

Can alarms stop forest fires?

That's the hope for the Senticnel, a new gadget that's already helping to preserve Spain's at-risk woodlands

Words/Mandi Keighran → Illustration/Al Murphy

Having a fire alarm at home is a bit of a no-brainer these days – after all, they save lives and property. So why not a fire alarm for a forest? That's the idea behind Senticnel, a new concept by Spanish company NTForest in collaboration with design studio Eli-Gutierrez.

"We thought it was such an amazing and innovative idea," says Elizabeth Gutierrez, lead designer on the project. "It's something that's really useful and can help to preserve the forest."

Senticnel is a network of tree-mounted wireless pods that measure temperature, humidity, radiation, wind speed and direction over a five kilometre radius. They can detect fires and work out where and how they might spread. A central hub then receives this data and relays it to, for example, a mobile phone or laptop, so monitors can be alerted wherever they are and notify the relevant authorities in just minutes.

Currently, the system is being used in two woodlands on the edge of the city of Valencia, Spain – the La Vallesa forest has 20 sensors installed, and there are 11 sensors protecting trees in the El Vedat hills. The goal for the near future is to expand the areas where the pods are installed, and then roll out the concept to other countries. It's a great example of how the Internet of Things can be used to protect the natural world.

"In a moment like this, with the threat of global warming and the depletion of natural resources, we think it's important to try to preserve as much as possible of the ecosystem that surrounds us," says Gutierrez. "We need to understand that there is only one earth, and we have to preserve it." *senticnel.com, eli-gutierrez.com*

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P. 20

Who are the Reindeer Police?



P. 29

Fancy a free concert in your living room?

QnA

This month's key questions answered



P. 23

Can this gadget save forests?



P. 27

Is '80s streetwear making a comeback?



P. 24

How can you paint with metal?