

Heat wave hits Northwest, sending people to cooling centers

August 12 2021, by Gillian Flaccus



A volunteer helps set up snacks at a cooling center established to help vulnerable residents ride out the second dangerous heat wave to grip the Pacific Northwest this summer, on Wednesday, Aug. 11, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus

People headed to cooling centers Wednesday as the Pacific Northwest began sweltering under another major, multiday heat wave just over a month after record-shattering hot weather killed hundreds of the region's most vulnerable people.

Temperatures soared to 97 degrees Fahrenheit (36.1 Celsius) by the evening in Portland, Oregon. In a "[worst-case scenario](#)," the [temperature](#) could reach as high as 111 F (44 C) in some parts of western Oregon this week before a weekend cooldown, the National Weather Service said. It's more likely temperatures will rise to 100 F (38 C) or above for three consecutive days, peaking around 105 F (40.5 C) on Thursday.

Sizzling weather also was expected in other parts of the country. The weather service said heat advisories and warnings would be in effect from the Midwest to the Northeast and mid-Atlantic through at least Friday.

The high temperatures in Portland, part of a usually temperate region, would break all-time records this week if the late June heat wave had not done so already, meteorologist Tyler Kranz said. Seattle will be cooler than Portland, with temperatures in the mid-90s, but it still has a chance to break records, and many people there, like in Oregon, don't have [air conditioning](#).

The forecast was hotter than for Phoenix, a desert city notorious for its blistering summertime temperatures.



December Snedecor, a homeless woman who lives in a tent in Portland, Ore., helps set up snacks at a cooling center established to help vulnerable residents ride out the second dangerous heat wave to grip the Pacific Northwest this summer on Wednesday, Aug. 11, 2021. Snedecor, 46, spent two nights at the same cooling center in June when temperatures in the city soared to 116 degrees Fahrenheit and she plans to spend the night there again this week as temperatures are forecast to hit 100 F or higher for three consecutive days. Credit: AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus

"We'll often hear people say, 'Who cares if it's 106 or 108? It gets this hot in Arizona all the time.' Well, people in Arizona have air conditioning, and here in the Pacific Northwest, a lot of people don't,"

Kranz said. "You can't really compare us to the desert Southwest."

People began coming into a 24-hour cooling center in north Portland before it opened Wednesday. Volunteers and county employees set up cots and stacked hundreds of bottles of water in the air-conditioned center in a vacant building.

The first few people in were experiencing homelessness, a population vulnerable to [extreme heat](#). Among them was December Snedecor, who slept two nights in the same center in June when temperatures reached 116 F (47 C).

She said she planned to sleep there again this week because the heat in her tent was unbearable.



Volunteers and Multnomah County employees unload cases of water to supply a 24-hour cooling center set up in Portland, Ore., Wednesday, Aug. 11, 2021, as a dangerous heat wave grips the Pacific Northwest. Credit: AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus

"I poured water over myself a lot. It was up in the teens, hundred-and-something heat. It made me dizzy. It was not good," Snedecor said of the June heat. "I've just got to stay cool. I don't want to die."

Gov. Kate Brown has declared a [state of emergency](#) and activated an emergency operations center, citing the potential for disruptions to the power grid and transportation. Besides opening cooling centers, city and

county governments are extending public library hours and waiving bus fare for those headed to cooling centers. A 24-hour statewide help line will direct callers to the nearest cooling shelter and offer safety tips.

Emergency officials have sent alerts to phones, said Dan Douthit, spokesman for the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management.

"We don't know exactly how hot it will get, but we're planning for a worst-case scenario," he said.



In this June 30, 2021 file photo Missoulians cool off in the Bitterroot River as temperatures crested 100 degrees Fahrenheit in Missoula, Mont. The Pacific Northwest is bracing for another major, multi-day heat wave in mid-August 2021 just a month after temperatures soared as high as 116 F in a record-shattering heat event that killed scores of the most vulnerable across the region.

Credit: AP Photo/Tommy Martino, File

The back-to-back heat waves, coupled with a summer that's been exceptionally warm and dry overall, are pummeling a region where summer highs usually drift into the 70s or 80s. Intense heat waves and a historic drought in the American West reflect climate change that is making weather more extreme.

The June heat in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia killed hundreds of people and served as a wake-up call for what's ahead in a warming world. It was virtually impossible without human-caused climate change, [a detailed scientific analysis found](#).

In Oregon, officials have released the names of 96 people who died of heat-related illness, and the [hot weather](#) was being investigated as a possible cause in many more deaths. Washington state reported more than 100 heat deaths, and officials in British Columbia say hundreds of "sudden and unexpected deaths" were likely due to the soaring temperatures.

The toll exposed huge blind spots in emergency planning in a region unaccustomed to dealing with such high temperatures, said Vivek Shandas, a professor of climate adaptation at Portland State University.



In this June 28, 2021 file photo the Kangaroo and Kiwi restaurant in the old Carnegie Library on Market Street NW uses misters to keep outdoor patrons cool on the hottest day in Seattle history. The Pacific Northwest is bracing for another major, multi-day heat wave in mid-August 2021 just a month after temperatures soared as high as 116 F in a record-shattering heat event that killed scores of the most vulnerable across the region. Credit: Dean Rutz/The Seattle Times via AP, File

Most of those who died in Oregon were older, homebound and socially isolated, and many were unable, or unwilling, to get to cooling centers.

The call center designed to provide information about cooling centers was unstaffed during part of the peak heat, and hundreds of callers got stuck in a voicemail menu that didn't include a prompt for heat-related

help. Portland's famed light-rail train also shut down to reduce strain on the power grid, eliminating a transportation option for low-income residents seeking relief.

This time, local and state officials have added more cooling centers and included a prompt in the call center voicemail.

"We knew a week in advance. What would happen if we knew an earthquake was going to hit us a week in advance?" Shandas said. "That's the kind of thinking we need to be aligned with."



In this June 28, 2021 file photo a display at an Olympia Federal Savings branch shows a temperature of 107 degrees Fahrenheit, in the early evening in Olympia, Wash. The Pacific Northwest is bracing for another major, multi-day heat wave in mid-August 2021 just a month after temperatures soared as high as 116 F in a record-shattering heat event that killed scores of the most vulnerable across the region. Credit: AP Photo/Ted S. Warren, File



In this July 1, 2021 file photo, farmworkers till soil as a heat wave bakes the Pacific Northwest in record-high temperatures near St. Paul, Ore. The Pacific Northwest is bracing for another major, multi-day heat wave in mid-August 2021 just a month after temperatures soared as high as 116 F in a record-shattering heat event that killed scores of the most vulnerable across the region. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard, File

Yet even younger residents struggled with the [heat](#) in June and dreaded this week's sweltering temperatures.

Katherine Morgan, 27, has no air conditioning in her third-floor apartment and can't afford a window unit on the money she makes

working at a bookstore and as a hostess at a brewery.

She'll have to walk to work Thursday, the day when temperatures could again soar.

"All my friends and I knew that [climate change](#) was real, but it's getting really scary because it was gradually getting hot—and it suddenly got really hot, really fast," Morgan said.

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