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Europe 'will be hit by severe drought' without urgent action on emissions

Southern England would be badly affected – while Spain, Portugal, southern Italy, Greece would turn into semi-desert

David Adam in Copenhagen
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A burnt-out firefighters' truck after forest fires devastated southern Greece during a heatwave last August. Photograph: Louisa Goulimaki/AFP/Getty Images

Europe will be struck by a series of severe droughts that will make life "hell" for hundreds of millions of people unless urgent action is taken to reduce [carbon emissions](#), a new study shows.

Large swaths of land, from Portugal to Ukraine, will suffer serious droughts at least every other year by the end of the century if average temperatures rise by 4C. Southern England would also be severely affected, with summers as dry as the droughts of 1976 and 1995 expected every other year.

Rachel Warren, a climate expert at the University of East Anglia, who presented the new research to a global warming conference in Copenhagen today, said: "We are looking at enormous increases in [drought](#) over the 21st century, particularly in the south."

Spain, Portugal, southern Italy, Greece and numerous other countries would be turned to semi-desert as [climate change](#) turned off their rainfall, the study shows. Asked what life would be like there, Warren said: "Hell, I should think. It is incomprehensible to imagine adapting to that level of drought."

Other studies have predicted increased drought in southern Europe, but these are the most severe conditions so far. "I certainly haven't seen such a dramatic picture."

She added: "The message has to get out that this can be avoided. The world has to pull together to deliver the kind of [carbon] cuts we need."

Strict controls on greenhouse gas emissions would prevent almost all of the damage, the research shows.

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