

# Second heatwave of 2019 shatters temperature records in western Europe

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This week's heatwave across western Europe on Wednesday and Thursday saw all-time temperature records broken in multiple countries, including in France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Luxemburg.

A significant element of the heatwave commented on by climate scientists was that heat records were not only beaten but shattered by between two and four degrees.

On Thursday Paris saw temperatures reach 42.6 Celsius (108.7 Fahrenheit), beating the previous record for the city of 40.4 degrees, measured at the Montsouris park more than 70 years ago. The national record of 45.9 degrees was set in June this year.

The Netherlands and Germany both set records on Wednesday and then beat them the following day. Temperatures reached 40.7 degrees in the Netherlands, the first ever registering of a temperature over 40 degrees in the country. In Germany, the previous record of 40.3 degrees from July 2015 was beaten by 2.3 degrees.

In Belgium, the national record of 39.9 degrees in Kleine Brogel set on Wednesday was re-set on Thursday at 41.8 degrees in Begijnendijk.

In the UK, the temperature exceeded 37.8 C (100 degrees Fahrenheit) for the second time ever.

There are already reports of at least six fatalities across Belgium and France, but the real number is far higher. Deaths caused from heatwaves are often difficult to specify because those most at risk of dying are the elderly, poor and disabled who are already at greater health risk.

In France, the government reported that by Wednesday already five people had died, 27 had been entered into emergency care at hospitals and another 371 had received urgent medical attention. No information has been provided about the people who died. In Belgium, a 66-year-old woman was found dead next to her camper near the beach in Middelkerke.

There is a long record of large fatalities in western Europe over the past decade and a half as a result of heat

waves and the failure of authorities to put in place appropriate infrastructure and precautions to deal with the high temperatures arising from climate change.

In 2003, a heatwave in early August, during the hottest summer in 600 years, killed up to 70,000 people, as calculated by statistical analysis of death rates for the month compared to previous years. In that disaster more than 14,800 people died in France. No precautions at all were taken by the government of Jacques Chirac, and the majority of the people who died were the elderly who were alone in their homes and could easily have been saved by the most basic measures.

In response to mass outrage in the working class at its culpability for the disaster, the French government was compelled to put in place several basic preventive systems, including an emergency alert system warning of a heat wave, and a telephone response network under which those most at risk can receive phone calls during the day.

As noted by Richard C. Keller, a professor in medical science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in an article published yesterday by the *Washington Post*, these measures remain inadequate for those who are most vulnerable, including the disabled and homeless, and overstretched charity agencies are still forced to step in to fill the gap.

A July 2006 heat wave led to 2,000 more mortalities in the country, and another in July 2015 led to 3,300 deaths.

Keller noted that with the heatwave last June, "this year's successive heat waves reveal an ominous pattern, one that looks remarkably like 2003... That year, short heat waves lasting from a few days to a week struck in June and July... At the beginning of August, a system developed over much of western and central Europe and remained in place for two weeks, bringing with it stifling temperatures and ruinous mortality."

Heat waves in western Europe arise from warm streams

of air moving north from Africa. While individual heatwaves, defined as statistical increases in temperature above the average, have always occurred, they are increasing in both frequency and intensity with global warming.

The five hottest summers in Europe since 1500 have all occurred in the 21st century, according to a Potsdam climate institute. The British weather service found that heatwaves are 30 times more likely to occur now than in 1750 because of the higher concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. It predicted that by 2050, record breaking heatwaves would occur every other year.

“What we have at the moment is this very warm stream of air, coming up from northern Africa, bringing with it unusually warm weather,” Peter Stott from the Met Office told BBC on Wednesday. “But without climate change we wouldn't have hit the peaks that we're hitting right now.”

On Friday, the spokeswoman for the UN's World Meteorological Organization, Clare Nullis, called the size of the increase in temperature records, by two and four degrees, “absolutely incredible.”

Nullis stated that “according to forecasts, and this is of concern, the atmospheric flow is now going to transport that heat towards Greenland. This will result in high temperatures and consequently enhanced melting of the Greenland ice sheet. We don't know yet whether it will beat the 2012 level, but it's close.”

The growing threat to human society and the environment itself by climate change, and the refusal of governments around the world to take any action to address it, is a damning indictment of the capitalist profit system, which subordinates all decision-making to the socially-destructive pursuit of profit by the corporate elite.



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