

# Death toll from Northwest heat wave expected to keep rising

July 2 2021, by Manuel Valdes

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A Salvation Army EMS vehicle is setup as a cooling station as people lineup to get into a splash park while trying to beat the heat in Calgary, Alberta, Wednesday, June 30, 2021. Environment Canada warns the torrid heat wave that has settled over much of Western Canada won't lift for days. Credit: Jeff McIntosh/The Canadian Press via AP

Each day, more deaths are being linked to the heat wave that struck the Pacific Northwest this past week, with medical staff who treated people

overwhelmed by temperatures well above 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 Celsius) saying the toll from the extreme weather will keep creeping up.

Hundreds of deaths were being investigated as heat related in Oregon, Washington state and British Columbia. The dangerous heat began June 25 and only began to subside in some areas on Tuesday.

The death toll in Oregon alone has reached at least 95, the state medical examiner said on Friday, with most occurring in Multnomah County, which encompasses Portland. The deaths include an Guatemalan immigrant who collapsed as he worked at a plant nursery in a rural Oregon town during the soaring heat.

In Canada, British Columbia's chief coroner, Lisa Lapointe, said Friday that 719 sudden and unexpected deaths have been reported in the province during the heat wave, and that number over a seven-day period is unprecedented. LaPointe said the number of deaths is three times more than what would normally occur during the same period.

The intense temperatures are believed to be a significant contributing factor in the jump, but the number is expected to increase as more information is compiled, LaPointe said.

Washington state authorities have linked about 30 deaths to the heat, with more reports coming in each day this week.



A sign that reads "Does your dog need water? Let us know!!" is seen Monday, June 28, 2021, at Yakima Community Aid's cooling station in Yakima, Wash. Credit: Amanda Ray /Yakima Herald-Republic via AP

"I think, over time, we will understand that the numbers are only going to climb," said Dr. Steve Mitchell, director of Harborview Medical Center's Emergency Medicine Department in Seattle. "I know, in my experience, that I'm expecting to see much larger numbers than what we are currently able to report because of talking to EMS colleagues who were experiencing twice as many calls for help that day."

There were 1,792 emergency room visits for suspected heat-related illness since June 25, the Washington state Department of Health said Thursday. Of those visits, 21% required people to be admitted to the



hospital.

Monday had the most emergency room visits, with 702, the health department said. It was the hottest day of the heat wave in many areas, with Seattle, Portland, Oregon, and other cities smashing all-time heat records. It reached 108 F (42 C) in Seattle, and 116 F (47) in Oregon's largest city.



With the temperature well over 100 degrees, Spokane, Wash., firefighter Sean Condon, left and Lt. Gabe Mills, assigned to the Alternative Response Unit of of Station 1, check on the welfare of a man in Mission Park in Spokane, Wash., Tuesday, June 29, 2021. The special fire unit, which responds to low priority calls, has been kept busy during this week's heatwave. Credit: Colin

Mulvany/The Spokesman-Review via AP



A Salvation Army EMS vehicle is setup as a cooling station as people lineup to get into a splash park while trying to beat the heat in Calgary, Alberta., Wednesday, June 30, 2021. Environment Canada warns the torrid heat wave that has settled over much of Western Canada won't lift for days. Credit: Jeff McIntosh/The Canadian Press via AP





Farmworkers, who declined to give their names, break up earth, Thursday, July 1, 2021, near St. Paul, Ore., as a heat wave bakes the Pacific Northwest in record-high temperatures. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard



Pedro Lucas, left, nephew of farm worker Sebastian Francisco Perez who died last weekend while working in an extreme heat wave, breaks up earth, Thursday, July 1, 2021, near St. Paul, Ore. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard





Water comes crashing down from a bucket directly on top of Jaecee Adams, 7, of Orofino, as she plays at the Orofino Splash Pad in Orofino, Idaho on Wednesday, June 30, 2021. Credit: August Frank/The Lewiston Tribune via AP





Leighanna Bardgett, 7, splashes her father Jessuah, right, as they cool off in the Bitterroot River as temperatures reached over 100 degrees in Missoula, Montana, on Wednesday, June 30, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Tommy Martino





In this aerial photo taken from a helicopter, structures destroyed by a wildfire are



seen in Lytton, British Columbia, on Thursday, July 1, 2021. A wildfire that forced people to flee a small town in British Columbia that had set record high temperatures for Canada on three consecutive days burned out of control Thursday as relatives desperately sought information on evacuees. Credit: Darryl Dyck/The Canadian Press via AP



Patrons of the Bitterroot River jump into the cool water as temperatures crested 100 degrees in Missoula, Montana, on Wednesday, June 30, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Tommy Martino



Kais Bothe relaxes in the cool in the city hall pool, as temperatures hit 37 degrees Celsius in Edmonton, Alberta, on Wednesday, June 30, 2021. Credit: Jason Franson/The Canadian Press via AP





Farmworkers, who declined to give their names, break up ground, Thursday, July, 1, 2021, near St. Paul, Ore., as a heat wave bakes the Pacific Northwest in record-high temperatures. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard

"With this latest heat emergency, when we were dealing with it, the only thing comparable at Harborview and in the region that we've experienced recently was actually the early days of COVID," Mitchell said.

Forecasters blamed the temperatures that spiked more than 30 degrees above normal on a "heat dome" that parked a strong high pressure system over the region. Temperatures cooled considerably in western Washington and Oregon by Tuesday, though a heat warning was still in effect for parts of the interior Northwest and Canada.

Experts say the hot weather is a harbinger of things to come as climate change affects global weather patterns.

The extraordinary heat wave stretched into the upper reaches of California, where several wildfires erupted in the hot, dry conditions, making it difficult for firefighters trying to beat back the flames that have driven thousands from their homes in mountain communities and burned several residences.

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