

Dutch raise summer heatwave toll

As many as 1,400 Dutch people died in the summer heatwave which gripped large parts of Europe, officials say.

The total is up on an earlier Dutch official estimate that between 500 and 1,000 people died.

The new tally says at least 1,000, and possibly as many as 1,400, were killed between June and August.

In August - the peak of the extreme heat - temperatures repeatedly topped 30C, in a country where the average would normally have been 22C (72F).

In France, worst-hit by the heatwave, a special commission set up in the wake of the crisis was preparing on Monday to publish its report on who was to blame.

ESTIMATED DEAD

- France - 11,400
- Netherlands - 1,400
- Portugal - 1,300
- UK - 900
- Spain - 100

More than 11,000 mainly elderly people died as temperatures above 40C (104F) gripped the country in August.

The French Government was stung by accusations that it had reacted slowly to the crisis.

It appointed the commission, which includes doctors and academics, to investigate whether changes in the system are needed.

Some have blamed the high number of deaths on the 35-hour working week - which has led to staff shortages.

Others have pointed to the separation of some elderly people from their families, and to shortcomings in French crisis and information systems.

Dozens of bodies remained unclaimed despite appeals for relatives to come forward, and the creation of a special task force to trace them.

The victims were buried last week in paupers' graves in an official ceremony.

The oldest was 97-year-old Georgette Guebey; the youngest was a man believed to be called Philippe Leger who was 36.

The heat has now subsided, but some forest fires have continued to burn.

Last week three firemen died as they fought a blaze in the Maures hills in Provence, already hit by devastating fires earlier in the summer.

Farmers are continuing to feel the effects of the heat. In the Haute-Pyrenees departement of France, there is anger that the area has been excluded from France's officially-designated disaster area, reducing the aid available to farmers.

Even Christmas trees have suffered. A million newly-planted trees which would have been sold in five or six years' time were lost, said Frederic Naudet, president of the AFSNN association for natural Christmas trees.

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/europe/3089794.stm>

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