

Faith Communities & Hot Weather Hazards

Hot weather can overwhelm the energy output of both your congregation and your house of worship. As a religious leader, you can help your congregation and community prepare for the hazards of a heat wave by providing information on how to cope with the heat, attending to the particular needs of vulnerable persons, and offering your house of worship as a “cooling center.”

TIP SHEET

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EXTREME HOT WEATHER AND HEAT WAVE HAZARDS

Health Risks

Extreme heat brings increased health risks for you and your congregation, especially for households not able to afford air conditioning, and for at-risk populations who are more vulnerable to extreme heat. The risk of getting sick or dying during a heat wave is particularly increased for those who: are younger than 5 or older than 64; have chronic medical or mental-health conditions; take medications that can disrupt the regulation of body temperature; are confined to their beds or unable to leave their homes; or are overweight. At-risk persons should be encouraged to limit exertion and seek cool spaces, such as a house or worship or a neighbor's home, to minimize exposure to extreme heat.

Heat-Induced Illnesses

Exposure to hot temperatures, whether indoors or outside, can cause serious or life-threatening health problems. Poorly cooled and/or ventilated homes create a severe hazard to at-risk individuals. For even the healthy, exposure to heat and direct sunlight for prolonged periods of time, accompanied by high humidity, may result in mild to severe sunburn, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, or heat stroke. (See chart on page 2 for symptoms and first aid for each of these illnesses.)

MITIGATION AND PREPAREDNESS

To prepare your house of worship for extreme heat, you should:

- Install fans, window air conditioners, or central air-conditioning in your house of worship as appropriate for your climate.
- Instruct your maintenance staff to check air-conditioning ducts for proper insulation—and clean annually.
- Install temporary window reflectors (for use between windows and drapes), such as aluminum foil-covered cardboard, to reflect heat back outside your house of worship.
- Weather-strip all doors and sills to keep the cool air inside.
- Cover windows that receive morning or afternoon sun with drapes, shades, awnings, or louvers, especially if you hold events or worship during the hottest part of the day. (Outdoor awnings or louvers can reduce the heat that enters a home or house of worship by up to 80 percent.)
- Keep your storm windows in place all year. If you don't have air-conditioning, then remove them and use window fans.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

During hot days or during a heat wave:

- Eat well-balanced, light, and regular meals. Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician.
- Drink fluids – particularly water – even if you do not feel thirsty. (POSSIBLE EXCEPTION: People with heart, kidney or liver disease, and others on fluid-restricted diets should check with their doctors before increasing fluid intake.)
- Avoid beverages containing alcohol, caffeine, or high amounts of sugar.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing (including brimmed hats) that covers as much of your skin as possible.
- If possible, stay out of the sun. When in the sun, wear sunscreen (at least SPF 15) and a hat to protect your face and head.
- Avoid strenuous activity, especially during the sun's peak hours – 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. If you must engage in strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day, usually in the morning between 4 a.m. and 7 a.m.
- Cool showers or baths may be helpful, but avoid extreme temperature changes. Never take a shower immediately after becoming overheated; extreme temperature changes may make you ill, nauseated, or dizzy.
- Use an air conditioner if you have one. Set the thermostat no lower than 78 degrees.
- If you do not have an air conditioner, keep rooms well-ventilated with open windows and fans. Consider going to a house of worship, public pool, air-conditioned store, mall, movie theater, or cooling center if you cannot cool your home.
- Fans work best at night, when they can bring in cooler air from outside.
- Seniors and others who may be especially sensitive to extreme heat should contact or be contacted by religious leaders, caregivers, friends, neighbors, or relatives at least twice a day during a heat wave.
- Check on family, friends, and neighbors who do not have air conditioning and who spend much of their time alone, especially if they are seniors, young children, and people with special needs.

COOLING FOR THE PUBLIC

Best Practices for Using Houses of Worship as “Cooling Centers”

During a heat wave, houses of worship can provide a welcoming space, a safe place to rest and cool down, a drink of water, and critical information to individuals who may be at risk of serious health problems. If you can provide air conditioning and hydration (tap water okay), in addition to meeting some basic safety requirements, you can open as a “Cooling Center” for the public during a heat wave. To properly use your house of worship as a “Cooling Center” you should provide necessities such as: bathrooms, water, basic first aid, and accurate information about unfolding conditions. Always maintain contact with local emergency management services throughout this process. For more in-depth information about converting your house of worship into a “Cooling Center,” see the **NDIN Emergency Rest Center Training Brochure** link in the resources section at the bottom of this page as well as the **NDIN Disaster Tip Sheet “How to Use Your House of Worship in a Disaster.”**

FIRST AID FOR HEAT-INDUCED ILLNESSESHEAT-RELATED TERMS AND INFORMATION FROM THE NATIONAL

Condition	Symptoms	First Aid
Sunburn	Skin redness and pain, possible swelling, blisters, fever, headaches.	Take a shower using mild soap to remove oils that may block pores, preventing the body from cooling naturally.
Heat Cramps	Painful spasms, usually in leg and abdominal muscles; may include heavy sweating.	Get the victim to a cooler location. Lightly stretch and gently massage affected muscles to relieve spasms. Give sips of up to a half glass of cool (not cold) water every 15 minutes. (Do not give liquids with caffeine or alcohol.) Discontinue liquids temporarily if victim is nauseated.
Heat Exhaustion	Heavy sweating but skin may be cool, pale, or flushed. Weak pulse. A normal body temperature is possible, but temperature will likely rise. Fainting or dizziness, nausea, vomiting, exhaustion, and headaches are possible.	Get victim to lie down in a cool place with fans or air-conditioning. Loosen or remove clothing and apply cool, wet cloths. Have victim consume half a glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Discontinue water if victim is nauseated. Seek immediate medical attention if vomiting occurs.
Heat Stroke (a severe and life threatening medical emergency)	High body temperature (105+); hot, red, dry skin; rapid, weak pulse; and rapid, shallow breathing. Victim will probably not sweat unless victim was sweating from recent strenuous activity. Possible unconsciousness.	Call 911 or emergency medical services, or get the victim to a hospital immediately. Delay can be fatal. Use extreme caution. Move victim to a cooler environment with fans and air conditioners. Remove clothing and watch for breathing problems. Try a cool bath, sponging or wet sheet to reduce body temperature.

WEATHER SERVICE

- **Heat Index (Apparent Temperature):** A number in degrees Fahrenheit that indicates how hot it feels when relative humidity is added to the actual air temperature. Exposure to direct sunlight can increase the heat index by 15 degrees.
- **Heat Wave:** Prolonged period of excessive heat, often combined with excessive humidity. The National Weather Service (NWS) defines a heat wave as at least three consecutive days when the temperature reaches 90°F.
- **Heat Advisory:** Issued by the NWS when the heat index is expected to reach at least 100°F but less than 105°F, or when nighttime lows are expected to remain above 80°F.
- **Excessive Heat Watch/Warning:** Issued by the NWS, 24-48 hours in advance, when it is possible the heat index will reach 105°F for at least three hours for at least two consecutive days, or when there is a predicted heat index of 115°F.
- **Ozone Health Advisory:** Issued when ozone levels in outdoor air are predicted to be high.
- **Ultraviolet Radiation:** Ultraviolet or UV radiation, which is emitted by the sun, can damage the skin. UV radiation can lead to severe sunburn following intense short-term overexposure, or to serious skin cancers after long-term overexposure.

OTHER RESOURCES

- Center for Disease Control— <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heattips.asp>
- FEMA— <http://www.ready.gov/heat>
- New York City Office of Emergency Management — http://www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/hazards/heat_tips.shtml
- New York City Office of Emergency Management— <http://www.erh.noaa.gov/er/gyx/heatindexchart2.gif>
- New York City Office of Emergency Management—
http://www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/hazards/heat_basics.shtml
- NDIN: ERC Training Brochure:
http://www.n-din.org/download/NDIN_Emergency_Rest_Center_Training_Course.pdf