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International Strategy for Disaster Reduction



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OSCE helps to fight wildfires in Armenia

Press release by OSCE, 14 September 2011

Source: <http://www.osce.org/yerevan/82456>

YEREVAN, 14 September 2011 – Assessing the risk of wildfires and developing and implementing national fire management policies was the focus of an OSCE-supported roundtable meeting in Yerevan today.

The event, organized by the OSCE Office in Yerevan, the United Nations Development Programme and the Armenian Ministry of Emergency Situations, brings together some 100 representatives from all state institutions involved in fire management, local self-government bodies, civil society and the international community.

“Strengthening the national capacity to fight fires will help make our region safer,” said William Hanlon, the Economic and Environmental Officer at the OSCE Office in Yerevan.

Participants discussed issues affecting forest and wildland fires in Armenia, achievements in forest and fire protection, development of emergency response capabilities and legislation, and regional and international co-operation.

Sergey Azaryan, the Director of the Armenian Rescue Service of Armenia’s Emergency Situations Ministry added: “Vast forest fires can destroy thousands hectares of forests, orchards and grasslands and the failure to organize a comprehensive and consistent fight may result in ecological disaster. That is why the topic of the discussion is urgent and of strategic importance to Armenia.”



Participants at an OSCE-supported event on assessing the risk of wildfires in Armenia, and developing and implementing national fire management policies, Yerevan, 14 September 2011. (OSCE/Gayane Ter-Stepanyan)

The discussion follows a two-day training course and practical exercise held in Syunik, a southern province of Armenia, where around 50 local fire brigade representatives learned about international best practices and modern techniques for forest fire management. The training course was conducted by Johann Georg Goldammer, the Director of the Global Fire Monitoring Centre, and two representatives of the Regional Forest Fire Network from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

“Climate change in the region will increase the threat of forest fires in the South Caucasus: extended droughts will heighten the risk of high-intensity fires resulting in environmental and economic damage, and lead to secondary disasters, such as landslides, erosion and loss of soil fertility,” said Goldammer, who has analyzed forest fires in Armenia and neighbouring countries in recent years.

He added that lack of adequate supervision of fires for agricultural purposes was the main cause of forest fires and this could be reduced if the authorities worked with farmers to avoid unnecessary burning. This event is part of a regional project for the South Caucasus which is supported by the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) initiative, which is a partnership of six organizations – the OSCE, UNDP, UNEP, UNECE, REC and NATO as an associate partner. A similar training course was organized under this project in Georgia last year.

Forest and Grassland Fire Management Issues Highlighted with Three Days of Events

Press release by UNDP, 14 September 2011

Source: http://www.nature-ic.am/en/Forest_Fire_Events_12_14.09.11

The joint efforts of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Armenia and UNDP towards prevention of forest fires and early response, as well as OSCE and Global Fire Monitoring Centre in the scope of the Environment and Security Initiative brought together nearly 300 participants in the forest and grassland fire management field exercise and conference held in Kapan and Yerevan between the 12th and 14th of September, 2011.

The increasing occurrence of grassland and forest fires throughout the last decade in Armenia has highlighted the threat from wildfire for the vulnerable forest ecosystems and biodiversity. 96% of the incidents are caused by negligence and burning of agricultural waste and pasturelands. The timeliness of the issue brought participants from all relevant organisations including Ministries of Emergency Situations, Agriculture, Nature Protection, Defence and Territorial Administration, the Marz Administrations and the civil society to the three days of fire management events.

The national training on wildfire management and risk reduction and the command-staff field exercise held in Kapan between the 12th and 13th of September revealed the current strengths as well as the needs of coordination and fire management capacities. The drill with participation of representatives of rescue service, military forces, police, forest enterprises and protected areas, Syunik Marz Administration, regional services and Armenian Red Cross also showed the [forest fire early response equipment provided by the UNDP-GEF](#) to the foresters of Syunik and Kapan Forest Enterprises and the Arevik National Park in action proving their efficiency and their usefulness to the beneficiaries. Furthermore, the replication value of the UNDP activity was highlighted through the decision of the Armenian Rescue Service to purchase 100 backpack pumps for fire fighting units. At the peak of the fire season, the donation of the equipment has come at a time of great need.

The Director of Rescue Service Major-general S. Azaryan emphasized in the conference “Forecast, Prevention and Suppression of Forest and Grassland Fires” held on the 14th of September in Yerevan that close cooperation between all stakeholders on both national and regional levels is required and relevant changes in law enforcement as well as a clear command chain are needed to prevent and reduce the damage of forest fires. Following the conference, the first national roundtable led by international forest fire experts resulted accordingly in the decision to form a permanent national Task Force on forest and grassland fire management by the 1st of October, 2011 to continue the developments started now.

The presented issues, openings and scientific advancements will be collected into the conference proceedings that will be published in both Armenian and English in the coming months. The participants were also provided with other material such as the poster on hazards associated with agricultural waste and grassland burning prepared and distributed to communities by the UNDP. The Ministry of Defence requested to be provided with the posters for distribution in order to further prevent forest fires in border areas. The national events on forest and grassland fire management coincided with the warning issued by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests on the increasing threat of wildfires due to the lack of fire management and impacts of climate change. The related FAO press release on a call for nations to improve landscape management especially on lands bordering forests to prevent forest fires was also distributed at the conference.

Burning of stubble and dry vegetation on forest neighboring fields has been banned in Armenia

Press release by the Climate Change Information Center, Armenia, 12 December 2011

Source: http://www.nature-ic.am/en/Local_News/422

The growing occurrence of grassland and forest fires throughout the last decade in Armenia is increasing the threat to vulnerable forest ecosystems and biodiversity. The most of the forest fires are directly or indirectly caused by the humans factor and about 96% of cases are because of human indifference. The main cause of forest fires is the prevailing tradition of burning agricultural plant residues in fields, pastures and meadows.

RA National Assembly passed an addition to the RA Law "On Protection of Atmospheric Air" on September 14, 2011 which announces the ban "to burn stubble, plant residues and dry vegetation areas, vegetation of pastures and meadows in the agricultural, forest neighboring, forest and specially protected area lands".

The burning of organic residues on fields negatively affects the overall soil quality, fertility and productivity. Combustion of organic material releases harmful substances into the air, which leads to air pollution and undesirable climate change.

Non-official English version of the mentioned piece of legislation:

non-official translation

Law of the Republic of Armenia

On Amendments (Supplements) of the RA Law "On Atmospheric Air Protection"

Adopted on Sep 14, 2011

Article 1. To supplement the sub point G of the Article 21 of the RA Law "On the Atmospheric Air Protection" dated October 11, 2011 by adding the following new paragraph:

"It is banned to burn stubble, plant residues and dry vegetation areas, vegetation of pastures and meadow lands in agricultural, forest, forest neighboring and specially protected areas of nature".

Article 2. This law enters into force on the tenth day of its official publication.

S.Sargsyan
President of the Republic of Armenia
03.10.2011

The forests of the south-eastern Syunik region of Armenia are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and under further climate aridization one of the main threats is posed by the increasing occurrence of forest fires.

Press release by UNDP, 26 July 2011

Source: <http://www.undp.am/?page=LatestNews&id=697>



The forests of the south-eastern Syunik region of Armenia are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and under further climate aridization one of the main threats is posed by the increasing occurrence of forest fires. Between 2001 and 2010, nearly 30 % of the burned forest covered area in Armenia was located in Syunik region, and during the most devastating year of the past decade in the region, 2006, nearly 300 hectares of forests were burned.

Forest fires can affect the local communities severely and, traditionally community members join the forest fire fighting efforts. On the local level, the authorities responsible for forest fire fighting are the Forest Enterprises, which lead the extinguishing work. However, the efforts of both the foresters and of the local community members are hampered gravely by the lack of adequate tools to combat wild fires.

The UNDP/GEF "Adaptation to Climate Change Impacts in Mountain Forest Ecosystems of Armenia" project, aims at enhancing the capacities of the forests of "Syunik" and "Kapan" Forest Enterprises and "Arevik" National Park to cope with risks posed by climate change. By donating fire equipment to relevant forest agencies such as "Syunik" and "Kapan" Forest Enterprises as well as to "Arevik" National Park the response capacities of those agencies to fight forest fire are substantially increased.

The donation ceremony of forest fire early response equipment to "Syunik" and "Kapan" Forest Enterprises and "Arevik" National Park took place in Goris, Syunik region on 22 July 2011. Together with the donation ceremony, the local foresters demonstrated the use of the newly-received forest fire early response equipment in a nearby forest area of the "Syunik" Forest Enterprise. The demonstration of the use of the donated equipment was led by Mr. Nikola Nikolov, an International Expert on Forest Fire Management under the UNDP/GEF Project, who will return to Armenia later this fall to further train the local foresters in forest and grassland fire fighting.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Dirk Boberg, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Armenia, stressed that the donated equipment would substantial increase the rapid response capacity of foresters in case of forest fires. The event was also attended by high level officials of the RoA Ministries of Nature Protection, Emergency Situations, and Agriculture and Syunik regional administration.

The forest fire early response equipment, including pick-up trucks outfitted with engine operated water pumps, several types of hand tools, as well as fire fighter uniforms guarantee a long-term tangible impact of the project in the Syunik region and are important, although hopefully not too often needed, in the protection of the vulnerable mountain forests of Syunik.