



PRESS RELEASE

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Forest Fires in Europe: Experts to assess innovative strategies for fire prevention

Forest fires are a serious threat to forests and human health. Due to climate change, the risks of forest fires are forecasted to increase in Europe, and in particular in Southern Europe. Faced with growing concern about forest fires, experts will gather in Rhodes, Greece on 4-6 May 2010 to discuss innovative fire preventive measures. The meeting, co-organised by FOREST EUROPE, will review national fire prevention systems, identify innovative strategies, best practices and policy instruments. It is also expected that the experts will develop policy conclusions and recommendations concerning the prevention of forest fires in Europe.

The meeting is an integral part of FOREST EUROPE's activities, contributing to the pan-European policy process for the sustainable management of the continent's forests. It is attracting policy and decision makers, forest stakeholders, forest fire researchers and experts.

Europe's forests are not only subject to the harmful effects of climate change. The continent's forests and their sustainable management are also negatively affected by the increasing risk of forest fires. Forest fires will not only continue to be a serious threat to Southern Europe; they will also seriously impact other parts of Europe. Fires take a dramatic toll on human lives and the environment and damage infrastructure. Still, fire prevention, even if recognised as a preferable and cost effective way to manage forest fires, attracts a small share of available resources and very little media and public attention. The experts will therefore attempt to identify areas where significant improvements can be made in prevention through innovative and best practices and knowledge exchange.

FOREST EUROPE, in keeping with the commitments of the ministers at the Fifth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe in 2007 is dedicated to the ongoing exploration of measures to prevent forest fires and their devastating effects, as well as to restore the economic, social and ecological potential of areas affected by forest fires.

The meeting is co-organised by FOREST EUROPE, the Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Climate Change; Republic of Cyprus, Department of Forests; Union of South European Foresters (USSE); Silva Mediterranea Committee; and Team of Specialists on Forest Fires UNECE/FAO. It will be followed by a meeting of the European Commission's Expert Group on Forest Fires.

Background information:

FOREST EUROPE – The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe

FOREST EUROPE is the pan-European policy process for the sustainable management of the continent's forests. It develops common strategies for its 46 member countries and the European Union on how to protect and sustainably manage forests. Founded in 1990, the continuous co-operation of FOREST EUROPE has led to achievements such as the guidelines and criteria for sustainable forest management.

High-priority topics of FOREST EUROPE are to strengthen the role of forests in mitigating climate change, to secure the supply of good-quality fresh water, enhance and preserve forest biodiversity and provide renewable forest products. Other important tasks are to develop a framework for future political collaboration and to prepare options for decision by ministers on a possible legally binding agreement on forests in Europe. Norway currently holds the chairmanship of FOREST EUROPE and will convene the next ministerial conference on 14-16 June 2011.

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