



FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION ON EXTREME HEAT

How Mayors Can Deliver for Residents

*A report by Climate Mayors in partnership
with Switch 5 and Hazelwood Network*

October 2026



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Extreme heat is here, and it's causing disruptions to everyday life in cities across the nation. Driven by climate change, summer heat waves roughly doubled in frequency between 1980 and 2023, while heat has been the nation's leading cause of weather-related deaths over the past 30 years.

For mayors who are on the ground listening to their communities, extreme heat is more than a climate statistic; it's a modern reality that has serious impacts from public health, to the infrastructure that runs cities, to emergency management. Prolonged heat can strain hospitals and power grids, damage roads and other transportation infrastructure, and worsen drought and wildfire risk. It can also affect residents' health, household expenses, work, sleep, transportation, and ability to care for others. As these impacts compound, heat can overwhelm essential services and escalate into a full-scale emergency.

The federal government generally defines extreme heat as a period of high heat and humidity with temperatures above 90 degrees for at least two to three days, though what qualifies as extreme varies based on local conditions. Around 70% of the world's population now experiences at least 90 days of strong heat stress annually, compared with 55% in the 1970s.

Americans already recognize the risk. In research recently commissioned by Climate Mayors, three-quarters of residents said extreme heat is becoming more common where they live, and 76% are concerned about its effects on their community. That concern crosses political lines, encompassing at least seven in ten Democrats, Independents, and Republicans.

However, awareness does not always translate into effective or sustained protection. Many residents know the

immediate steps to take, like staying indoors, turning up the air conditioning, or limiting strenuous activity outside, but those precautions can become difficult to maintain as a heat wave continues. Cooling a home may become unaffordable. Work or caregiving responsibilities may make it impossible to avoid exposure. Some may struggle to locate or access a cooling center, or determine when conditions at home have become unsafe. Already, one-third of respondents surveyed report that extreme heat has disrupted their daily routines.

Residents expect local leaders to help close this gap. Only 2% say local governments should play no role during extreme heat. Yet just 42% believe their local government has handled extreme heat very or somewhat well, and most do not recall receiving heat-related communications from city officials.

This creates an opportunity for mayors to lead the shift from heat awareness to action.

Extreme heat communications need to be rooted in the tangible, the executable, and the accessible: residents are looking for guidance that can help them manage disruptions to everyday life, not simply understand weather forecasts. What's more, communications can help residents navigate available options, but they cannot substitute for the services, protections, and other material support needed to provide relief from extreme heat.

This report and accompanying [toolkit](#) are based on research conducted by Climate Mayors in partnership with Switch 5 and the Hazelwood Network. This work, shared with hundreds of mayors and cities, explores how Americans across different regions experience extreme heat, what prevents them from staying safe, how they want to be supported, and where local leaders can step in to protect their health, finances, and quality of life. Extreme heat might be here to stay, but together we can effectively address it.



KEY FINDINGS

1

Extreme heat disrupts everyday life.

One-third of Americans say extreme heat has disrupted their daily routines. Across the qualitative research, residents described lost sleep, reduced productivity, difficult commutes, unsafe working conditions, and challenges caring for children, older relatives, neighbors, and pets.

2

Heat strains residents' health and exposes different barriers to staying cool.

More than one-third of national respondents say they or someone they care for has experienced heat-related health effects. In Arizona and Florida, the cost of cooling is a prominent concern: 67% of Arizona respondents and 64% of Florida respondents report higher energy bills during extreme heat. Research in Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin highlights a different challenge: residents may lack air conditioning altogether.

3

Concern is widespread and crosses political lines.

76% of Americans are concerned about extreme heat affecting their community, including 83% of Democrats, 72% of Independents, and 71% of Republicans.

4

Cities have an opportunity to make their response more visible and useful.

Most residents do not recall receiving city communications about extreme heat, and only 42% believe their local government has handled it well.

5

Awareness of cooling resources does not guarantee their use.

While 66% have heard of cooling centers and 56% would be at least somewhat likely to use one, only 29% have ever done so.

6

Residents want guidance they can act on.

Approximately nine in ten people want actionable safety guidance, information about cooling resources, and tips for managing energy costs. 88% want guidance on helping others.

METHODOLOGY

This report highlights primary data collected from research commissioned by Climate Mayors and done in partnership with Switch 5 and Hazelwood Network. The multi-phase research initiative examined how Americans experience extreme heat and how cities can communicate more effectively before and during extreme heat events.

The first phase of research used qualitative interviews with more than 900 residents across selected metropolitan areas in Arizona, Florida, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin. The next phase of research built on those conversations through a nationally representative survey of 2,924 adults, supplemented by state oversamples of 1,696 residents in the same five states.

This approach allowed Climate Mayors and partners to identify patterns held nationally, where they differ across communities, and provide quantitative evidence to help cities prioritize their communication and response strategies.

Spanish-language research was conducted only in Arizona and Florida. Findings from Spanish-speaking participants reflect those two state samples and should not be interpreted as representative of Spanish-speaking residents nationally.



ABOUT US



Founded in 2014, [Climate Mayors](#) is a bipartisan network of more than 350 mayors across 47 states advancing local climate action. Representing more than 70 million Americans, Climate Mayors drives federal and global momentum, connecting the dots between local action and national progress.

Partner Acknowledgement

[The Hazelwood Network](#) brings together innovators, expertise, and resource access to support partners, which include public, private, and nonprofit organizations and foundations who are committed to developing and scaling impactful climate tech programs and climate ventures globally.

[Switch 5](#) is a research and intelligence organization that understands how people make decisions and translates that understanding into practical tools organizations can execute against through its proprietary data system for predictive models, decision tools, and AI-enabled analysis.



SECTION 1

HOW AMERICANS EXPERIENCE HEAT

Extreme heat is a health, affordability, and quality-of-life issue, but residents do not perceive its urgency equally. Residents experience it through rising utility bills, disrupted routines, unsafe working conditions, and concern for vulnerable loved ones. These experiences shape both their level of concern and the types of support they need.

For many households, staying safe during extreme heat comes at a significant cost. When it comes to **affordability**, managing extreme heat is a consideration in a family's budget: 58% of respondents limit AC use because of cost. 65% report higher energy bills during extreme heat.

When it comes to **health**, more than one-third of Americans say they or someone they care for has experienced effects such as dehydration or heat exhaustion.



“

Mi suegra sí fue afectada por el golpe de calor y más en sus condiciones de salud... A ella le provocó problemas cardiovasculares y respiratorios y una deshidratación severa que, debido a esto, tuvo que ser ingresada de urgencia en el hospital.”

“My mother-in-law was affected by heat stroke, and even more so due to her health conditions... It caused her cardiovascular and respiratory problems and severe dehydration, which, as a result, led to her being rushed to the hospital.”

Florida Resident, Latino male, 55-64 years old

Section 1: How Americans Experience Heat

Nighttime heat disrupts recovery and sleep; it compounds chronic conditions and causes exhaustion that carries over into the next day, potentially leading to dangerous accidents. For outdoor workers and people who rely on public transportation, exposure may be difficult to avoid. Agricultural, construction, service, and other workers may spend hours outside, while transit riders can face long waits at unshaded stops.

“

I used to work at FedEx at the warehouse, and it's three times the weather outside, and the warehouse has no AC, so when it's hot outside it feels like everything's burning inside the warehouse. I've seen people out of nowhere pass out to the floor because of the heat.”

Florida Resident, Latino male, 35-44 years old

Extreme heat isn't an academic challenge: it has a real effect on day-to-day life and affects the quality of life for all residents, and especially high-risk populations. Residents describe sleepless nights, persistent exhaustion, reduced productivity, missed work, limited mobility, and less time with family and friends. Ordinary activities, from cooking and running errands to exercising, commuting, and caring for others, can become difficult or unsafe.

“

At the time [of extreme heat], I was completely incapacitated—unable to get up and take care of cooking or cleaning. I also have a bird to take care of, and that was difficult.”

Wisconsin Resident, white male, 35-44 years old

Heat is also a shared challenge, **affecting the decisions people make when caring for others as well as themselves**. Residents describe concern for older adults, children, people with health conditions, unhoused neighbors, outdoor workers, and pets. 88% say communications should include information on how to help others during extreme heat. Caregiving can also complicate the use of public resources, with 27% of respondents identifying caregiving or pet responsibilities as a potential barrier to using a cooling center.

Yet these impacts do not translate into the same sense of urgency everywhere. In the qualitative research, Arizona and Florida participants expressed greater concern about extreme heat, while concern was more moderate in Oregon and Washington, at 63% and 64%, respectively. Wisconsin stood out: only 50% expressed concern about heat affecting their community, and 42% said it was becoming more common.

Cities can tailor communications to both residents' concerns and the barriers they face. In Arizona and Florida, where concern is high and cooling costs are prominent, cities can emphasize affordable cooling and utility assistance. In Oregon and Washington, messages can draw on residents' experiences of past heat events and help households plan for staying cool, particularly when they lack air conditioning. In Wisconsin, communications should make local risks concrete and emphasize protecting older adults, people living alone, and neighbors without adequate cooling, rather than assuming everyone already views heat as an urgent personal threat.



ARIZONA

Extreme heat is not an unfamiliar emergency in Arizona and has become an entrenched part of daily life. Residents generally understand the health risks and know how to protect themselves, but prolonged heat strains household budgets, workplaces, transportation, and the power grid. The challenge for Arizona cities is therefore less about establishing that heat is dangerous and more about helping residents sustain protective actions through long periods of extreme temperatures.

“

Cómo nos preparamos es comprar muchas botellas de agua o sueros para no deshidratarse también se lleva un abanico pero eso solo hecha aire caliente.”

“The way we prepare is by buying many bottles of water or electrolyte drinks to avoid dehydration; we also carry a fan, but that just blows hot air.”

**Arizona Resident, Latina
female, 35-44 years old**

“

Trabajo afuera y me preocupa mucho la deshidratación, la bronceada y el agotamiento por el calor.”

“I work outside and I worry a lot about dehydration, getting sunburnt, and heat exhaustion.”

**Arizona Resident, Latino
male, 45-54 years old**

What this means for mayors: Arizona residents need communications that are specific, timely, and operational. Messages should identify what makes the current heat event different, confirm that essential systems are prepared, and connect residents to cooling locations, transportation, utility assistance, workplace protections, and help for people without reliable air conditioning. Communications should be issued in both English and Spanish and should recognize outdoor workers, renters, older adults, and unhoused residents explicitly.

In the Arizona survey sample,

83% are concerned about extreme heat affecting their community.

72% believe local governments should open cooling centers, while 58% want cities to help reduce energy costs.

67% have experienced higher energy bills during extreme heat.

59% sometimes or often limit air-conditioning use because of cost.

53% have had difficulty keeping their homes cool.

39% say they or someone they care for has experienced a heat-related health issue.

FLORIDA

In Florida, heat is often treated as a routine part of life, but that familiarity can obscure its cumulative effects. Residents face prolonged air-conditioning costs, outdoor exposure during work and transportation, and the possibility that storms or power outages will eliminate access to cooling altogether. High concern is paired with comparatively weak awareness of city action and cooling resources, suggesting that cities need to make their response much more visible.

“

I have had my AC go out one time and needed a new compressor. Fortunately for me, the weather had cooled enough, although still hot, the fans worked. I had to pray for nightfall to come quickly to cool off until the company returned to fix the AC. Besides that one incident, I am more concerned about the increased cost.”

Florida Resident, Black female, 65 years or older

“

Me agobia el calor con facilidad y me desespera. Suelo cansarme con facilidad y no rindo en el trabajo.”

“The heat easily overwhelms and frustrates me. I tend to tire easily and can’t last at work.”

Florida Resident, Latina female, 55-64 years old

What this means for mayors: Florida cities can break through the normalization of heat by explaining how it affects health, costs, work, transportation, and power reliability. Communications should emphasize utility assistance, energy-cost relief, and affordable ways to keep homes cool, as well as what to do during an outage and where residents without AC can go.

In the Florida survey sample,

82% are concerned about extreme heat affecting their community.

64% have experienced higher energy bills.

60% believe local governments should open cooling centers, and 56% want local governments to help reduce energy costs.

53% sometimes or often limit air-conditioning use because of cost.

44% have had difficulty keeping their homes cool.

39% say they or someone they care for has experienced a heat-related health issue.

25% are not aware of any local-government action on extreme heat.

OREGON

Oregon's experience with the 2021 heat dome demonstrated how quickly unfamiliar heat can become a deadly emergency. Many homes were built without air conditioning, and residents may still underestimate their vulnerability outside the most severe events. Heat can also coincide with wildfire smoke, leaving people without a safe option indoors or outdoors.

“

The biggest problem is for families with small children that don't have air conditioning or a portable fan to combat the heat.”

Oregon Resident, Asian or Pacific Islander male, 65 years or older

“

We had an extreme heat situation a few years ago, and people died—especially those living in RVs or in heat-sink neighborhoods.”

Oregon Resident, white female, 65 years or older

What this means for mayors: The more than 100 deaths from the 2021 heat dome give Oregon cities a concrete, shared example of why heat preparedness matters. Yet preparedness gaps remain: 19% of Oregon participants in the qualitative research reported lacking adequate cooling resources—the largest share among the five state samples. Oregon cities can use the lessons of the 2021 heat dome to help residents take practical steps before the next heat event arrives. Cities can help residents without AC develop a plan, publicize cooling-center locations and transportation, and coordinate heat and smoke guidance. Messages framed around protecting neighbors, older adults, outdoor workers, and unhoused residents may resonate more strongly than messages focused exclusively on individual risk.

In the Washington-Oregon survey sample,

75% say extreme heat is becoming more common.

62% say their community has been affected a great deal or a fair amount.

In Oregon's qualitative sample,

79% had heard of cooling centers, but only 30% recalled city communications about extreme heat.

19% said they lacked adequate cooling resources—the largest state-level resource gap identified in that research.

Oregon participants expressed particularly strong interest in neighborhood groups, community-based outreach, and social media.

WASHINGTON

The 2021 heat dome transformed extreme heat from an abstract concern into a lived emergency for many Washington residents and a fatal event for at least 100 residents. Older housing without air conditioning, agricultural work in eastern Washington, transit exposure in Seattle, and the risk of wildfire smoke create different vulnerabilities across the state. A single statewide message is unlikely to address all of them.

“

I have no AC in my home. There are 3 to 4 weeks each summer that are very difficult to withstand. I improvise with a spray bottle of cool water and fans.”

Washington Resident, white female, 55-64 years old

What this means for mayors: Washington cities can lead with mobile alerts while tailoring guidance to local conditions. Seattle-area messages can emphasize nearby resources and transit access; eastern Washington communications should help residents develop a cooling plan, connect them with home-cooling assistance where available, and identify accessible places to cool off—without assuming they already have air conditioning. Cities can also explain how to prepare for simultaneous heat, smoke, and power disruptions and clearly identify whether cooling locations accommodate children, pets, and accessibility needs.

In the Washington-Oregon survey sample,

75% say extreme heat is becoming more common.

73% are concerned about extreme heat.

In Washington’s qualitative sample,

74% had heard of cooling centers, but only 22% recalled city heat communications.

18% said they lacked adequate cooling resources.

Text alerts were the most strongly preferred rapid-notification channel in Washington, alongside local news and social media.

WISCONSIN

Extreme heat is not yet perceived as an equally immediate threat across Wisconsin. Residents may feel personally prepared or view severe heat as temporary, even while recognizing that older adults, people without air conditioning, outdoor workers, and residents on fixed incomes face serious risks. The communications opportunity is to make those risks relevant without overstating them.

“

Everyone should watch out for our neighbors, check on the elderly, and keep little ones cool.”

Wisconsin Resident, white female, 65 years or older

“

They mention the facilities that are available and the specific hours they are accessible. They also recommend that we check on vulnerable friends and neighbors who may be in need.”

Wisconsin Resident, Native American male, 65 years or older

What this means for mayors: Wisconsin cities can frame heat preparedness as a community responsibility. Messages can ask residents to check on neighbors, explain that even a relatively short heat wave can be dangerous, and normalize cooling centers as practical community resources rather than last resorts. Outreach through senior services, faith communities, neighborhood organizations, local news, and text alerts can help reach residents who may not personally identify as vulnerable.

In the Wisconsin survey sample,

67% had heard of cooling centers.

50% expressed concern about extreme heat affecting their community.

42% said extreme heat is becoming more common.

22% recalled receiving city communications about extreme heat.

Concern for others emerged as a prominent theme even among participants who were not personally worried about heat. Residents repeatedly raised concerns about older adults, neighbors without air conditioning, and households unable to afford sustained cooling.

Local television and radio, text alerts, and social media were the preferred communications channels.



SECTION 2

CONNECT HEAT AWARENESS TO CITY SUPPORT

Awareness of extreme heat is widespread, but awareness of city support lags behind. Residents know it's hot and getting hotter, and that it's becoming more common. **76% of national respondents are concerned about heat affecting their community.** The time for passive notification is over: mayors, city leaders, public officials, and other key messengers have a huge opportunity to help residents understand what actions to take, what resources are available, and how to access them when they need them.

69%

of national respondents say their city has been affected by extreme heat in recent years.

Cities may be doing more than residents realize, and they have both an opportunity and a clear public expectation to make that support more visible and accessible. **Only 2% of national respondents felt that local government should play no role during extreme heat.** Residents expect local leaders to provide information, guidance, and resources. Closing the gap between available support and residents' ability to use it requires clear communications backed by tangible help: affordable cooling, accessible services and transportation, workplace protections, and other support that makes it easier for people to stay safe.

42%

of national respondents think their local government has handled extreme heat well.

This should not be read as a judgment of city performance. The qualitative research suggests a visibility gap: in Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin, 67–79% of participants had heard of cooling centers, but only 22–30% recalled city communications about extreme heat. City efforts may not always be reaching residents or registering as city support. This points to an opportunity for mayors and cities to make their leadership more visible, practical, and responsive: helping residents understand what their city is doing, what support is available, and how to access it.

SECTION 3

WHERE ACTION BREAKS DOWN

People generally understand that extreme heat is dangerous and know the basic steps they can take. **But awareness alone cannot overcome cost, uncertainty, convenience, trust, or incomplete information about available resources.**

THE COOLING-CENTER FUNNEL

Cooling centers illustrate the awareness-to-action gap:

66%

have heard of cooling centers.

56%

would be at least somewhat likely to use one.

29%

have ever used one.

This drop-off is not explained by a single logistical barrier. Instead, the research points to a more fundamental challenge: **52% of residents say they would prefer to remain at home.**

Other people may be uncertain about where to go, how to get there, what to expect, or whether a center can accommodate family members, pets, or accessibility needs.

The gap, therefore, is not simply between awareness and use. It is between general awareness and having enough information, and enough viable options, to make a decision.



“

Not wanting to be away from home and being with strangers... If I had a fan blowing on me, that might be better than going to a cooling place.”

Wisconsin Resident, white male, 65 years or older

THE COST OF STAYING COOL

Remaining home may be more comfortable or convenient, but it is not always affordable or safe. Nearly two-thirds of respondents report higher energy bills during extreme heat, while 58% say they sometimes or often limit their air-conditioning use because of cost.

“

Because when we have to turn on the central air for even 2 or 3 days it raises our power bill by up to 200 dollars.”

Oregon Resident, white female, 35-44 years old

Residents generally understand that air conditioning can protect their health. The barrier is often whether they can afford to use it as much as they need. This leaves some residents caught between two imperfect choices: public cooling that may feel inaccessible or disruptive, and home cooling they cannot comfortably afford.

THE RECALL GAP

Across the research, **most residents did not recall receiving extreme-heat communications from their city**, even though they expect local leaders to provide information, guidance, and resources.

This “recall gap” may reflect limited reach, messages that do not stand out, or information that residents do not recognize as coming from their city. Regardless of the cause, it highlights the same opportunity: **cities can communicate earlier, more consistently**, and more concretely by moving beyond general warnings to help residents understand exactly what to do, where to go, and what support is available.

LANGUAGE AND TRUST CAN WIDEN THE GAP

The communications gap is especially pronounced among the Spanish-speaking residents included in the qualitative research in Arizona and Florida. Across this group, only **17% recalled receiving any city communication about extreme heat, and fewer than four in ten knew that cooling centers existed in their community.***

Some participants described poorly translated information, uncertainty about identification requirements, and fear of interacting with government institutions. Others relied more heavily on Spanish-language television, radio, community organizations, or personal networks than on official city channels.

“

Incluir en mensajes que estos programas son para todos en la comunidad y no afecta a los indocumentados”

“Include in messages that these programs are for everyone in the community and don’t impact people who are undocumented.”

Florida Resident, Latina female, 45-54 years old

**Source note: The 17% communications-recall and “fewer than four in ten” cooling-center-awareness findings come from the Spanish-language qualitative study conducted in Arizona and Florida. They should not be directly compared with the nationally representative 66% cooling-center-awareness figure.*



SECTION 4

WHAT RESIDENTS EXPECT FROM CITIES

People are not simply looking for more warnings about extreme heat once it arrives. **They want timely, practical guidance that helps them prepare, make decisions, find support, and protect the people around them.**

~9 IN 10

residents say city communications should include actionable safety guidance, information about cooling resources, and tips for managing energy costs

88%

want information about how to help others during extreme heat.

Cities can begin sharing information about supports before the heat season so residents have time to learn what resources exist, apply for assistance, identify cooling options, and make plans for themselves and others. As a heat event approaches, communications can then shift from advance preparation to immediate, situation-specific action.



MAKE GUIDANCE SPECIFIC AND IMMEDIATELY USEFUL

Generic reminders to “stay cool” or “drink water” offer residents little new information. Across the qualitative research, people consistently asked for more specific guidance: how to recognize signs of heat illness, how to cool their homes affordably, when it may no longer be safe to remain there, and where to find help.

Effective communications should quickly answer the questions residents are asking:

→ What is happening, and when?

→ What should I do differently?

→ What resources are available near me?

→ Who should I check on?

→ What is the city doing to help?

MAKE RESOURCES EASY TO USE

Residents want enough information to determine whether an available resource will work for them. For cooling centers and other services, that means naming exact locations, hours, transportation options, accessibility information, what is available on site, and whether identification is required. Information about utility assistance and other cooling support should similarly name programs and explain how residents can access them.

“

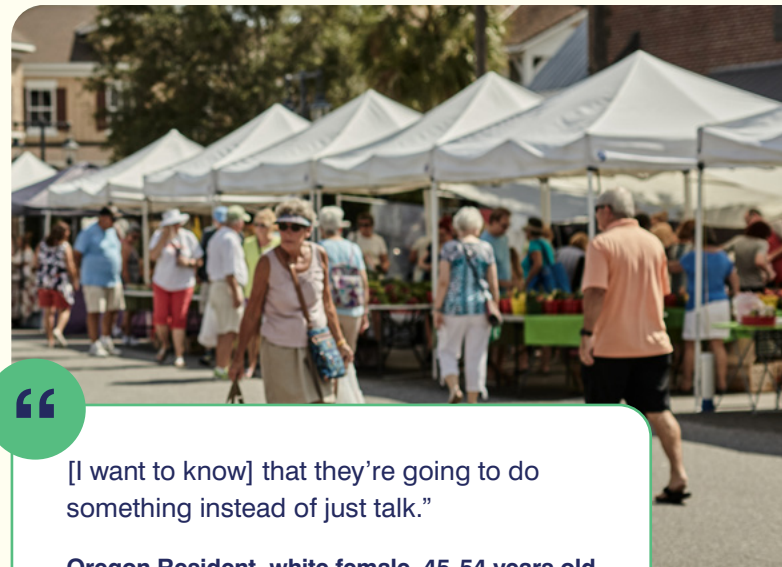
Give contact information on the television screen, such as the address with convenient times.”

Washington Resident, Asian or Pacific Islander male, 45-54 years old

Clarity is part of access. From a resident’s perspective, a resource that is difficult to find or poorly explained may as well not exist.

SHOW WHAT THE CITY IS DOING

Residents also expect communications to demonstrate action. In the qualitative research, messages that only described the danger of extreme heat were sometimes perceived as performative or disconnected from residents’ immediate needs. People wanted to know how their city was preparing, what services it had activated, and how local leaders were addressing disruptions such as power outages, transportation challenges, and the need for safe cooling.



“

[I want to know] that they’re going to do something instead of just talk.”

Oregon Resident, white female, 45-54 years old

USE TRUSTED MESSENGERS AND MORE THAN ONE CHANNEL

No single messenger or communications channel can reach every resident or credibly deliver every kind of information.

Residents' preferred channels include:

Local television, radio, or newspapers: 78%

Text-message alerts: 63%

Social media: 60%

Utility-company alerts: 47%

Neighborhood groups: 45%

Different messengers and channels serve different functions. Local news and weather professionals can establish awareness and urgency. Health professionals can explain risks, symptoms, and protective actions. Utilities can provide cost and energy guidance.

Trusted local voices, including neighborhood organizations, faith leaders, worker groups, and other community partners, are especially important for reaching residents who may not encounter or trust official city communications. Because these messengers understand their communities' circumstances, languages, and concerns, they can reinforce city guidance, connect residents with support, and make information feel more credible and relevant.

Offline outreach remains essential for residents who may not be reached through official digital channels. In communities with substantial Spanish-speaking populations, native-quality translations, Spanish-language media, trusted community partners, and clear assurances about access requirements can help close persistent information and trust gaps.

“

Incluir personas Hispanas como tv anchor o actores que puedan decir el mensaje y personas pueden tener más confianza a personajes conocidos.”

Include Hispanic people such as TV anchors or actors who can deliver the message, as people may have more trust in well-known figures.”

Florida Resident, Latina female, 45-54 years old

The research also suggests that cities can strengthen both reach and trust by matching the message to the messenger:

Ways to match the message to the messenger:

Mayors and city officials for city actions, available resources, and response coordination

Meteorologists and weather services for forecasts and urgent warnings

Health professionals and public-health departments for symptoms and safety guidance

Utilities for energy-saving information and bill assistance

Community organizations, faith leaders, and neighborhood networks for trusted local outreach

COMMUNICATE LIKE A NEIGHBOR, NOT AN INSTITUTION

Residents understand extreme heat through its consequences on their health, household expenses, sleep, work, mobility, and ability to care for others, not through scientific data or political and environmental framing. City communications should connect the risk to these immediate, lived effects and acknowledge and validate that extreme heat can be expensive, exhausting, disruptive, and sometimes frightening. Messages that sound bureaucratic, unactionable, or poorly translated can undermine trust, even when the underlying information is accurate.

“

Los gobiernos locales deben acercarse más a las comunidades y que estas sientan de verdad que se preocupan por ellos y no limitarse a mensajes impersonales.”

“Local governments must be more approachable to communities so they truly feel that they care about them, rather than limiting themselves to impersonal messages.”

Arizona Resident, Latino male, 65 years or older

An empathetic tone cannot remove the practical barriers residents face, but when paired with clear guidance and accessible support, it can signal that city leaders understand residents' experiences and are prepared to help them act.





SECTION 5

IMPLICATIONS: TURNING AWARENESS INTO ACTION

As extreme heat becomes more common in our communities, its effects can cascade across public health, essential infrastructure, and our natural environment, compounding into broader emergencies. **How residents receive and use information during these moments is critical to survival and protection.**

SIX RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITIES

1

Build Awareness Before the Heat Arrives

Do not wait until a heat wave to inform residents about available resources. Throughout the year, and especially before heat season, cities can explain how extreme heat can affect health, household costs, daily routines, and essential services; promote cooling centers, utility assistance, and home-cooling programs; and help residents make plans for themselves and the people they care for. Advance communication gives residents time to understand why these resources may be necessary, determine which options will work for them, and prepare before conditions become dangerous.

2

Help Residents Prepare for Ripple Effects

Residents experience extreme heat not as a single hazard, but through its effects across all areas of life: health, household costs, sleep, work, caregiving, and more. Extreme heat can also strain power and water systems, disrupt transportation, and exacerbate drought and wildfire risk. Mayors can help communities prepare by explaining what may be affected, how residents can plan for potential disruptions, and what the city is doing to protect essential services.

3

Coordinate the Local Information Network

Because extreme heat affects health, energy costs, transportation, infrastructure, work, and daily life, no single agency or messenger can prepare for or respond to it alone. Cities can bring together emergency management, public health departments, utilities, transportation agencies, weather professionals, local media, and community partners to define their respective roles and coordinate communications and services. Prepare shared guidance, translations, referral information, and outreach plans before heat season begins.

4

Make Support Easy to Navigate

Awareness alone is not enough. Cities can provide the details people need to decide whether and how to use available resources: exact locations, hours, transportation options, accessibility information, services available, language access, and identification requirements. Cities can also provide realistic guidance for residents who prefer to remain home, including lower-cost cooling strategies, utility-support programs, warning signs that the home is becoming unsafe, and alternative cooling options.

5

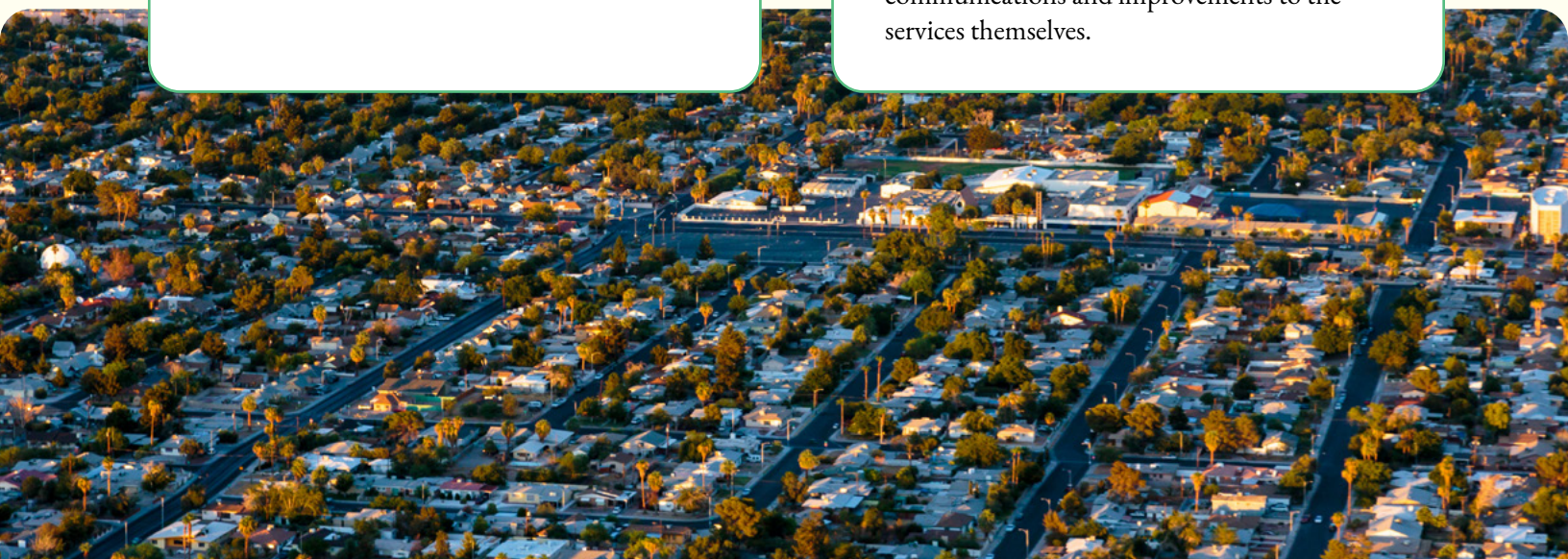
Offer More Than One Path to Safety

Design communications around residents' actual circumstances, including energy costs, work, transportation, disability, language, caregiving, pets, and institutional trust. Pair public cooling information with guidance and support for residents trying to remain safe at home.

6

Measure Whether Communication Helps Residents Act

Evaluate more than message volume or audience reach. Cities can examine whether residents remember the guidance, understand their options, know where to find assistance, and can use the resources being promoted. What cities learn should inform both future communications and improvements to the services themselves.



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BROADER EXTREME-HEAT ECOSYSTEM

Cities cannot close the awareness-to-action gap alone. **Funders, public agencies, utilities, and researchers each have a role in making information and support more useful and accessible.**

For funders: Invest in the communications infrastructure behind an effective response, not only one-time public-awareness campaigns. Priorities may include community partnerships, language access, offline outreach, message testing, shared communications tools, and evaluation of whether residents can find and use available resources.

For public agencies: Coordinating information across partners, agencies, jurisdictions, and services helps residents receive consistent guidance rather than fragmented or competing messages. Agencies can also help cities establish clear standards for heat-health guidance, resource information, accessibility, and measurement.

For utilities: Treat affordability information as a core part of heat-safety communication. Utilities are especially well-positioned to provide timely guidance about energy use, bill assistance, shutoff protections, home-cooling programs, and steps residents can take before and during an extreme-heat event.

For researchers: Build the evidence base around what helps residents act, not only what they know or believe. Future research should test the connection between communication, behavior, resource use, and health outcomes while continuing to examine differences in access, language, trust, and lived experience.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CITIES

Americans do not need to be persuaded that extreme heat matters. They need help acting on what they already know.

By communicating earlier, providing practical guidance, making resources easier to understand, and coordinating with trusted partners, cities can help residents move from awareness to action and strengthen their communities' ability to withstand a hotter future.





In partnership with the **Hazelwood Network** and **Switch 5**