

Italy heat 'killed 4,000'

More than 4,000 elderly Italians died in this summer's heatwave, the country's Health Ministry has estimated.

It said on Thursday that 34,071 people over 65 died between 16 July and 15 August, compared with 29,896 in the same period last year.

The ministry had initially refused to release any figures, saying that it would be impossible to determine whether the extra deaths were caused by the heat.

It was forced to back down as a result of media pressure.

The heatwave, which saw temperatures consistently above 40C in some parts of Europe, brought a sharp increase in death rates in several countries.

In France, the government said more than 11,000 people had died as a result of the unusual weather, and the inability of the health system to cope.

ESTIMATED DEAD

- France - 11,400
- Italy - 4,200
- Netherlands - 1,400
- Portugal - 1,300
- UK - 900
- Spain - 100

The Italian Health Ministry launched an investigation in late August.

On Thursday, an official of the Health Ministry's Superior Health Institute, Dr Donato Greco, said it would not be possible to blame all the extra deaths on the heat without further study.

However, he added: "There is a relationship between heat peaks and mortality."

In Italy, temperatures started rising in June and soared well into the 40s in July and August in many parts of the country.

Temperatures were generally higher in Italy than in France, and led to water shortages and major forest fires.

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/europe/3099878.stm>

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