

# Forest Fires: MOEFCC Pegs Losses at Rs. 18L

*Vineet Upadhyay*

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), in an affidavit submitted to the Uttarakhand High Court on Monday, mentioned that a total of 922 incidents of forest fires had occurred in Uttarakhand, destroying 1890.79 hectares till April 29 this year. The fires had resulted in losses to the tune of Rs. 1,801,695 the affidavit said.

The ministry also apprised the court about an indigenous methodology, developed by Forest Survey of India and known as Web Fire Mapper, to detect fires. It informed the court about several other measures, such as creation and maintenance of fire lines, construction of watch towers, procurement of fire equipment and other fire-control techniques.

The affidavit dated May 9, 2016, stated that the Union Home Ministry has already constituted 'a team of experts' to undertake a visit to affected areas for a comprehensive and detailed study. The team will also 'suggest appropriate measures to fight forest fires'.

The ministry also informed the HC that despite repeated reminders by the Union ministry since 2010, the state government has not submitted a 'crisis management plan' to deal with such disasters.

Earlier, treating the cases of wildfires as a PIL, Uttarakhand HC on May 2 gave the Centre and state time till May 9 to furnish before it a "comprehensive 360 degrees details" of the extent of damage caused by the forest fires.

The division bench of Chief Justice K.M. Joseph and Justice V.K. Bisht took the matter 'seriously' as media reports said extensive damage was done to the environment and huge of property.

The number of fire-fighting staff in the state has also been increased from 3,000 to 6,000 to control the fires which caused extensive damage to flora and fauna in 60 per cent of forest land in the state.

Last month, forest fires broke out in several districts of the hill state. Though small forest fires are reported every year in the state, this time the situation was alarming as there had been no rainfall this season and the fires spread quickly.

*The Times of India (New Delhi), 11 May 2016*