New UN online tool detects global fire hotspots in real time

11 August 2010 – The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today **unveiled** a new online portal to help countries monitor fires and protect property with data from satellites operated by the United States space agency NASA.

The new Global Fire Information Management System (**GFIMS**) shows fire hotspots almost in real time, with a lag of 2.5 hours between when satellites pass over fires to when information is available.

Developed with the University of Maryland, it also allows users to receive email alerts, allowing them to react quickly.

The launch of GFIMS comes at a time when the incidence of megafires is on the rise, according to Pieter van Lierop, an **FAO** Forestry Officer responsible for the agency's activities in fire management.

"The control of these fires has become an issue of high importance, not only because of the increasing number of area burned but also because of the relations with issues of global interest, like climate change," he stressed.

The unprecedented heat wave in Russia, which saw temperatures soar to 40 degrees Celsius and winds of up to 20 metres per second, have caused more than 14 million acres to burn. Forest fires have already claimed more than 50 lives this summer in Russia.

Globally, vegetation fires affect some 350 million hectares of land annually, with half or more of this area situated in Europe.

Until recently, people managing natural resources faced hurdles in obtaining timely and satellite-driven information on vegetation fires.

"The information was very fragmented because it was gathered from various sources making it unsuitable for precise analysis and identifying trends," said John Latham, Senior Environment Office in FAO's Natural Resources Management and Environment Department.

GFIMS, he said, delivers essential data to its users while fires are still burning.

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