

Severe heat wave spread across much of US

Evan Blake
25 July 2016

Over the past week, heat wave conditions have spread across much of the United States, affecting tens of millions of people. In the eastern two-thirds of the US, heat indices surpassed 100 degrees Fahrenheit in numerous cities.

For the first time in at least a decade (as far back as records go), parts of the country's three largest metropolitan areas—New York, Los Angeles and Chicago—simultaneously received heat wave alerts from the National Weather Service (NWS) Friday morning. Other large cities, including Philadelphia, Kansas City, St. Louis, Phoenix and Minneapolis, were also under heat watches, warnings or advisories. In total, over 122 million Americans across 26 states received heat alerts of varying degrees from the NWS.

In the past week alone, at least eight deaths have been attributed to the extreme heat. These have included a four-year-old girl in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, a 12-year-old boy in Arizona, an elderly man in Memphis, Tennessee, and five other heat-related deaths in Roseville, Michigan.

The heat wave stems from a high pressure ridge located at the middle and upper levels of the atmosphere, which is reflecting heat downward and preventing the formation of clouds and precipitation, in the process forming what is referred to as a “heat dome” of intense heat and humidity. The high pressure also traps air pollutants closer to the ground, diminishing air quality. First centered in the Midwest, the “heat dome” has been broadening geographically, covering the eastern two-thirds of the country and reaching Southern California this week.

“It’s oppressive and dangerous for people exposed to this condition,” Chris Vaccaro, a spokesman for the NWS, told the *Los Angeles Times*. “This is the most significant heat wave of the year,” Vaccaro added.

In the past month, the National Climatic Data Center recorded that 570 American cities have broken their

daily highest maximum temperature measurements, while another 450 have tied their historical peaks.

Last month’s State of the Climate report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) revealed that temperatures in June were the highest on record for the month, making it the 14th consecutive record-breaking month. The report also noted that the first six months of 2016 were the hottest recorded since measurements began in 1880.

Despite the North and Southeast regions experiencing reduced temperatures Sunday, the heat wave is forecast to continue and deepen throughout the coming week. The NWS has issued an excessive heat warning through Monday for large parts of the country, including northern Delaware, central and southern New Jersey and southeast Pennsylvania.

As a consequence of the extreme heat, numerous wildfires have erupted across the country in recent weeks, with the most severe taking place in California, Wyoming and Utah.

In Los Angeles, which has been intermittently experiencing heat wave conditions since early June, the Sand Fire erupted Friday in Santa Clarita Valley, rapidly growing to cover a swath of over 22,000 acres by Sunday afternoon.

The Sand Fire was initially centered in uninhabited areas near State Route 14. Fueled by raging winds Saturday night, the fire now threatens hundreds of homes in a Santa Clarita neighborhood, forcing roughly 1,500 residents to evacuate. As of this writing, 18 structures have been destroyed by the fire, while one possibly fire-related death has been reported. The fire remains only 10 percent contained.

In Monterey County in Northern California, a wildfire erupted Friday and has burned over 6,500 acres, forcing nearby residents to flee. Officials estimate that the fire threatens roughly 1,000 homes.

The Lava Mountain Fire, located in the Shoshone

National Forest in northwest Wyoming, began Thursday night during a lightning storm. The fire quadrupled in size Sunday, growing to 4,269 acres, and is zero percent contained. In northeast Wyoming, the Hatchery Fire has burned 3,000 acres and threatens multiple structures.

In Utah, the West Antelope Fire has grown to over 13,000 acres, by far the largest in the state. The Choke Cherry Fire near Ibapah, Utah has burned over 1,600 acres since it began July 18.

On Friday, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officially denied federal assistance to the victims of the devastating 36,000-acre Erskine wildfire in highly impoverished Kern County, located north of Los Angeles in California's Central Valley.

The fire erupted June 23, ultimately destroying 285 homes and killing two people. In their rejection notice, FEMA callously declared, "we have determined that supplemental federal assistance is not necessary."

The heat wave crisis presently engulfing a majority of the United States undoubtedly stems from global warming, which scientists have repeatedly warned will cause an ever-increasing frequency of extreme weather events such as "heat domes." To resolve such a monumental problem as climate change requires a socialist revolution by the international working class, to rebuild society in the interests of the vast majority, not the handful of plutocrats currently plunging mankind toward the abyss.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)