

Climate change and extreme weather across the South

Trévon Austin
27 June 2023

Extreme weather and scorching heat across the southern United States, brought on by a “heat dome,” have caused dozens of injuries and deaths over the last week. The severe weather has taxed the Texas power grid, with no end in sight for the record highs. Moreover, the blistering temperatures are expected to expand during the coming week, putting even more people at risk.

Much of the southern US, particularly Texas, remains in the midst of a record-breaking and brutal heat wave that meteorologists believe will last until July 4. On Wednesday, six all-time heat records were broken or tied in the state of Texas. The records included a blistering 115-degree reading in Del Rio and Laredo and 116 degrees in Cotulla. Many places such as San Angelo reached 114 degrees and Kingsville hit 111 degrees, all-time record highs.

The heat index, which is how hot it feels to the human body when humidity is factored in, reached an unofficial record of 125 degrees in Corpus Christi.

On Thursday, heat alerts remained in effect for 18 million people across much of Texas, northern Mexico, parts of New Mexico and a small part of Oklahoma.

Metropolitan areas suffering amidst the unbearable conditions include Tulsa, Oklahoma; Roswell, New Mexico; El Paso, Texas; Austin, Texas; Corpus Christi, Texas; Houston; and San Antonio. Each of these cities was as hot as or hotter than California’s Death Valley, an arid desert infamous for its extreme heat.

The Tuesday death of a postal worker in Dallas, where the heat index reached 115 degrees, was blamed on the extreme heat.

Across these areas, high temperatures ranging from 90 to over 100, combined with high humidity, have led to heat index values above 110 degrees. In extreme cases along the Gulf Coast, the cocktail of heat and

humidity has pushed the heat index as high as 120 degrees.

The heat index reached 118 degrees Tuesday at Rio Grande Village in Big Bend National Park. Local media reported a man was hospitalized after collapsing in the heat. The unnamed individual and his son were reportedly hiking through the desert that connects Texas and Mexico at the time of his medical emergency.

All-time records were also set in parts of Mexico in recent days, including in the town of Monclova in Coahuila state, as well as in Chihuahua state. According to world temperature records expert Maximiliano Herrea, much of northern Mexico has also witnessed temperatures near 120 on the heat index.

The past week also saw a tornado spawned by a multitude of severe storms in the region. At least four people died and nine were injured after a tornado hit Matador, Texas, a small town of about 800 people northeast of Lubbock, late Wednesday night.

The tornado struck around 8 p.m., making it difficult for local authorities to immediately assess the full extent of the damage. According to first responders, three people died as a result of the storm and 10 were injured and were transported to Lubbock hospitals by Emergency Medical Services. One of the injured died at the hospital.

Multiple state and local agencies have sent police, fire and EMS resources to Motley County, where Matador is, to help with search and rescue efforts. Derek Delgado, public information officer for Lubbock Fire Rescue, said he has never seen so many agencies working together on one disaster. Governor Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration in response to the Matador tornado. As of this writing, Abbott has issued disaster declarations for at least 21 counties as a result

of the severe weather.

Texas is no stranger to extreme heat during the summer season, but this is a significant heat event for the state, especially for the month of June.

Many experts note that the brutal, record-smashing heat wave that is scorching northern Mexico and the south-central U.S., especially Texas, has a connection to human-induced climate change.

According to Alex Lamers from the Weather Prediction Center, if the current temperatures continue into the next week, Texas could experience the hottest two-week stretch on record. The high heat is forecast to last into July.

Undoubtedly, human-induced climate change is increasing the odds of Texas seeing longer, more frequent and intense heat waves in the immediate future.

An analysis of data from Climate Central, a science advocacy group based in Princeton, N.J., said that climate change is making events like the heat wave at least five times more likely.

“Human caused climate change made the extreme and extremely unusual temperatures in Mexico and the southern U.S. much more likely. Heat this intense, this early in the year will create stressful conditions for millions of people,” Andrew Pershing, vice president for science at Climate Central, told *USA Today* earlier this week.

Climate Central's findings come from its Climate Shift Index tool, which is “a model-derived analysis of the likelihood of local temperatures with and without the influence of climate change, expressed on a simplified scale to quantify the degree to which carbon pollution affected average temperature,” according to Peter Girard, the Vice President of Communications.

On Thursday, the CSI measured the highs across Texas at levels of 3, 4, and 5 on the index. That equates to the background warming due to climate change making the extreme temperatures three to five times as likely as they otherwise would be if baseline temperatures were not influenced by climate change.

In Texas, the average daily high temperatures have increased by 2.4 degrees—0.8 degrees per decade—since 1993, according to data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, amid concerns over human caused climate change resulting in rising temperatures. Atmospheric changes such as altered jet

stream and “El Niño” also play a role.

The local capitalist press has remained virtually silent on the social impact of the harsh weather. Regardless, the widespread misery millions must endure across the south is a direct product of American capitalism. In addition to Texas shredding environmental regulations over the last few years, state officials have refused to update the state’s outdated power grid. Rural and urban Texans must deal with power outages during extreme heat and freezes. In Houston alone, more than 200,000 customers were temporarily out of power yesterday as a result.

According to the National Weather Service, heat waves are viewed as less dramatic than other natural disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, flooding or even thunderstorms, but they kill more people in the U.S. than all other weather-related disasters combined and cause hundreds of deaths each year.

The National Integrated Heat Health Information System reports that more than 46 million people from west Texas and southeastern New Mexico to the western Florida Panhandle are currently under heat alerts.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact