

Multnomah County braces for triple-digit heat wave



By **Monica Samayoa** (OPB)

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Multnomah County is ramping up efforts to keep residents safe, as temperatures are forecasted to reach dangerous levels starting this weekend.

The National Weather Service forecasts the [Portland Metro area](#) could reach 100 degrees starting Sunday with triple-digit temperatures to continue through the week. The extreme heat has prompted the agency to issue an [excessive heat watch](#) that will remain in effect until Thursday evening.

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According to the NWS Portland, evening temperatures will drop to mid 60s to 70 degrees, leaving little to no relief from the heat and potentially increasing heat-related illnesses.

Rachel Pearl is deputy director of the Department of County Human Services for Multnomah County. She said the county is currently monitoring the forecast and is



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“We don’t make a formal decision until the morning of, based on the weather being pretty dynamic and trying to track what’s happening,” she said. “However, we are planning, looking at facilities, staffing up for those cooling centers for folks to be able to get inside and cool off and identifying other spaces that people can get inside.”



In this file photo from July of 2022, a cooling center is set up at the East Portland Community Center.

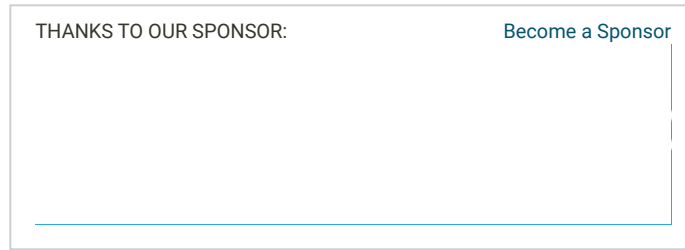
Rebecca Ellis / OPB

Pearl said the county is also working with community groups to help spread the word to prepare folks for the extreme heat, especially residents who are more vulnerable to heat, like seniors and homeless.

“With weather changing so much right now because of climate change, we’re seeing these incidents come up more and more and sometimes are less predictable,” she said.



The deadly 2021 June heat dome sent warning signals throughout the Pacific Northwest of what is to come as the climate crisis continues. Ninety-six people died in the state, 69

many efforts and lessons learned to help residents keep safe during the extreme temperatures — including distributing heat pumps and opening more cooling centers.



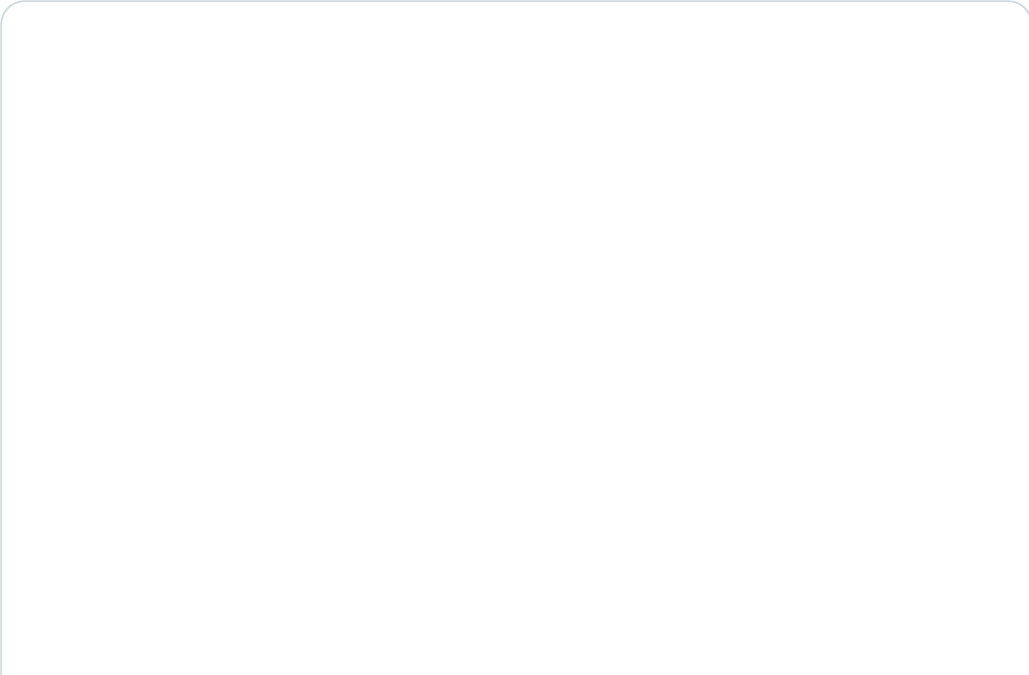
Multnomah County has also ramped up preparedness, Pearl said, and has started to think about things earlier, even if the forecast changes.

“I think early notification and early planning is really critical to be able to think about what is possible and prevent people from getting sick or worse from the heat,” she said.

NWS Weather Prediction Center  

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There is high confidence in a dangerous heat wave in the Pacific Northwest. Locations in the interior valleys and lower elevations of western Oregon could see one of their hottest five-day stretches on record (by average temperature), with 100+ degree highs likely.



The heat dome also brought changes for workers who labor outdoors. During the heat dome event, at least [four people died of heat-related illnesses on the job](#). It prompted the [state to adopt rules, which took effect in June 2022](#), to protect workers from extreme heat when temperatures reach 80 degrees. [The rules](#) require employers to provide access to shaded areas, cool drinking water, and additional rest breaks to cool down and acclimate to the heat. They also require employers to provide [heat illness prevention training](#).

“It’s important to emphasize that workers have a right to a safe and healthy workplace,” Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services Mark Peterson said. “They have a right to raise concerns with their employers free of retaliation and to get those concerns addressed.”

Since May of this year, Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division have received an estimated 37 heat related complaints.

“The complaints involve a relatively diverse mixture of industries, with roughly 40% of them involving restaurants and retailers,” he said. “One of the complaints involves an employer based in agriculture.”

Last year between July and August, Peterson said there were 87 heat-related complaints, with 53 resulting in violations. There were no heat-related worker deaths reported to the agency in 2022.

Peterson said the agency is continuing to work with employers and employees with the resources they need to implement and comply with the rules.

“Oregon is one of a handful of states that maintain requirements for employers to protect workers from the dangers of high heat,” he said. “We are dedicated to continuous improvement in all aspects of what we do and the adoption, education, and enforcement of our heat requirements reflect that ongoing dedication.”

According to the [Oregon Health Authority](#), heat-related illnesses can show up as headaches, muscle cramps and nausea. The agency advises people to stay indoors when possible, avoid excessive exercising and drink excess water to stay cool.

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