

# Forest Fires Return to Haunt Uttarakhand

*Seema Sharma*

About a week after the forest fires in different parts of Uttarakhand were doused, largely due to rains, fires have returned, this time on Varunavrat Parvat of Uttarkashi. The raging inferno were noticed at 4 am. Though there was no report of casualties, the fire took place in the most susceptible landslide zone which is being studied by geologists.

More than four thousand hectare forest area has been destroyed in thousands of incidents across the state which reached to pinnacle on April 27 to 29. However, the series of fire incidents came to a sudden halt from May 5 onwards when a good spell of rain fall doused the blaze simmering at various forest areas of the state.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests of Uttarakhand, Rajender Mahajan said, "The fire was witnessed at 4 in the morning at Varunavrat Parvat. After this the division forest official deputed 25 forest personal in the task of extinguishing the fire which was finally brought under control by 10. The report about extent of damage is yet to be evaluated. However, there was no case of injury or casualty of any human life. "

However, local eye-witness told *TOI* that the massive fire was still on in the Varunavrat and was not extinguished till evening. Not only in Uttarkashi, but fire report also came from Tehri and Ramnagar forest division. When *TOI* tried to contact the forest fire incharge-B.D. Gupta, to get detail about these fires, he did not respond to the calls.

Mahahjan said, the spell of dryness in the air is ringing the alarming bell for the forest department. "The way the rain spell has come to a halt and, the drying in the air is being reported from several regions in the state, we have become alert. The chief minister too held meeting with us on the Sunday morning on the subject of forest fire and directed us to be on guard in this regard."

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