

## Portugal wildfires out of control

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**24 August, 2005**

## THE ARTICLE

### Portugal wildfires out of control

**BNE:** Special firefighting airplanes 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 more than 60 years. They are racing through woodland, which is very dry. Strong winds are fanning the flames and increasing the risks to firefighters. Nearly 3,000 firefighters are battling to contain the fires and prevent them from destroying property and homes. They are being stretched to their limits and need urgent help.

Coimbra, the nation's third largest city, narrowly escaped the fires on Tuesday. Flames reached the edge of the city and the population of 100,000 prepared to evacuate. The wind suddenly changed direction and officials said there was now no chance the fires would return. However, with temperatures set to rise to 36 degrees Celsius, much of the country is still on a high state of alert. Conditions are made worse by Portugal's worst drought since 1945, which has dried up many reservoirs.

## WARM-UPS

**1. FIRE:** Imagine wildfires are all around your town. You can see the flames in the distance. What will you do? Will you gather together your possessions and leave? 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 / being stretched to your limits / narrow escapes / flames / high temperatures / droughts / reservoirs*

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. Use these topics:

- 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. Portugal is waiting for special firefighting planes to arrive.  | T / F |
| b. Portugal's wildfires are its worst in 60 years.                 | T / F |
| c. Firefighters are fanning the flames.                            | T / F |
| d. Firefighters are being stretched to their limits and need help. | T / F |
| e. Portugal's third largest city is very narrow.                   | T / F |
| f. 100,000 people in the city of Coimbra evacuated their homes.    | T / F |
| g. Weather forecasters said the weather would become cooler.       | T / F |
| h. Portugal is experiencing its worst drought since 1945.          | T / F |

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

- |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| a. across     | dangers       |
| b. region     | circumstances |
| c. racing     | just          |
| d. risks      | abandon       |
| e. prevent    | area          |
| f. narrowly   | stop          |
| g. edge       | increase      |
| h. evacuate   | all over      |
| i. rise       | border        |
| j. conditions | speeding      |

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

- |                                |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Special firefighting        | fanning the flames       |
| b. help fight more than twenty | changed direction        |
| c. the worst to hit the region | to 36 degrees Celsius    |
| d. Strong winds are            | in more than 60 years    |
| e. They are being stretched    | the edge of the city     |
| f. narrowly escaped            | airplanes                |
| g. Flames reached              | a high state of alert    |
| h. The wind suddenly           | out-of-control wildfires |
| i. temperatures set to rise    | the fires                |
| j. the country is still on     | to their limits          |

## WHILE READING / LISTENING

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

### Portugal wildfires out of control

**BNE:** Special firefighting *airplanes / submarines* from across Europe have arrived in Portugal to help fight more than twenty *out-of-order / out-of-control* wildfires. The fires are the worst to hit the region in more than 60 years. They are *racing / pacing* through woodland, which is very dry. Strong winds are *banning / fanning* the flames and increasing the risks to firefighters. Nearly 3,000 firefighters are battling to *contain / maintain* the fires and prevent them from destroying property and homes. They are being stretched to their *limits / summits* and need urgent help.

Coimbra, the nation's third largest city, *widely / narrowly* escaped the fires on Tuesday. Flames reached the *edge / wedge* of the city and the population of 100,000 prepared to *evacuate / elevate*. The wind suddenly changed direction and officials said there was now no chance the fires would *return / downturn*. However, with temperatures set to rise to 36 degrees Celsius, much of the country is still on a *high / tall* state of alert. Conditions are made worse by Portugal's worst drought since 1945, which has dried up many *reservoirs / baths*.

## AFTER READING / LISTENING

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

- 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:

- airplanes
- hit
- racing
- fanning
- battling
- stretched
- narrowly
- edge
- direction
- temperatures
- alert
- drought

## DISCUSSION

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

- a. What did you think when you first read this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. What do you think about 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?
- 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 had wildfires for four years?
- f. Reservoirs in Portugal are dry but golf courses are green. Should Portugal's government have 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 set fires in forests?
- i. What kind of prison sentence would you give them?
- 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:** Special firefighting airplanes \_\_\_\_\_ Europe have arrived in Portugal to help fight more than twenty out-of-control \_\_\_\_\_. The fires are the worst to hit the \_\_\_\_\_ in more than 60 years. They are racing through woodland, which is very dry. Strong winds are \_\_\_\_\_ the flames and increasing the risks to firefighters. Nearly 3,000 firefighters are \_\_\_\_\_ to contain the fires and prevent them from \_\_\_\_\_ property and homes. They are being stretched to their \_\_\_\_\_ and need urgent help.

Coimbra, the nation's third largest city, narrowly \_\_\_\_\_ the fires on Tuesday. Flames reached the \_\_\_\_\_ of the city and the population of 100,000 prepared to \_\_\_\_\_. The wind suddenly changed direction and officials said there was now no chance the fires would \_\_\_\_\_. However, with temperatures set to rise to 36 degrees Celsius, much of the country is still on a high state of \_\_\_\_\_. Conditions are made worse by Portugal's worst drought since 1945, which has \_\_\_\_\_ many reservoirs.

## **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. Explain how angry you are that your government cannot protect your country from wildfires. Tell the government what it should do from now. Read your letters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

**4. DIARY / JOURNAL:** Wildfires have been around your home 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. F      b. T      c. F      d. T      e. F      f. F      g. F      h. T

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| a. across     | all over      |
| b. region     | area          |
| c. racing     | speeding      |
| d. risks      | dangers       |
| e. prevent    | stop          |
| f. narrowly   | just          |
| g. edge       | border        |
| h. evacuate   | abandon       |
| i. rise       | increase      |
| j. conditions | circumstances |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |                                |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Special firefighting        | airplanes                |
| b. help fight more than twenty | out-of-control wildfires |
| c. the worst to hit the region | in more than 60 years    |
| d. Strong winds are            | fanning the flames       |
| e. They are being stretched    | to their limits          |
| f. narrowly escaped            | the fires                |
| g. Flames reached              | the edge of the city     |
| h. The wind suddenly           | changed direction        |
| i. temperatures set to rise    | to 36 degrees Celsius    |
| j. the country is still on     | a high state of alert    |

### WHICH WORD?

#### Portugal wildfires out of control

**BNE:** Special firefighting *airplanes* / ~~submarines~~ from across Europe have arrived in Portugal to help fight more than twenty ~~out-of-order~~ / *out-of-control* wildfires. The fires are the worst to hit the region in more than 60 years. They are *racing* / ~~acing~~ through woodland, which is very dry. Strong winds are ~~banning~~ / *fanning* the flames and increasing the risks to firefighters. Nearly 3,000 firefighters are battling to *contain* / ~~maintain~~ the fires and prevent them from destroying property and homes. They are being stretched to their *limits* / ~~summits~~ and need urgent help.

Coimbra, the nation's third largest city, ~~widely~~ / *narrowly* escaped the fires on Tuesday. Flames reached the *edge* / ~~wedge~~ of the city and the population of 100,000 prepared to *evacuate* / ~~elevate~~. The wind suddenly changed direction and officials said there was now no chance the fires would *return* / ~~downturn~~. However, with temperatures set to rise to 36 degrees Celsius, much of the country is still on a *high* / ~~taH~~ state of alert. Conditions are made worse by Portugal's worst drought since 1945, which has dried up many *reservoirs* / ~~baths~~.