

Global heatwave exacerbates social crisis across US, Europe, Asia and Middle East

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Phoenix, Arizona, recorded its 19th consecutive day with high temperatures above 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43.3 degrees Celsius) on Tuesday, temperatures that are forecast to persist through Sunday. The town of Sanbao, China, registered a national record high temperature of 126 degrees Fahrenheit (52.2 C), shooting past a record 122 degrees Fahrenheit (50.3 C) set in 2015.

In Italy, temperatures shot past 107 degrees Fahrenheit (41.8 C) in Rome and 113 degrees Fahrenheit (45 C) in Sardinia. And at the Persian Gulf International Airport in Iran, the heat index soared to an unprecedented 152 degrees Fahrenheit (66.7 C).

The temperature records set Tuesday and those that have been set since the beginning of July are demonstrative of what is increasingly emerging as a “new normal” for the world’s climate. With the continual increase in the emission of greenhouse gases into Earth’s atmosphere (e.g., carbon dioxide, methane), more heat from sunlight is trapped and gives rise to the extreme weather phenomena—heat domes, polar vortexes, prolonged wildfires, torrential flooding, savage hurricanes—that are now directly attributed to global warming.

The immediate cause of the current temperatures are four “heat domes” that have currently centralized over the southern United States, the North Atlantic, North Africa and the Middle East and South Asia. Heat domes are immense high pressure systems filled with hot air that prevent colder air from coming in and reducing temperatures. In addition to heatwaves, heat domes exacerbate wildfires, droughts and other heat-related weather disasters.

The toll on human life is immense. There were more than 61,000 heatstroke and heat-related deaths in Europe last summer, according to a study in *Nature*

Medicine published last Friday. Data from the National Weather Service in the United States shows that deaths from extreme heat are eight times higher than deaths caused by hurricanes over the last decade.

Heat deaths particularly impact workers forced on the job in unsafe and deadly conditions. Thousands of migrant workers in Qatar, many of whom were construction workers building stadiums and other facilities for last year’s world cup, have died from heatstroke and other related illnesses such as kidney failure from dehydration, according to separate research by the journal *Cardiology* and the *Guardian*. A 2021 study by the *Los Angeles Times* found that nearly 400 people die from heat in California each year, the majority of them among the elderly, the homeless and construction, agricultural and warehouse workers.

Just last month, USPS letter carrier Eugene Gates Jr. died on the job the same day temperatures in Dallas-Fort Worth spiked to 113 degrees Fahrenheit (45 C). His story is among the many thousands of workers in construction, auto, logistics and numerous other industries being forced into unsafe and deadly conditions without safety equipment for the profits of their employers. All of these deaths have gone largely unreported by the corporate media.

And the scale of death is only going to increase as global temperatures continue to rise. The temperature noted above in Iran in particular is a warning that portions of Earth’s surface may become uninhabitable to human life in the near future. The temperature, humidity and other factors reached 92.7 degrees Fahrenheit (33.7 C) on what is known as the “wet bulb” temperature scale.

While not designed as a metric of how hot a given day feels, the scale estimates at what point the human body’s ability to cool itself, such as through radiating

heat and sweating, stops working. That limit is 95 degrees wet-bulb Fahrenheit (35 C), which was almost reached in Iran. If carbon emissions continue unabated, large portions of South Asia and the Middle East could reach these inhospitable conditions regularly in the second half of the 21st century.

Shelter, rest and water are largely the solution to mitigating and preventing heat-related injuries and deaths, but the infrastructure to provide such things is largely crumbling, even, in fact especially, in the world's richest countries. In Phoenix, Arizona, as a result of budget cuts for cooling centers and hydration stations, only one city-run cooling center for the metropolitan area's homeless population remains open during the nighttime, when the lows only drop to 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 C). Just last year, the county in which the city resides recorded 425 heat-related deaths. Alongside those are thousands of heat-related injuries, including simply standing on hot concrete while barefoot, which can result in second-degree burns in seconds.

The lack of infrastructure in Phoenix for workers and the poor to protect themselves against extreme weather is just one example of the class divide that exists surrounding climate change. The capitalists have caused the crisis and their loyal corporate media acolytes worked to suppress warnings about the dangers for decades, until the impacts were too apparent to ignore. Moreover, the wealthy have the resources to either survive extreme heat or frigid cold, or simply relocate elsewhere temporarily to avoid the impacts of the ecological crisis the social system which they defend caused.

The deaths caused by climate change are among the many ways the ruling elite expresses its indifference to the lives of workers. Just as with the coronavirus pandemic and the US/NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, no amount of suffering is allowed to get in the way of soaring Wall Street profits. Vast sums of money are spent for colossally destructive ends while an increasingly small pittance is given for the basic maintenance of social life.

It is capitalism, not humans in an abstract sense, that has caused the ongoing and accelerating climate crisis, and it is that social system which must be overturned and replaced.



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