

Seven dead after storms lash France, Switzerland and Italy

AFP- Ferocious storms and torrential rains that lashed France, Switzerland and Italy this weekend have left at least seven people dead, local authorities said on Sunday.

Three people died after torrential rains triggered a landslide in southeastern Switzerland, police in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino said Sunday.

Elsewhere in Switzerland, a man was found dead in a hotel in Saas-Grund in the southwest canton of Valais, police said, adding that he was probably taken by surprise by a sudden rapid rise in floodwater.

Images published in the online publication 20minuten showed parts of the town covered in a thick layer of mud and rocks.

Another man is also missing in Valais, police said.

In France, three people in their 70s and 80s died in the northeastern Aube region on Saturday when a falling tree crushed the car they were travelling in, the local authority told AFP.

A fourth passenger was in critical care, it added.

Switzerland's civil security services said "several hundred" people were evacuated in the southern canton of Valais and roads closed after the Rhone and its tributaries overflowed in different locations.

The situation in Valais was "under control" Sunday, Frederic Favre, the official responsible for civil security, told a press conference, but he warned that it would remain "fragile" for the next several days.

Emergency services were assessing the best way to evacuate 300

people who had arrived for a football tournament in the mountain town of Peccia, while almost 70 more were being evacuated from a holiday camp in the village of Mogno.

The poor weather was making rescue work particularly difficult, police had said earlier, with several valleys in the southern cantons of Ticino and Valais near the border with Italy, inaccessible and cut off from the electricity network.

In Ticino, some 400 people – including 40 children from a holiday camp – had to be evacuated from risk areas and taken to civil protection centres.

The federal alert system also said part of the canton was without drinking water.

Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis, who is from Ticino, said the repeated disasters “have touched us deeply”.

It’s the worst flooding experienced in the canton since 2000 when 13 people were killed in a mudslide which destroyed the village of Gondo.

Scientists say climate change driven by human activity is increasing the severity, frequency and length of extreme weather events such as floods and storms.

– Italy flooding –

In northern Italy, Piedmont and the Aosta Valley also suffered flooding and mudslides, though no deaths were reported.

Firefighters in Piedmont announced Sunday morning that they had carried out 80 operations to rescue people in difficulty.

A mudslide temporarily blocked a regional road to the ski resort of Cervinia in the Aosta Valley, a semi-autonomous region located along the border with France and Switzerland.

A river which burst its banks caused significant damage to the

centre of the town where several streets were flooded.

A mudslide blocked access to Cogne, a village of 1,300 people in the Aosta Valley, where 90 millimetres of rainfall was recorded in a six-hour period on Saturday.

At the European football championships in Germany, a match between Germany and Denmark Saturday evening was interrupted for almost half an hour because of heavy rain and lightning.

AFP