

Mapping Increased Climate Threats in Washington

Heat and Smoke Threaten Public Health in Washington

Climate change impacts are increasing. During the summers, Washington is experiencing more extreme weather events and wildfires. The record-setting Labor Day fires of 2020 blanketed the state in smoke, exposing residents to fine particulate matter. In the summer of 2021, Washington experienced a high-pressure condition known as a “heat dome.” The heat dome sent temperatures skyrocketing, without typical nighttime cooling. Extreme temperatures threatened the health of residents, most of whom do not have home air conditioning. These climate events vary by season and location across the state. Mapping is an important tool for understanding the geographic patterns and the public health impacts of climate change.

Washington Tracking Network Creates Near-Realtime Map Data

In 2021, the Washington State Department of Health’s Division of Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) worried about fireworks sparking wildfires. EPR requested that the Washington Tracking Network (WTN) add drought information to the Smoke & Air map on the WTN On The Go mobile-friendly mapping tool. WTN also added drought information to several Emergency Preparedness and Response measures on the WTN Data Portal.

WTN staff worked as part of the Extreme Heat Incident Management Team. They built a new Cooling Centers map layer for display on WTN tools, including the Smoke & Air map.

Maps Direct Resources to Prepare for Emergencies

EPR used the maps and data WTN provided to direct resources to the areas with the greatest risk of wildfires ahead of Independence Day celebrations and fireworks.

The Extreme Heat Incident Management Team used the Cooling Center map layer to see where there were not enough cooling centers. This allowed them to work with partners to establish more cooling centers and ensure better coverage.



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