

# DRAFT COMMUNITY HEAT ACTION CHECKLIST

A TOOL FOR  
LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

SEPTEMBER 2024



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON



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## Background

### Purpose

Extreme heat is becoming more frequent and severe in towns, cities, and counties across the United States. Some communities are experienced in dealing with extreme heat. Others may have the resources and expertise to plan and prepare long before a heatwave strikes. However, many communities—particularly those that are smaller, [historically marginalized](#), or newly experiencing extreme heat conditions—may not have the experience, background, or lead time necessary to develop a comprehensive heat plan. The United States includes more than 3,000 counties and 35,000 towns and municipal governments. As of 2023, the vast majority do not expressly address extreme heat in public hazard mitigation or heat action plans.

This **Heat Action Checklist** is intended to be an entry point for communities looking to take some basic initial steps to plan for extreme heat, and is intended to align with and support, rather than duplicate, existing [hazard mitigation](#) and [risk assessment](#) processes.

### Extreme Heat Impacts

Extreme heat—and in particular, extreme heat combined with high humidity—creates significant community health risks. Extreme heat can cause new health conditions, including life-threatening [heat stroke](#), burns, or [dehydration](#), and can worsen chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes, and heart disease. People taking certain medications, as well as first responders, outdoor workers, people experiencing homelessness, and people without air conditioning can be at increased risk. Those under age 5 and over age 65, people with disabilities, and people who are pregnant are among [those most affected](#). Extreme heat can lead to reduced learning and lost class time for kids in schools, while those with lower incomes may find it harder to access air conditioning and cool down.

### Identifying Risks

Identifying who within your community is most at risk is important to figure out which neighborhoods may need additional support during extreme heat. Risk depends on physical, social and economic factors—for example, who has access to reliable air conditioning—and also on which parts of a town or city heat up most. Urban areas without much green space can feel like an “[Urban Heat Island](#)” in the afternoon, with temperatures up to 15°F to 20°F warmer than surrounding green areas. Understanding physical, social, and economic risk together is important. Some tools include:

- NOAA’s and CDC’s [Extreme Heat Vulnerability](#) Mapping Tool is a map that overlays heat projections with social vulnerability data to determine overall vulnerability to extreme heat.
- The National Weather Service’s [HeatRisk](#) provides a forecast up to seven days out for heat-related impacts over each 24-hour period.
- The Census Bureau’s [Community Resilience Estimates](#) for Heat contain census-tract-level data on social vulnerability to extreme heat events.
- FEMA’s [National Risk Index](#) evaluates local relative risk to extreme heat across the country.
- FEMA’s [Resilience Analysis and Planning Tool](#) helps communities identify vulnerable populations, heat risk information, and infrastructure relevant to public health.



## Section 1: Before Heat Season

*This section lists actions your community can take to plan for extreme heat in advance.*

### Internal Planning

- ☐ Identify which office(s) will coordinate heat preparedness actions
- ☐ Fill out the table in the appendix identifying local points of contact in your community
- ☐ Identify which office(s) will declare a local heat emergency and activate emergency actions
- ☐ Identify trusted key community partners (businesses, volunteer groups, community service providers, faith leaders, health care practitioners, utilities, etc.) in heat-affected communities
  - ☐ Collect contact information for community partners
  - ☐ Gather community partners in advance of heat season to discuss preparations
  - ☐ Identify major outdoor employers and discuss heat preparations
  - ☐ Organize a briefing on heat and health from public health or health care professionals
- ☐ Set clear thresholds (for example, when an [Excessive Heat Watch](#) is issued) to trigger local preparedness actions
- ☐ Identify “heat islands” and neighborhoods which may need extra help
- ☐ Identify and monitor weather and health data using [weather.gov](#) and the [HeatRisk](#) tool
- ☐ Host a [training exercise](#) for public officials; state, local, Tribal, and territorial governments can [request](#) free technical assistance from FEMA
- ☐ Complete a training or FEMA [certificate program](#) on climate change and extreme heat

### Public Awareness

- ☐ Share educational resources on [extreme heat and health](#), [how to spot the signs of heat-related illness](#) and [steps to prevent it](#), and on [heat messaging](#)
- ☐ Share educational resources on [home weatherization](#) and [energy assistance](#) programs
- ☐ Create a central town, city, or county webpage with key emergency information, including how to subscribe to local emergency alert systems
- ☐ Work with HOAs, neighborhood associations, and trusted community partners to create neighborhood “call trees” so that neighbors can check in on each other

### Preparing Infrastructure and Resources

- ☐ Identify air-conditioned sites (community centers, schools, libraries, public buildings, malls, buses, transit stations) that could act as stationary or mobile [cooling centers](#).
  - ☐ Work with community partners to create a staffing plan for cooling centers
  - ☐ Create a transportation plan with community partners to get people to cooling centers, for example, by providing free public transit services
  - ☐ If possible, install backup solar and battery systems or generators at cooling centers
  - ☐ Pre-stage bulk water supplies at cooling centers
  - ☐ Assemble and pre-stage [emergency kits](#) at cooling centers
- ☐ Collect supplies to be distributed like handheld fans, bottled water, ice packs, cooling towels
- ☐ Check in with managers of senior living and public housing facilities on a plan to check in on residents during a heat event



- ☐ Ask local utilities to develop “[no-shut-off](#)” policies during and immediately after heat waves
- ☐ Ask local utilities about their preparations for emergency energy usage reductions

## Section 2: Before an Extreme Heat Event

*This section lists actions your community can take to prepare for imminent extreme heat.*

- ☐ Prepare to activate heat resources and plans when hazardous heat is in your community’s [Day 3-7 Hazards Outlook](#) or when extreme heat is in the 3-7 day [HeatRisk](#) forecast
- ☐ Begin activating heat resources and plans when an [Excessive Heat Watch](#) or [Excessive Heat Warning](#) is issued or when extreme heat is in the 1-3 day [HeatRisk Index](#) forecast
- ☐ When an [Excessive Heat Warning](#) or [Heat Advisory](#) is issued, send out notifications reiterating the warning and listing local resources like cooling centers and transportation services
  - ☐ Distribute information about local resources through...
    - ☐ ...text messages
    - ☐ ...emails
    - ☐ ...government websites
    - ☐ ...social media
    - ☐ ...local print, radio, television, and online media
    - ☐ ...telephone alerts
  - ☐ Distribute information about local resources to...
    - ☐ ...community groups, businesses, non-profits, and faith-based organizations
    - ☐ ...government employees
  - ☐ Send standby notifications to cooling centers and cooling center staff
    - ☐ Send standby notifications to transportation services to cooling centers
  - ☐ Send standby notifications to health care providers and public health officials
  - ☐ Send standby notifications to key community partners and service providers
  - ☐ Send standby notifications to local utilities (including electricity and water providers)
  - ☐ Plan to reschedule or move outdoor and afterschool events indoors where appropriate
    - ☐ Contact event organizers and school leaders
    - ☐ Identify suitable indoor spaces
    - ☐ Notify event attendees and students
  - ☐ Post notices about heat-safe recreation at parks and trailheads
  - ☐ Post notices about local cooling resources in the hottest and most at-risk neighborhoods



## Section 3: During an Extreme Heat Event

*This section describes actions your community can take during an active extreme heat event.*

- ☐ When appropriate, send out additional notifications reiterating [National Weather Service warnings/advisories](#) and listing local resources like cooling centers or transportation services
  - ☐ Advise community members to limit outdoor activities
- ☐ Activate cooling centers
- ☐ Activate volunteer groups like local Community Emergency Responder Teams (CERTs) and service organizations providing relevant services
- ☐ Activate public transit services to provide free transportation to cooling centers & indoor spaces
- ☐ Communicate periodically with key stakeholders, including...
  - ☐ ...volunteer organizations
  - ☐ ...utilities
  - ☐ ...nearby local and state public safety officials
  - ☐ ...health care facilities, [clinicians, and pharmacists](#)
  - ☐ ...cooling centers
  - ☐ ...public indoor spaces (including libraries, religious spaces, schools, and malls)
- ☐ Organize periodic emergency response briefings for members of the public and the media
- ☐ Distribute cooling resources like water bottles, fans, cooling towels, ice packs, and other items in public spaces
- ☐ Send park rangers with cooling resources to parks and trailheads and close high-risk areas
- ☐ Send public workers and volunteers with cooling resources to high-risk neighborhoods
- ☐ Distribute cooling resources to outdoor workers and people with housing insecurity

### During Extended Heat Events

- ☐ Activate neighborhood phone trees
- ☐ Activate an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) or other central coordinating facility
- ☐ Coordinate use of public buses to provide free air-conditioned shelter at key locations
- ☐ Release periodic media and emergency advisories as appropriate detailing local resources
- ☐ In cases of severe electricity grid stress, institute a limited closure or remote work policy for public offices to conserve energy and encourage remote work for non-essential workers
- ☐ Publish a local emergency declaration, if necessary, based on emergency room capacity and healthcare system strain
- ☐ Surge capacity to relevant services, including...
  - ☐ ...emergency and 911 services
  - ☐ ...cooling center staffing
  - ☐ ...distribution of water, fans, cooling towels, ice packs, and other cooling resources
- ☐ Track heat-related illnesses and casualties, EMS activations, hospitalizations, and emergency room visits, alongside other impacts like transportation system impacts
- ☐ In the event of high grid strain, send out an emergency alert advising community members to immediately conserve energy where safely possible



## Appendix: Resources

### Local Points of Contact (To Be Filled Out)

Resource Provider	Location	Hours of Operation	Point of Contact	Email	Phone
Emergency Services					
Local Cooling Center #1					
Local Cooling Center #2					
Local Cooling Center #3					
Utility Support Services					
Workplace Safety					
Public Health					
Power Outages					
Drinking Water					
Transportation					
Parks and Recreation					



## Federal Resources

### General Information

- [Preparing for and responding to extreme heat](#) | Ready.gov
- [Heat and health information](#) | Heat.gov
- [Heat and health-related funding opportunities](#) | Heat.gov
- [The Small Business Administration's Business Resilience Guide](#) | SBA.gov
  - [Additional information on business resilience](#) | Ready.gov

### General Personal Emergency Preparedness Supply List ([FEMA](#))

Extreme heat events can often lead to power outages. This list of general personal emergency preparedness supplies can help organizations, businesses, and individuals prepare for unforeseen power disruptions during extreme heat events. If you are stocking emergency supplies for your household, business, or an office, adjust the quantity needed for the number of people expected to need them in case you lose electricity or cannot easily get to a store.

- [Water](#) (one gallon per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation)
- [Food](#) (at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food)
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert
- Battery-powered fans or other cooling devices
- Insulated cooler to store refrigerated medications
- Flashlight
- First aid kit, including supplies for heat stroke
- Extra batteries
- Whistle (to signal for help)
- Dust mask (such as an N-95 mask) to protect against heat-exacerbated pollutants like wildfire smoke
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties (for personal sanitation)
- Manual can opener (for food)
- Local maps
- Cell phone and laptop with charging cables and a backup battery

### Criteria for Effective Cooling Centers

- [The Use of Cooling Centers to Prevent Heat-Related Illness: Summary of Evidence and Strategies for Implementation](#) | CDC
- [Cooling Centers by State](#) | NCHH
- [Cooling Centers Guidance, Commonwealth of Massachusetts](#) | Mass.gov
- [Cooling Centers Guidance, California Department of Public Health](#) | CDPH.CA.gov

### Criteria for Effective Home Cooling

- [Home Cooling Systems](#) | Energy.gov
- [Maintaining Your Air Conditioner](#) | Energy.gov
- [A Guide to Energy-Efficient Heating and Cooling](#) | EnergyStar.gov





## Template Communications Materials

### Heat Safety Messaging

- [Planning & Preparing | Heat.gov](#)
- [Five ways to stay cool during extreme heat | FEMA.gov](#)
- [Be Prepared for Extreme Heat | FEMA.gov](#)
- [Social Media Guidance for Heat Safety | Weather.gov](#)
- [Heat Illness Prevention for Workers | OSHA.gov](#)
- [Heat and Other Safety Videos | Weather.gov](#)
- [Child Hot Car Death Prevention | NHTSA.gov](#)

### Extreme Heat Infographics and Dashboards

- [Be Prepared for Extreme Heat | FEMA.gov](#)
- [CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index | CDC.gov](#)
- [NWS HeatRisk | NOAA.gov](#)
- [Local HeatRisk Tracking | CDC](#)
- [Clinical Overview of Heat | CDC](#)
- [National Integrated Heat Health Information System | Heat.gov](#)
- [Extreme Heat and Your Health | CDC.gov](#)
- [Building Resilience Against Climate Effects Framework | CDC.gov](#)
- [Heat Safety Infographics | Weather.gov](#)
- [Heat Safety Tips and Resources | Weather.gov](#)
- [Heat Social Media Graphics | Weather.gov](#)