three-day battle, with over 100 firefighting teams involved.
* <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/netanyahu-israel-will-cut-through-cruelty-of-red-tape-to-help-fire-victims-473789> - This article covers Prime Minister Netanyahu's commitment to expedite assistance for fire victims, including the opening of emergency housing for evacuees.
* <https://www.greaterkashmir.com/world/thousands-evacuated-due-to-massive-wildfire-near-jerusalem/> - This report states that at least 10,000 people have been evacuated from their homes due to a massive wildfire near Jerusalem, with hundreds of firefighters struggling to control the blaze.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/01/israel-fires-wildfires-jerusalem> - Please view link - unable to able to access data