

Extended fire season puts California on alert

By Haya El Nasser, Aljazeera America

The climate change debate currently pits the bulk of the scientific community against holdouts who don't believe rising temperatures are the result of human activity. But in California, a state suffering from a historic drought, why the phenomenon is happening is less important than the simple fact that it is.

Forecasters and fire agencies have tossed aside their normal fire calendar – mid-May to mid-October – and now prepare for what some call a new normal of a greatly extended fire season. They are hiring extra staff and issuing more warnings. Some local officials have warned that fire season in some parts of California has basically become a year-round phenomenon.

The National Weather Service has been issuing an unprecedented number of fire forecasts and alerts in the thick of the usually-wet season, months earlier than normal. Its forecast offices have kicked into fire-season mode well ahead of schedule.

The Sacramento office, which issues fire forecasts for interior Northern California, decided last week to up its daily seven-day forecasts to twice a day, and its National Fire Danger Rating System, which measures the seriousness of fire conditions, is going out earlier.

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