Gaza arson balloons spark 19 blazes in south

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Incendiary balloons launched from the Gaza Strip started 19 fires in southern Israel on Wednesday, according to authorities.

The southern branch of the Fire and Rescue services said the blazes were quickly extinguished and that investigators determined they were started by arson balloons.

Israel has recently seen a rash of cross-border arson attacks and on Tuesday announced it would cut supplies of fuel to Gaza in response.

The halting of fuel shipments marked a shift for Israel, which over the last several weeks opted instead to put various restrictions on the size of the Strip’s fishing zone in response to arson attacks.

Israel in the past has cut off fuel supplies to Gaza’s sole electricity station in response to attacks emanating from the Strip, though such moves have drawn criticism from Palestinians and the international community for worsening an already dire humanitarian situation in the Strip.

Tensions with Gaza have been steadily rising in recent weeks amid a spike of incendiary balloon attacks, including some that carried explosive devices that detonated in the air or on the ground inside Israeli territory.

Earlier this month saw a fresh surge in violence, including two nights of rocket attacks and retaliatory Israeli air force strikes.

On Tuesday, a senior Hamas member warned Tuesday that Israeli policies toward Gaza were endangering unofficial ceasefire understandings between the sides.