

Deadly heat wave hits central and eastern US

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The severe heat wave that swept the Midwestern United States this weekend caused 11 deaths. Power outages related to the heat wave left over 98,000 households in Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois without power, with several thousand still without power as of Monday.

Powerful storms followed the heat wave and flooded portions of the city of Chicago, northwest Illinois, northern Wisconsin and Minnesota. Floods have trapped motorists, closed freeways, and injured several.

The heat dome spread to the Eastern United States just in time for the opening of the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The dome is a zone of high-pressure warm air that inhibits cooler Arctic air from reaching the northern US.

Intense thunderstorms have followed the heat dome east, causing flooding in Philadelphia, record-setting high temperatures in Baltimore and Washington DC, and power outages from storms in New York City. The sporadic power outages in NYC sent the real-time price of electricity skyrocketing over \$1,000 per megawatt, from \$50 earlier in the day.

Five of the heat-related deaths in the Midwest were in Roseville, Michigan, near the city of Detroit. The deaths in Roseville were attributed to heart and lung problems exacerbated by the heat. Age and poverty-related health conditions, such as diabetes and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), make people especially susceptible to heat-related mortality. Dehydration and respiratory distress from humidity lead to death within hours. Several in Roseville died of heart attacks.

The city of Detroit is the poorest large city in the United States, with overall poverty levels of 39.3 percent and a child poverty rate of 57 percent. From the financial and housing crash in 2008 to the city bankruptcy in 2014, the living standards of the people of Detroit have been under relentless attack. Both

autoworkers and city employees have had their pensions gutted to subsidize bailouts of the parasitic auto and finance industries. Foreclosures and evictions have displaced many residents into substandard public housing. (See “Seniors face eviction in Detroit gentrification plan”).

Hikes in utility rates and cuts to local transit have driven up the cost of living and reduced ease of travel for the urban poor. Many in Detroit have to rely on public transit, with 24 percent of city residents having no car. Detroit area utility costs have been up to 24 percent higher than the national average for the past four years.

The city of Detroit offers “cooling centers” for those without air conditioning, but access is not adequate. A 2012 study by the University of Michigan concluded that only 30 percent of the most vulnerable populations could reach a cooling center on foot without risking heat stroke. The researchers declared that the city must “improve the effectiveness of emergency response measures during future extreme heat events.”

Previous heat waves in the Midwest have strongly impacted the urban poor. Heat island effects have killed hundreds in the US and thousands in Asia in the last few years. The city of Chicago experienced a heat wave in 1995 that claimed over 500 lives in three days. More recently, both India and Pakistan experienced heat waves that claimed thousands.

These deaths are preventable. The energy corporations and Republican and Democratic administrations, including the Obama White House, have intentionally neglected upgrades to infrastructure such as roads, utilities and housing for decades. Subpar housing, crumbling roads, and ancient electrical infrastructure are all indicators of the disdain the ruling class has for even the most basic needs for the masses of people.

Climate change is tied to the rise in severe weather

episodes and extreme temperatures. So far, every month in 2016 has set yet another all-time temperature record. Detroit is identified by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) as an urban area of concern under climate change.

NRDC writes: “By 2099, Detroit is estimated to experience 36 excessive heat event days per summer, up from nine days on average between 1975-1995.” The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts an extra 100 to 250 heat-related deaths every summer in the city of Detroit due to climate change.



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