Summer Heat Waves Strike Poor and Minority Residents the Hardest

June 7, 2021 By Casey Halter

Can't beat the heat? As temperatures rise across the country, a new campaign by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and local branches of the National Weather Service is mapping neighborhoods in specific cities that are disproportionately affected by extreme heat. The goal of the initiative is to help local governments find solutions to the racial disparities caused by past discriminatory housing policies, CNN reports.

This summer, the national research awareness campaign will pinpoint the hottest locations in cities across 11 states. Of particular interest to community researchers are so-called urban heat islands—regions with lots of concrete and little green space where temperatures can be up to 20 degrees higher than nearby areas.

Such heat islands are unequally distributed across racial and income groups. Poorer people of color live "in all but six of the 175 largest urbanized areas in the continental United States," noted a recent study in the journal Nature.

This means residents of these communities are disproportionately affected by the more severe heat waves caused by ongoing climate change. Another investigation concluded that the key reason for this health inequity is redlining—a discriminatory housing practice that for decades kept homeowners of color locked into urban communities with fewer trees, poorer air quality and less access to healthy food, medical care, quality schools and other resources.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 600 people die of extreme heat in the United States every year. Rising temps also increase the risk for several heat-related illnesses, including heat stroke, heat exhaustion, dehydration and heat rash.

"As climate change brings worsening heat waves, the information from these campaigns will help bring local and equitable solutions to those facing the greatest threat," said Hunter Jones, a project manager at NOAA's Climate Program Office.

Over the next few months, Jones and a team of citizen scientists will take heat sensors into cities where temperatures are rising more quickly. These include Atlanta, New York City and San Francisco.

Researchers explained that the data gathered from this campaign could help urban zone planners

implement solutions to extreme heat in cities. These fixes include creating more green spaces, planting more trees, applying whitewash to dark pavement and rooftops to prevent heat absorption, and providing community residents with more air-conditioned spaces.

For steps you can take to help beat the heat this summer, read "6 Hot Tips for Warm Weather Days."

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/summer-heat-waves-strike-poor-minority-residents-hardest