



## Collection of Forest Fire Statistics in the Countries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

Since 1980, the Joint FAO/ECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics, a subsidiary body of the Timber Committee and the European Forestry Commission, has been collecting information, at the national level in the countries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, on the number of fires, the area burnt, and as well as information on causes. FAO/ECE now has a data base with national information for practically all member countries. The results are published annually under the title *Forest Fire Statistics* in the *Timber Bulletin* and are also available at the Timber Committee website: <<http://unece.org/trade/timber>>.

The Resolution S3 of the Ministerial Conference at Strasbourg committed the signatories (including the EU) to creating a decentralised data base on forest fires. Since then a data base, with fire-by-fire information, has been built up, in those countries/regions of the European Union with a particularly severe forest fire problem. In this system, for each fire, information is collected on first alert and extinction times, location, area, cause etc. according to a "common core" of parameters ("socle minimum"). 19 countries of the 27 signatories of Resolution S3 expressed their willingness to adhere to a data base network based on the common core system adopted by EU members, considering it a good, feasible starting point of collecting data on a common base at the pan-European level.

FAO Silva Mediterranea, like the Working Party a subsidiary body of the European Forestry Commission (EFC), covers a region where forest fires are one the most serious dangers to sustainable forest management, and has also stated its interest in moving towards a fire-by-fire information system, based on the EU system.

At the global level, FAO has collected data on forest fires, using the FAO/ECE conceptual framework and definitions, as part of its monitoring of the state of the world's forests within the context of the Global Forest Resource Assessment.

International Forest Fire News (IFFN), prepared by Mr. J.G. Goldammer, leader of the ECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fires, contains both technical and statistical information on forest fires world wide. Mr. Goldammer is also developing a Global Vegetation Fire Inventory (GVFI), collecting information by a network of correspondents. GVFI is an activity of the International Global Atmospheric Chemistry (IGAC) project, a core project of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP).

There is a strong need for a comprehensive international set of comparable data on forest fires and other wildland fires, as a tool for policy makers, and for operational planning (for both prevention and suppression), as an essential part of improving understanding of climate change and the factors influencing it, and as a part of an effort to monitor the state of the world's forests.

In recent years the scientific community has shown renewed interest in forest (vegetation) fires, notably because of their significant role in climate change, and new methods of collecting information are being developed, using remote sensing techniques. Furthermore, the research community needs geo-referenced data (although not necessarily at a very fine degree of resolution).

The approach pioneered in the EU is very valuable and should be extended within the framework of Resolution S3 to other countries, chiefly in Europe and around the Mediterranean, but also in other regions where institutions and resources made it possible to collect fire-by-fire data. Countries starting to collect this information should use the "common core" ("socle minimum") already developed in the EU as a starting point, in order to promote comparability between data for different regions. The Commission of the European Communities has offered to provide technical support to this work and to process data for new countries (including non-EU countries and non-signatories of Resolution S3) in



International Forest Fire News (IFFN) is an activity of the FAO/UNECE Team of Specialists on Forest Fire and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC). IFFN is published on behalf of UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission and is serving the UN-ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN). For the complete IFFN archive see: <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iffn/iffn.htm>

its existing structure. The Silva Mediterranea forest fire network would also contribute to establishing contacts, encouraging the setting up of such systems and ensuring international comparability.

However, it would be many years before all countries, even in Europe, were able to supply the type of detailed information required by the fire-by-fire approach. In order to avoid a short term reduction in the coverage of forest fire information, it was essential to maintain the existing FAO/ECE system of data collection at the national level, until a more comprehensive and detailed system, with at least as wide a geographic coverage, was operational. Indeed the terms and definition, based on the Global Forest Resource Assessment, and the questionnaire itself, could be used as the basis for data collection in other regions.

FAO/ECE continues to collect and publish annually forest fire statistics, as almost all countries in the ECE region are able to provide reasonably good information on number of fires, area burnt and causes of fires. Collection of information on value of losses and costs of suppression and prevention was discontinued in 1995 as few countries provided this type of information. Furthermore, the latter was not really comparable between countries, in the absence of a commonly agreed international method of evaluation. The European Commission collects and transmits this information to FAO/ECE for the 15 member countries, thus also contributing to a harmonisation of fire statistics in Europe.

At the global level IFFN has a leading role in making available fire reports. All those involved should continue to share the information acquired, in order to build up over time a more accurate picture of the situation. In the context of the FAO Global Forest Resource Assessment the Global Fire Monitoring Centre has made an important contribution to this effort.

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