

FACT SHEET:

Biden Administration Mobilizes to Protect Workers and Communities from Extreme Heat

New Initiatives at OSHA and Across Agencies Will Enhance Workplace Safety, Build Local Resilience, and Address Disproportionate Heat Impacts

Today, President Biden is launching a coordinated, interagency effort to respond to extreme heat that threatens the lives and livelihoods of Americans, especially workers, children, and seniors. While climate-related disasters like hurricanes, wildfires, and floods produce dramatic images of devastation, extreme heat often takes place out of sight and out of the news. But heat is the nation's leading weather-related killer.

The United States experienced a dangerously hot summer this year, [breaking records](#) last set during the Dust Bowl. The climate crisis is making heat waves more intense and frequent – endangering workers and communities. During the June 2021 heat wave in the Pacific Northwest, states reported hundreds of excess deaths and thousands of emergency room visits for heat-related illness. Climate scientists have concluded that this heat wave would have been [virtually impossible](#) without climate change. Millions of U.S. workers are exposed to heat in their workplaces, and essential jobs with high exposure levels are disproportionately held by Black and Brown workers. Heat also poses higher risks in urban centers and to children, seniors, economically disadvantaged groups, and those with underlying health conditions.

Recognizing the seriousness of this threat, the Biden Administration is taking immediate action on heat hazards to protect workers and communities as part of a broader commitment to workplace safety, climate resilience, and environmental justice. The Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, and Agriculture; the Environmental Protection Agency; and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are announcing a set of actions that will reduce heat-related illness, protect public health, and support the economy:

- The Department of Labor is launching a multi-prong initiative on occupational heat exposure to protect outdoor workers, including agricultural, construction, and delivery workers, as well as indoor workers, including those in warehouses, factories, and kitchens.
- Other new and recent agency actions will provide cooling assistance to households; use schools as cooling centers; launch a heat resilience innovation challenge; address social vulnerabilities and disproportionate impacts; reduce urban heat through tree cover; and improve local preparedness through data-sharing.
- The Biden Administration's Interagency Working Group on Extreme Heat will continue to coordinate a holistic response.

These actions would also supplement President's Build Back Better Agenda, which includes historic funding levels to support resilient communities and improve the assessment and mitigation of climate-related impacts like extreme heat.

Specifically, the Biden Administration is announcing a whole-of-government approach to address extreme heat by:

Developing Workplace Heat Standards and Increasing Enforcement

The Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is responsible for setting and enforcing standards to ensure safe, healthy working conditions. Heat is a growing workplace hazard, with the climate crisis making extreme heat more frequent and severe. Workers in agriculture and construction are often at highest risk, but the problem affects all workers exposed to heat, including indoor workers without climate-controlled environments. Too often, heat-induced injuries and illnesses are misclassified or not reported, especially in sectors that employ vulnerable and undocumented workers.

To better protect heat-exposed workers, OSHA is:

- **Launching a rulemaking process to develop a workplace heat standard:** OSHA is announcing today the issuance of an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) on heat illness prevention in outdoor and indoor work settings. This is a significant step toward a federal heat standard to ensure protections in workplaces across the country. The ANPRM, which will be published next month in the Federal Register, will initiate a comment period allowing for OSHA to gather diverse perspectives and technical expertise on topics including heat stress thresholds, heat acclimatization planning, and exposure monitoring.
- **Implementing an enforcement initiative on heat-related hazards:** In parallel with beginning rulemaking on a heat-specific standard, OSHA can use existing tools to protect workers in hazardously hot indoor and outdoor settings. Through a new enforcement initiative, OSHA will prioritize heat-related interventions and workplace inspections on days when the heat index exceeds 80°F. On these days, OSHA Area Directors will dedicate additional resources in responding to heat-related complaints and expand the scope of programmed and unprogrammed inspections to address heat-related hazards. In addition to shaping the focus of OSHA field staff, this initiative also will expand on OSHA's campaign to educate and assist employers on heat illness prevention.
- **Developing a National Emphasis Program on heat inspections:** OSHA is also working to formalize a National Emphasis Program (NEP) on heat hazard cases, which will target high-risk industries and focus OSHA resources and staff time on heat inspections. Establishing a new NEP requires extensive data review, which OSHA is working to complete in order for the NEP to take effect before the Summer 2022 heat season. In doing so, OSHA will build on the existing Regional Emphasis Program for Heat Illnesses in Region VI, which covers Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.
- **Forming a heat work group to engage stakeholders and inform ongoing efforts:** Within OSHA's National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (NACOSH), OSHA is forming a Heat Illness Prevention Work Group to provide better understanding of challenges and best practices in protecting workers from heat hazards. This group will include three

members of the full NACOSH—a public representative, labor representative, and management representative—as well as new members from a range of sectors and industries. OSHA will convene periodic meetings of the work group to provide diverse perspectives on topics including identification, monitoring, and response to workplace heat hazards; heat emergency response plans; and worker training and engagement.

Providing Cooling Assistance to Households and Communities

Beyond the workplace, extreme heat also threatens Americans in our homes and neighborhoods. For households that lack air conditioning altogether, have inadequate equipment, or cannot afford the energy costs of running their units, extreme heat conditions can pose severe risks of health impacts. Greater access to in-home air conditioning and to public cooling centers will address systemic injustices, improve quality of life, and prevent illness and death.

The Biden Administration is providing ongoing support to expand this access, including by:

- **Directing LIHEAP Resources to Cooling Programs:** The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently issued [guidance](#) for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) that provides flexible options for states, territories, Tribes, and Tribal organizations to adjust their LIHEAP programs to address extreme heat. LIHEAP provides grants to these governments to assist low-income households with meeting their home energy needs. Through these flexibilities, grantees can expand their programs to allow for the purchase of air conditioning units; increase cooling assistance payments for electric bills; establish cooling centers; conduct targeted outreach to ensure at-risk households are in a safe temperature environment; and pursue a range of other options to respond to extreme heat.
- **Using Schools as Cooling Centers:** The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is leveraging American Rescue Plan funding to provide technical assistance for the development of neighborhood cooling centers within existing public school facilities. This specialized support will help align broader investments in healthy schools with needs for cooling centers in vulnerable communities. EPA has issued a call for letters of interest from state agencies, school districts, and community-based organizations, with recipients to be selected in October and projects to begin in early 2022.

Launching an Innovation Challenge on Heat Protection

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is launching a series of prize competitions focused on strengthening our nation's resilience to climate change. The first competition in this series will focus on new ways to protect people at risk of heat-related illness or death during extreme heat events or in connection with other disasters. Through this competition, DHS aims to motivate American talent and creativity toward innovations that will save lives and make our nation fundamentally more resilient to heat.

Identifying and Addressing Disproportionate Heat Impacts

Extreme heat poses threats to communities across the country—but some communities are more at risk because of longstanding economic and racial injustices and ongoing vulnerabilities. Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, as well as people with low incomes, are more likely to live in areas with intensifying heat impacts and often have less access to air conditioning and other risk-reduction resources. Cities also face higher impacts due to the [“urban heat island” effect](#), referring to elevated temperatures from the prevalence of surfaces that retain heat. This effect can be more severe in neighborhoods affected by redlining and other forms of institutionalized discrimination, as these areas often have lower tree cover and higher pavement concentration.

The Biden Administration is working to develop better understandings of disproportionate heat impacts and promote targeted solutions for disadvantaged communities, including through two new resources:

- **New EPA Analysis of Heat Impacts on Socially Vulnerable Groups:** This month, EPA released a report on [“Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States”](#) which confirms that climate-driven changes in extreme temperatures disproportionately impact groups that are socially vulnerable based on income, educational attainment, race and ethnicity, and age. In the 49 cities analyzed, increases in high-temperature days are projected to cause premature deaths, and Black individuals are 40-59% more likely than non-Black individuals to currently live in high-impact areas. The report also includes projections of lost labor hours due to high temperatures, finding that people of color and low-income individuals are more likely to live in areas that will be most disrupted.
- **Forest Service Guide on Using Tree Cover to Address Urban Heat:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service recently issued a report on [“Climate Adaptation Actions for Urban Forests and Human Health”](#), which includes a menu of tangible, neighborhood-level options for using urban tree, forest, and greening projects to reduce extreme temperatures and heat exposure. In addition to addressing heat hazards, the actions presented can provide additional public health benefits by improving air quality, enhancing storm resilience, and promoting mental health and social cohesion. The guide also provides local governments with guidance on prioritizing the needs of disadvantaged communities and vulnerable populations.

Improving Local Preparedness through Data Sharing and Technical Assistance

Responding to extreme heat requires action at all levels of government, and demand for science-based information is growing. The Biden Administration is committed to partnering with local officials to provide and enhance data, research, and planning tools on extreme heat and health impacts.

New and ongoing data collaboration efforts of the Biden Administration include:

- **The National Integrated Heat Health Information System (NIHHIS)**, jointly developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), convenes federal agencies and local partners to develop science-based products and services to

improve our national heat response. Today, the NIHHIS is announcing plans for an April 2022 National Meeting to bring together scientists and decision makers working to reduce the health risks of heat and enhance resilience of communities on multiple time scales.

- **The CDC's Heat and Health Tracker**, which provides heat and health data to help communities better prepare for and respond to extreme heat events, will issue an update this week to provide a nationwide heat forecast for October 2021. The forecast will include the expected number of days at or above a dangerous level of heat, based on climatological norms. This county-level information will help health departments and emergency planners identify the needs of vulnerable populations and take appropriate public health action.
- **The Interagency Working Group on Extreme Heat**, formed by the White House Climate Policy Office in July 2021 and co-led by HHS, NOAA, and EPA, will continue to regularly convene agencies to communicate, coordinate, and improve the federal response to extreme heat. These efforts will include facilitating the use of federal data sharing and mapping resources to help states, Tribes, territories, and local governments improve heat-related planning and decision-making. HHS co-leads this group through its recently established Office of Climate Change and Health Equity, which works to protect communities with disproportionate exposures and vulnerabilities to climate-related threats and will engage the health workforce in our climate response.

Calling on Congress to Deliver Build Back Better Investments in Resilience

President Biden will continue to work with Congress to protect communities across the country from heat hazards. The President's Build Back Better Agenda provides historic funding levels to support resilient communities and improve the assessment and mitigation of climate-related impacts, including extreme heat. Related investments include \$1 billion for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, over \$12 billion for weatherization assistance and residential energy efficiency and electrification, and \$1.2 billion for NOAA research and forecasting.

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