

In heatwave, France records 1,000 excess deaths

Berlin: France saw around 1,000 additional deaths last week at the height of its record-smashing heatwave, the country's public health agency said on Sunday.

Europeans elsewhere were suffering through yet another day of new temperature highs that sparked wildfires in Germany and had Berlin police using water cannons to cool down the crowd.

Temperature records were broken in several countries over the weekend as the heatwave slowly moved towards the eastern parts of the continent.

In Germany, a new nighttime temperature record was reported on Sunday from Kubschütz, in eastern Saxony, where the temperature did not drop below 29.4 degrees Celsius. The nightly record came only hours after a daytime record of 41.5 degrees Celsius in Mockern-Drewitz in

Saxony-Anhalt, according to preliminary data by the German weather service DWD. The previous record was set a day earlier.

A new study from the World Weather Attribution, a Europe-based collaboration of scientists, reported on Friday that the record-breaking heat and humidity in Europe this week would not have been possible without climate change.

The rapid study found that the heat would have been virtually impossible just five decades ago, and is 200 times more likely today than it would have been 20 years ago.

France saw a surge in deaths last week at the height of its record-smashing heatwave, including a sharp increase in calls to private homes, especially in the Paris region, the national public health agency said on Sunday.

There were more than



The heatwave caused significant damage to the tram infrastructure in Leipzig, Germany, on Saturday. (AP)

1,200 deaths on Wednesday, when France was sweltering under its hottest temperatures ever, increasing to more than 1,400 deaths on each of the two following days, Public Health France said.

In April and May, before the heatwave, France's rate of deaths was about 900 to 1,000

per day, it said.

The agency concluded that France experienced a total of at least 1,000 additional deaths during those three days alone, an estimate it cautioned is likely to increase as more data is collected, including for deaths at home.

The increase in deaths was

sharpest in areas under red warnings of extreme heat, it said. Those warnings blanketed about three-quarters of the country at the peak of the heatwave. The agency said that 85 per cent of the deaths involved people aged 65 and above.

In Gohrischheide, in eastern Germany, a fire broke out in a large forest that's still contaminated with ammunition from World War II, which made the firefighters' efforts to put out the flames even more dangerous and complicated.

Similarly, a major firefighting operation was underway in southwest Germany near the town of Traisen, where the heat sparked a forest fire in an area that also contained unexploded ordnance. Firefighting efforts had to be temporarily suspended after explosions took place and an ordnance disposal unit was brought in to continuously assess the situation, German

news agency dpa reported.

In addition, the big cities' fire departments were busy sending out ambulances to people suffering from heat-related illnesses. In Berlin, an additional 500 ambulance dispatches were reported on Saturday, most of them heat-related.

Berlin police found a unique way to help suffering Berliners and tourists alike. They put up two huge water cannons — usually used to disperse unruly protesters — in front of the city's iconic Brandenburg Gate and sprayed the cool water across the cheering crowd.

The heat also continued to damage the country's infrastructure with the concrete surface on countless highways breaking up, and a weekend warning by national rail operator Deutsche Bahn to avoid all unnecessary train travel.

AP