

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 24, 2021

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Criswell:

This summer has produced historic heat waves and high temperatures across the United States, particularly in the West, devastating communities and causing hundreds of heat-related deaths. According to the National Weather Service¹, extreme heat events have been the leading cause of weather-related death in the United States over the last 30 years. Local communities and health districts are tasked with responding to these extreme heat events without dedicated federal resources. Although “Ready.gov” provides tips on preparation and safety, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other federal agencies need to be doing more, including providing direct relief to individuals and communities already experiencing the effects of extreme heat. As Senators from states experiencing extreme heat that threatens the lives of our constituents, we request immediate assistance from FEMA for our state, Tribal, and local governments to help protect the public from extreme heat.

Extreme heat can cause a range of illnesses, including heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke. Children, the elderly, individuals with chronic illnesses, outdoor workers and athletes, and low-income communities are particularly vulnerable to the health effects of extreme heat. City residents also face increased risks due to the urban heat island effect – paved surfaces absorb heat and reemit heat, causing temperatures to be up to 10 degrees higher than surrounding areas.² In addition to public health concerns, extreme heat also negatively affects our economy. Hotter temperatures result in reduced labor supply and productivity, particularly in outdoor occupations. Industries that depend on specific temperatures and weather conditions, including agriculture and outdoor tourism and recreation, are greatly affected by extreme heat events, often losing business and in the case of farmers, crops. Extreme heat clearly poses a danger to our health and economy.

Many local communities have developed adaptation strategies, including establishing early warning systems with forecasts of extreme heat events or opening cooling centers that offer access to air-conditioning. However, many barriers exist to accessing cooling centers, including lack of transportation, safety concerns, limited hours of operation, and location. This is particularly challenging in rural and remote parts of the country. In addition, operating these cooling centers, conducting outreach to the public, and other mitigation measures can be costly and overwhelming for local governments to do on their own.

¹ <https://www.weather.gov/hazstat/>

² <https://scied.ucar.edu/learning-zone/climate-change-impacts/urban-heat-islands>

Given the urgency of this matter, we request responses to the following questions by no later than October 1, 2021:

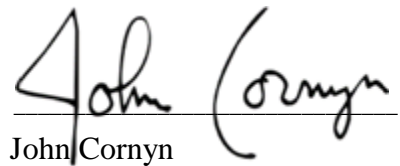
1. Does FEMA recognize “extreme heat” as eligible for a major disaster or emergency declaration? If not, why not? If so, has FEMA proactively communicated this to states and what relief will FEMA provide to communities experiencing extreme heat?
2. Has any state or Tribal government requested an emergency or major disaster declaration for extreme heat in the past?
3. What long-term mitigation and adaption efforts does FEMA provide for extreme heat events? Are projects that mitigate the effects of extreme heat eligible for funding through FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grants?
4. Heat waves usually cause an increase in the use of electricity, leading to potential power outages. However, according to a recent news article, FEMA does not have a plan on how to help a large city deal with a combined blackout and heat wave.³ Will FEMA develop such a plan?
5. How does FEMA plan to respond to extreme heat events that pose immediate, life-threatening health and safety risks to Americans, other than providing preparation and safety tips?
6. How is FEMA collaborating with other federal agencies to develop an immediate plan to provide relief to states, Tribes, and municipalities facing extreme heat?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your swift response.

Sincerely,

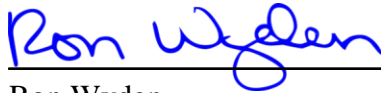


Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

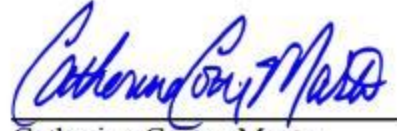


John Cornyn
United States Senator

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/03/climate/heat-climate-health-risks.html>



Ron Wyden
United States Senator




Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
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