

Europe's deadly heat

By [David Gelles](#)

It's not yet summer, and Europe is already suffering from a deadly heat wave.

Parts of France [hit more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit](#) this week, according to AccuWeather. London set a record for the month of May, reaching 95 degrees. Oxford, where records date back 211 years, notched the [highest temperature ever registered](#) this early in the year. Extreme heat was reported in more than half a dozen countries, from Portugal to Switzerland.

The culprit was a "heat dome" caused by warm air that moved up from northern Africa and is now stuck under a high-pressure system that has settled across western Europe. And it comes as [global temperatures continue their rapid rise](#) in recent years, fueled by the unrelenting [burning of fossil fuels](#).

Scientists have said the anomalous warmth is almost certainly linked to human-caused global warming.

"This record-breaking heat has the fingerprints of climate change all over it," Friederike Otto, professor of climate science at Imperial College London, said in a statement.

The broiling temperatures represented an early start to the heat season in Europe. Last year, almost all the continent was unusually hot, [according to the annual European State of the Climate report](#). Europe is warming faster than any other continent, and researchers estimate that in recent years it has seen [tens of thousands of heat-related deaths](#) annually.

ClimaMeter, a group of scientists that studies the link between extreme weather and global warming, [issued a report](#), stating that this heat dome was "an event driven by rare meteorological conditions, whose characteristics are exacerbated by human-driven climate change."

Unprepared

The heat pushed Londoners to line up at public pools and sent crowds at the French Open to seek relief from mist-spraying systems, Lynsey Chutel and Nazaneen Ghaffar [reported for The Times](#).

Heat was linked to at least seven deaths in France in recent days, and the toll was expected to rise. Several of those who died were at the beach, while others were participating in outdoor sporting events, including one person who was running a 10-kilometer race.

"Before 1989, heat waves occurred on average once every five years in mainland France," the country's meteorological service [said in a statement](#), according to Bloomberg. "Since 2000, at least one heat wave has been recorded every summer."

In parts of Italy, the authorities have [placed restrictions on outdoor labor](#) according to France24, while some farmers were forced into the fields, as crops needed to be harvested early.

A wildfire broke out near Edinburgh, which is often still chilly this time of year. And a [spike in water demand](#) left nearly 1,000 homes in England with low water pressure, Bloomberg reported.

Air conditioning is relatively rare in homes and schools in Europe. In England, homes were built for cold weather and designed to retain heat. During heat waves, that makes them hard to cool, [Inside Climate News reported](#). The London Tube can be nine degrees Fahrenheit hotter than the street during a period of intense heat, [Bloomberg reported last year](#).

The hot days were followed by warm nights. [Persistent heat that doesn't break overnight can be particularly dangerous](#) as the body doesn't have the chance to cool down.

Power disruptions

The heat also affected the energy market.

On Sunday, solar power met nearly half of the electricity demand in Britain, [according to Bloomberg](#). Then around midday on Tuesday, hourly electricity prices dipped below zero in France, which can occur when solar and wind power add more energy to the grid than it can use.

But in Germany, power [prices jumped 29 percent](#) on Wednesday, Reuters reported, as electricity demand spiked and the high-pressure system led to low output from windmills, forcing the grid to rely on more expensive sources of power, such as gas and coal.

European consumers are looking for alternatives. [Sales of heat pumps and solar panels have soared in recent months](#), as the war in Iran has caused energy prices to jump for the second time in five years.

"Everyone now knows electrification makes sense," one clean energy executive [told my Times colleague Eshe Nelson](#). "It makes a lot of sense to switch to heat pumps, to solar and green electricity."

The European heat wave is expected to peak on Thursday, with the region cooling in the days ahead.

"This latest heat wave in Europe is a brutal reminder of the spiraling impacts of the climate crisis, both human and economic," Simon Stiell, the United Nations climate chief, said in a statement on Wednesday. **"The main culprit is the world's addiction to burning coal, oil and gas, and destroying forests."**

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