

Winter wildfires surge in Uttarakhand, 1000+ alerts received

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DEHRADUN: Uttarakhand is witnessing a rise in winter wildfires, a phenomenon that usually begins on November 1. The Forest Survey of India (FSI), the apex body of the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC), has sent 1006 fire alerts to Uttarakhand between November 1 and January 1. Compared with the previous year, there is a notable increase, as 556 fire alerts were received during the same period.

Wildfires have been reported across almost all districts, including Uttarkashi, Nainital, Bageshwar, Tehri, Dehradun, Pithoragarh, Pauri, and Almora. Villagers expressed concern, citing the absence of rainfall or snow in the last three months, making the region dry.

On New Year's Eve, Nainital experienced heightened forest fires. Jawan Singh Rawat, a Nainital resident, said, "Smoke billowed from Hartola hill in Ramgarh, Nainital, on the December 31 evening, with heavy plumes visible from a distance. These fires may lead to increased human-wildlife conflicts, as animals venture out to escape the flames."

Wildlife conservationists expressed concern, suggesting a link between fires and illegal activities, saying, "To corner innocent wildlife, forests are lit by anti-forest elements. Increased patrolling is required as wildlife descends to lower altitudes during this season."

Forest officials cited multiple reasons for the surge in fire alerts. Nishant Verma, chief conservator of forests (forest fires), said, "We are verifying these alerts through field teams before reporting actual forest fire incidents. Controlled burning by forest staff, agricultural residue burning by farmers, waste burning by villagers in barren land, and systematic clearing of forests by the forest corporation contribute to these alerts."