

Heat wave affecting 100 million people as extreme weather extends across United States

Bryan Dyne
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One hundred million people in the US Midwest, South and Southwest are currently suffering under a sweltering heat wave, one of the many extreme weather events that have happened across the country in the past few days. The National Weather Service has issued various heat advisories for cities and regions across the country, warning of sustained temperatures higher than 100 degrees Fahrenheit (about 38 degrees Celsius).

In cities including Chicago and Detroit, the National Weather Service issued an excessive heat warning, noting that the heat index would rise to 105 degrees. In Denver, the temperature reached 100 degrees, a record for the city at this time of year, and the heat index reached 107 degrees in North Carolina. In Tucson, Arizona, temperatures reached as high as 111 degrees after warnings that the temperature could rise as high as 115 degrees.

At these temperatures, it is dangerous for anybody to be outside for any amount of time as the temperature and humidity can produce rapid heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Heat waves kill more people than any other extreme weather event every year and killed 1,577 people in the US last year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a 56 percent increase from 2018. There have been as of this writing no reported deaths from the ongoing heat wave.

The current extreme temperatures are up to 30 degrees above normal for this time of year, caused by a shift in the jet stream that brought an immense amount of warm air over a majority of the country. The “heat dome” began in the western part of the country at the end of last week and has since moved and expanded east and north. High temperatures are expected to persist in parts of the country for at least the rest of the week, particularly in the Southwest.

High heat and winds have also produced numerous

early-season wildfires in Arizona, New Mexico and Alaska. There are currently 38 active large fires, according to the National Interagency Fire Center: six in Arizona, six in New Mexico, three in California and 23 in Alaska. Fires in the US to date have burned 2.8 million acres, nearly three times as much as they had to this date in 2021 and more than twice the average. The amount of fires and the acres burned so far this year exceed any amount in the past 10 years, including the explosive fire seasons in 2017 and 2018.

At the same time, numerous storms have ripped through many of the same areas now experiencing the heat wave. In Chicago, for example, 85 mph winds, tornado-like conditions and hail left at least 44,000 people without power on Monday. Similarly powerful storms knocked out power in Western Michigan and Ohio, leaving tens of thousands without power to cool and protect themselves from the stifling temperatures.

The storm systems also struck elsewhere in the country. One of the worst tragedies caused by these events was the death of 10-year-old Muhammad Arman bin Rashidula in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. First responders have confirmed that the child died after being swept into a drainage ditch during a flash flood on Monday. Witness reports indicate that he slipped into a drainage ditch leading into the Kinnickinnic River.

Two adults that attempted to rescue him are missing and presumed dead. According to the city’s fire department, they are the child’s father and a neighbor, who entered the river in an attempt to rescue him. All three were reportedly taken by the currents caused by the day’s heavy rains and dragged at least two miles. Search efforts by first responders and local residents are ongoing to locate the father and neighbor as water levels and strong currents have receded.

Record flooding has also occurred in Yellowstone National Park in northwestern Wyoming and southern Montana. Helicopter footage taken by the National Parks Service shows that high water levels eroded and collapsed many parts of the road that makes up the park's northern entrance. Numerous bridges in the park, as well as lodging for some of the park's hundreds of workers, were also swept away in the current.

Other roads also suffered significant damage, some from erosion and others from mud and rock slides caused by the heavy rainfall. The entire park was closed on Tuesday, and its visitors—from those visiting the main attractions, such as the Old Faithful geyser to those camping in Yellowstone's back country—were evacuated. The park remains closed, and over the next few weeks, visitors have been warned to check updates and possibly modify their travel plans. In addition, the northern entrance will remain closed for repairs for at least the remainder of the year.

At the same time, numerous towns in southern Montana suffered massive flood damage. The unincorporated community of Gardiner, just outside Yellowstone's northern entrance, was isolated after flooding destroyed bridges and washed out every road leading into and out of the town. While a road was cleared by crews Tuesday for local traffic and rescue crews, steady power and potable water remain a critical issue. Damage to other highways in the area also left people stranded in similar situations in Mammoth and Cooke City.

In other parts of Montana, residents were forced to evacuate as flash floods caused by warm rainfall falling on late season snowpack destroyed significant parts of Red Lodge and Livingston. And in Billings, a 500-year flooding event forced the city's water plant to shut down, leaving the city with "between a day to a day-and-a-half of water supply," according to the city government. It is estimated that it will be weeks, possibly months, before the areas affected will be fully restored.

There is also a possibility of further flooding. "Plan on highs in the 60s to 70s in the higher elevations [Friday and Saturday], which should melt much of the remaining snowpack and lead to additional river rises," the National Weather Service warned Tuesday.

That so many dangerous extreme weather events have

happened at the same time is a direct result of man-made climate change. The dynamics of the jet stream have been linked to global warming, which in turn creates heat domes in the summer and "polar vortexes" in the winter. The sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change demonstrated that extreme weather—from wildfires, to more intense storms, flash floods and harsh winter storms—are caused by rising global average temperatures induced by capitalist industrial and agricultural activity.



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