

## The report predicted destruction from fires ...

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Experts offer solutions for fighting forest fires, but their proposals remain under the carpet. The German professor's report describes what led to the tragedy in Mati and how it could have been avoided.

Dr. Gabriel Xanthopoulos is one of six expert scholars of the independent committee on the prospects for combating forest and rural fires in Greece, told the Greek newspaper ["Ta Nea"](#) on the report of the commission led by the director of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) Professor Dr. Johann Georg Goldammer, which she prepared after the fire in Mati, which killed 102 people.

The report analyzed the deepest causes of the ever-growing problem of wildfires in Greece and presented proposals. It was delivered to all political parties on February 7, 2019.

Has something changed two years later? "Nothing ..." says Dr. Gabriel Xanthopoulos, "What we have done before, we are doing now ... We continue to focus on the consequences of fires, not their prevention, while forest management continues to fail the most devastating consequences ... Together we are spectators of the same useless work."



Professor Georg Goldammer with then Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras

The problem of forest fires in Greece, according to the experts who compiled the report, is aggravated by socio-economic (land use, demography) and climatic changes, lack or inadequacy of institutional measures, inadequate and outdated equipment and ineffective organization of fire management, human activities and a combination of interactions of the above factors.

## **Problems**

According to the authors of the report:

- Greece is the only country in Europe where the funds spent on the elimination of consequences are disproportionately high in comparison with the prevention of problems.
- There are 45 competent authorities involved in forest fire prevention, which should be coordinated within a common framework.
- To this end, 17 bodies belonging to 6 ministries must cooperate in order to fulfill 11 different responsibilities.
- To solve the problem, an increase in the quantity and continuity of the supply of fuels and lubricants plays a very important role.
- Without well-functioning logistics in the supply of fuels and lubricants, ineffective fire prevention leads to a further increase in fires.
- The risk of the occurrence and spread of fires on the outskirts of urban areas, rural settlements, agricultural holdings and tourist zones has been increased.
- Since the 1980s, there has been an increase in forest fires and burned-out forest areas in Greece, reaching 1.092 million hectares by 2007. Fire extinguishing methods

## **Disadvantages in the field of effective prevention include:**

- Lack of a unified fire protection plan.
- Lack of approved and documented local fire plans. Gaps and reduced reliability of fire statistics that can guide fire prevention actions.
- The country is overly dependent on air means. Firefighters are transferring urban firefighting techniques to forest and rural fires.
- The difficulty of introducing the use of modern technological tools and scientific methods in business planning.
- Illegal and unplanned construction in forested areas and the creation of residential areas in the forest around major urban and tourist centers.
- There is a large discrepancy between the funds allocated for prevention in relation to the numerous funds spent on extinguishing fires.

## **Foundations**

In particular with regard to firefighting measures, said Dr Gabriel Xanthopoulos, the increase in funds allocated for this over the past 20 years has not led to a corresponding increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of the mechanism. Separate problems relate to both the fire forces and the means (ground, air), as well as the way of interaction between them.

## **A single method for solving the problem**

Experts argue that the problem of fires should be addressed by the state as a whole, through an integrated and consistent forest fire management system, and not through separate, unrelated services and actions to prevent or extinguish.

However, it is noted that in July KYSEA approved a program to improve the level of civil protection called “AIGIS”. The program covers the entire territory and is associated with simplifying the mechanism and updating equipment. It is expected to be announced by the government in September.

**Source:** <https://en.rua.gr/2021/08/09/the-report-predicted-destruction-from-fires/>