

## Portugal wildfires out of control

URL: <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0508/050824-fires.html>

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**24 August, 2005**

## **THE ARTICLE**

### **Portugal wildfires out of control**

**BNE:** Specialist firefighting aircraft from across Europe have arrived in Portugal to help fight more than twenty out-of-control wildfires. The fires are the worst to hit the region in living memory and have killed 15 people. Despite Portugal experiencing wide scale blazes for the past four years, it has no planes of its own to extinguish fires from the air. The fires are raging through tinder dry and parched woodland, being fanned by strong and unpredictable winds. Nearly 3,000 firefighters are battling in vain to contain the fires and prevent them from charring property and homes. They are being stretched to their limits and desperately need reinforcements.

Successes have been few in the fight against the ravaging flames. Coimbra, the nation's third largest city, narrowly escaped being engulfed by the fires and is now no longer under threat. Flames reached the outskirts of the city on Monday, which had the population of 100,000 scrambling to evacuate. Officials said there was no chance the fires would return to the city's perimeter. However, with the mercury set to rise to 36 degrees Celsius, much of the country is still on a high state of alert. Conditions are exacerbated by Portugal's worst drought since 1945, which has dried up many reservoirs. Police have also arrested dozens of arsonists, some of whom may face charges of manslaughter.

## WARM-UPS

**1. FIRE:** Imagine wildfires are surrounding your town. You can see the flames in the distance. What will you do? Will you gather together your possessions and evacuate? Will you help fight the flames? Walk around the class and talk to other students about the fires and what you have been doing.

**2. RESCUE:** Rank the following in order of which you would save first if you had to evacuate your house because of a wildfire. Talk about your order with your partner(s).

\_\_\_\_\_ Passport / documents

\_\_\_\_\_ Grandmother

\_\_\_\_\_ Money

\_\_\_\_\_ Photo albums

\_\_\_\_\_ Pet

\_\_\_\_\_ Clothes

\_\_\_\_\_ Computer

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

**3. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

*Wildfires / Portugal / woodland / strong winds / firefighters / battling in vain / being stretched to your limits / flames / city outskirts / droughts / reservoirs / arson*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**4. FIRE:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "fire". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

**5. STRETCHED TO YOUR LIMITS:** In pairs / groups, talk about times when you have been stretched to your limits regarding the following:

- a. Homework
- b. Struggling with money
- c. Exercise
- d. Stressful situations
- e. Relationships
- f. Neighbors
- g. Examinations
- h. Other

## BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| a. Wildfires in Portugal are the worst in living memory.                 | T / F |
| b. Portugal has dozens of specialist planes it uses to extinguish fires. | T / F |
| c. Firefighters are generally vain people.                               | T / F |
| d. Firefighters are being stretched to their limits and need help.       | T / F |
| e. There have been many successes in defeating the flames.               | T / F |
| f. 100,000 people in the city of Coimbra evacuated their homes.          | T / F |
| g. Conditions are exacerbated by the worst drought in decades.           | T / F |
| h. Pyromaniacs have been arrested for starting some of the fires.        | T / F |

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| a. blazes         | futilely     |
| b. parched        | pyromaniacs  |
| c. in vain        | back-up      |
| d. charring       | boundary     |
| e. reinforcements | fires        |
| f. engulfed       | temperatures |
| g. perimeter      | scorching    |
| h. the mercury    | worsened     |
| i. exacerbated    | dried up     |
| j. arsonists      | consumed     |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |                                      |                                   |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. the worst to hit the region       | have been few                     |
| b. it has no planes of its own to    | to contain the fires              |
| c. fires are raging through          | charges of manslaughter           |
| d. firefighters are battling in vain | engulfed by the fires             |
| e. They are being stretched          | tinder dry and parched woodland   |
| f. Successes                         | in living memory                  |
| g. narrowly escaped being            | reached the outskirts of the city |
| h. Flames                            | to their limits                   |
| i. the mercury set to                | extinguish fires from the air     |
| j. face                              | rise to 36 degrees Celsius        |

## WHILE READING / LISTENING

**WHICH WORD?** Strike through the incorrect word in each pair in italics.

### Portugal wildfires out of control

**BNE:** Specialist firefighting aircraft from across Europe have arrived in Portugal to help fight more than twenty *out-of-control* / *out-of-this-world* wildfires. The fires are the worst to hit the region in living *memorials* / *memory* and have killed 15 people. Despite Portugal experiencing wide scale *blazes* / *blazers* for the past four years, it has no planes of its own to extinguish fires from the air. The fires are raging through *tinsel* / *tinder* dry and parched woodland, being *fanned* / *furnished* by strong and unpredictable winds. Nearly 3,000 firefighters are battling in *veins* / *vain* to contain the fires and prevent them from *charring* / *scarring* property and homes. They are being stretched to their limits and desperately need reinforcements.

Successes have been few in the fight against the *ravaging* / *raving* flames. Coimbra, the nation's third largest city, *narrowly* / *widely* escaped being engulfed by the fires and is now no longer *under* / *over* threat. Flames reached the *undershirts* / *outskirts* of the city on Monday, which had the population of 100,000 scrambling to evacuate. Officials said there was no chance the fires would return to the city's *periscope* / *perimeter*. However, with the *mercury* / *plutonium* set to rise to 36 degrees Celsius, much of the country is still on a high state of alert. Conditions are *exacerbated* / *exonerated* by Portugal's worst drought since 1945, which has dried up many reservoirs. Police have also arrested dozens of *arsonists* / *astronauts*, some of whom may face charges of manslaughter.

## AFTER READING / LISTENING

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'living' and 'memory'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. WHICH WORD?** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT "WILDFIRES" SURVEY:** In pairs / groups, write down questions about wildfires and crazy weather.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- |              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| • twenty     | • ravaging     |
| • living     | • engulfed     |
| • wide scale | • scrambling   |
| • tinder     | • mercury      |
| • vain       | • exacerbated  |
| • limits     | • manslaughter |

## DISCUSSION

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What were your initial thoughts on this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. What goes through your mind when you see TV pictures of homes burning?
- d. Have you ever seen a house on fire?
- e. Does your country suffer from wildfires?
- f. What do you think it's like to be a firefighter?
- g. What's the greatest threat you have ever faced?
- h. What's the greatest disaster to hit your town in living memory?
- i. If you had to evacuate your home, what three things would you take?
- j. When was the last time you were stretched to your limits?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Why do you think there are so many wildfires in Portugal?
- d. Have you ever had any bad experiences with fire?
- e. What do you think of the fact that Portugal has no firefighting aircraft, even though it has experienced wildfires for four years?
- f. Reservoirs in Portugal are dry but golf courses are green. Should Portugal's government establish a more sensible water policy?
- g. Has the weather changed in your part of the world over the past ten years?
- h. What do you think of people who deliberately set fires in forests?
- i. What kind of prison sentence would you give to an arsonist?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

## LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

### Portugal wildfires out of control

**BNE:** \_\_\_\_\_ firefighting aircraft from across Europe have arrived in Portugal to help fight more than twenty \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_ wildfires. The fires are the worst to hit the region in \_\_\_\_\_ memory and have killed 15 people. Despite Portugal experiencing wide scale \_\_\_\_\_ for the past four years, it has no planes of its own to \_\_\_\_\_ fires from the air. The fires are raging through tinder dry and parched woodland, being \_\_\_\_\_ by strong and unpredictable winds. Nearly 3,000 firefighters are battling in \_\_\_\_\_ to contain the fires and prevent them from \_\_\_\_\_ property and homes. They are being \_\_\_\_\_ to their limits and desperately need reinforcements.

Successes have been few in the fight against the \_\_\_\_\_ flames. Coimbra, the nation's third largest city, narrowly escaped being \_\_\_\_\_ by the fires and is no longer under threat. Flames reached the \_\_\_\_\_ of the city on Monday, which had the population of 100,000 scrambling to evacuate. Officials said there was no chance the fires would return to the city's \_\_\_\_\_. However, with the \_\_\_\_\_ set to rise to 36 degrees Celsius, much of the country is still on a high state of alert. Conditions are exacerbated by Portugal's worst \_\_\_\_\_ since 1945, which has dried up many reservoirs. Police have also arrested dozens of \_\_\_\_\_, some of whom may face charges of manslaughter.



## **HOMEWORK**

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find more information on the wildfires in Portugal. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

**3. LETTER:** Write a letter to your government. Express your anger over its inability to protect your country from wildfires. Tell the government what it should be doing right now. Read your letters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

**4. DIARY / JOURNAL:** Your home has been in the path of a wildfire for three days. You have been helping firefighters to keep back the flames. Write your diary / journal entry for a day you spent fighting the fire. Read your entries to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T      b. F      c. F      d. T      e. F      f. F      g. T      h. T

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| a. blazes         | fires        |
| b. parched        | dried up     |
| c. in vain        | futilely     |
| d. charring       | scorching    |
| e. reinforcements | back-up      |
| f. engulfed       | consumed     |
| g. perimeter      | boundary     |
| h. the mercury    | temperatures |
| i. exacerbated    | worsened     |
| j. arsonists      | pyromaniacs  |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |                                      |                                   |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. the worst to hit the region       | in living memory                  |
| b. it has no planes of its own to    | extinguish fires from the air     |
| c. fires are raging through          | tinder dry and parched woodland   |
| d. firefighters are battling in vain | to contain the fires              |
| e. They are being stretched          | to their limits                   |
| f. Successes                         | have been few                     |
| g. narrowly escaped being            | engulfed by the fires             |
| h. Flames                            | reached the outskirts of the city |
| i. the mercury set to                | rise to 36 degrees Celsius        |
| j. face                              | charges of manslaughter           |

### WHICH WORD?

#### Portugal wildfires out of control

**BNE:** Specialist firefighting aircraft from across Europe have arrived in Portugal to help fight more than twenty *out-of-control* / ~~out-of-this-world~~ wildfires. The fires are the worst to hit the region in living ~~memorials~~ / *memory* and have killed 15 people. Despite Portugal experiencing wide scale *blazes* / ~~blazers~~ for the past four years, it has no planes of its own to extinguish fires from the air. The fires are raging through ~~tinsel~~ / *tinder* dry and parched woodland, being ~~fanned~~ / ~~furnished~~ by strong and unpredictable winds. Nearly 3,000 firefighters are battling in ~~veins~~ / *vain* to contain the fires and prevent them from *charring* / ~~scarring~~ property and homes. They are being stretched / ~~stretchered~~ to their limits and desperately need reinforcements.

Successes have been few in the fight against the *ravaging* / ~~raving~~ flames. Coimbra, the nation's third largest city, *narrowly* / ~~widely~~ escaped being engulfed by the fires and is now no longer *under* / ~~over~~ threat. Flames reached the ~~undershirts~~ / *outskirts* of the city on Monday, which had the population of 100,000 scrambling to evacuate. Officials said there was no chance the fires would return to the city's ~~periscope~~ / *perimeter*. However, with the *mercury* / ~~plutonium~~ set to rise to 36 degrees Celsius, much of the country is still on a high state of alert. Conditions are ~~exacerbated~~ / ~~exonerated~~ by Portugal's worst drought since 1945, which has dried up many reservoirs. Police have also arrested dozens of *arsonists* / ~~astronauts~~, some of whom may face charges of manslaughter.