

PE7 Action: Heat Emergency Plan

6 Points

A. Why is this action important?

Extreme heat events, like heat waves, are often referred to as “silent killers” because they can last for multiple days and their impacts are not always easy to observe. They can be particularly dangerous to children, the elderly, the sick, the socially isolated, and non-English speaking populations. According to the Fourth National Climate Assessment, average annual temperatures in the Northeast are expected to increase by 4.0°F to 5.1°F by 2050. The Northeast region is also predicted to see an increase in the frequency, intensity, and duration of extreme heat events occurring each year. With these changes, New York can expect to see an increase in heat-related illnesses and deaths. Because these health impacts can be reduced by having a heat emergency plan and local adaptation resources in place ahead of a heat event, the Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program recommends that municipalities foster efforts to create heat emergency plans.

A heat emergency plan is usually a multiagency and locally coordinated plan that describes and organizes activities that result in efficient response to heat events. Planning for extreme heat is critical for ensuring both the long-term resilience of a community as well as for reducing the number of deaths and hospitalizations that take place during high-heat events.

B. How to implement this action

This action can be implemented by undertaking the following steps to develop and implement a comprehensive heat response plan:

1. Convene a group of key stakeholders to discuss current heat emergency management systems, their effectiveness, and applicability to high-heat events. Be sure to include representatives from the most impacted segments of the community, like low to moderate income residents, non-English speaking people, and those who could represent these groups such as environmental justice advocates. Members of municipal staff engaged in emergency management planning should be consulted when beginning this process to ensure this plan builds on existing work and available resources.
2. Create a new heat emergency plan or update an existing one using the following guidelines:
 - a. Define geographic coverage of the heat emergency plan and the underlying causes of heat vulnerability in the region (e.g., language vulnerability, age vulnerability, socio-economic vulnerability). The [New York State Department of Health Heat Vulnerability Index](#) can be used to identify heat-vulnerable areas and populations. Census data can also be used to identify specific vulnerable populations (e.g., children under five, persons living in poverty).
 - b. Outline specifically what your community will do in the case of a heat wave. For example, activate cooling centers and promote awareness of their locations and methods of available transportation for residents to travel to these centers. (See PE7 Action: Cooling Centers).
 - c. Create a system to check in on your community’s most vulnerable people during a heat wave. For example, create a [Neighbor to Neighbor](#) network in which vulnerable citizens receive telephone calls during an emergency from their neighbors. Consider community and key stakeholders in this process by connecting with organizations that support socially, linguistically, and geographically isolated populations as well as environmental justice and economically disadvantaged communities.
 - d. Work with utility companies to suspend disruption of services during predicted high-heat events, or during

seasonally hot weather. Coordinate with utilities to address public health needs resulting from power disruptions associated with extreme heat events.

3. Determine appropriate trigger levels of key indicators to implement the plan. Work with regional offices of the National Weather Service (NWS) to define activation thresholds based on heat alerts and advisories or on information obtained from the NWS Hazardous Weather outlook.
4. Develop a communication plan and outreach materials to improve awareness among residents. Activities may include using existing telecommunications technology and social networking systems to improve reach of early warning and evacuation systems, developing a plan and materials for communicating to non-English speaking populations, and/or developing outreach materials and guidance on recognizing heat illnesses (cramps, exhaustion, stroke) and appropriate treatment. Consider using or promoting materials developed by New York State and/or by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Communication and outreach materials can be shared with the community through any mediums including the municipal website, social media, email, paper mail, text message etc.
5. Have the plan approved by local elected officials. Inform the county emergency management office of this planning effort. If possible, conduct a drill or training exercise to identify deficiencies in the response plan so they can be addressed before the actual emergency event.
6. Review and update the plan after extreme weather events or on a regular basis, at least every five years, to ensure its effectiveness.

C. Timeframe, project costs, and resource needs

If your community does not already have a heat emergency plan, creating a new one can take from six to ten months, depending on the amount of time and resources available to help with plan creation. If your community already has a plan, updating it to incorporate strategies that can handle existing heat waves as well as future heat waves that could potentially be longer and more intense should take between two to three months.

D. Which local governments implement this action? Which departments within the local government are most likely to have responsibility for this action?

This action is applicable to all types of local governments but is particularly important for communities with large proportions of vulnerable populations such as the elderly. The department or people with the responsibility for leading public health efforts are most likely to be responsible for this action. In many cases, the county health department or emergency management offices may assume the lead role for this action. Cross-department involvement and support are strongly recommended. Stakeholder involvement is important to understand needs of vulnerable populations.

E. How to obtain points for this action

Six points are available for submitting a new or a revised heat emergency plan that is consistent with the guidelines above.

F. What to submit

Submit a copy of a heat emergency plan and documentation of communication and outreach materials (such as links to the municipal website and/or to social media posts, handouts, copies of emails). Additionally, provide documentation that the plan has been adopted by local elected officials. The plan must have been developed or updated within five years prior to the application date.

All CSC action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submittals should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

G. Links to additional resources or examples

- [Village of Hastings-on-Hudson Heat Emergency Plan](#)
- [CDC's Heat Response Plans: Summary of Evidence and Strategies for Collaboration and Implementation](#)
- [NYSDOH Heat Vulnerability Index](#)
- [NYSDOH Extreme heat advice](#)
- [Groundwork Hudson Valley Heat Island Mapping of Westchester County](#)

H. Recertification Requirements

The recertification requirements are generally the same as the initial certification requirements. But every five years (at minimum), applicants should describe how strategies within the prior plan have been implemented, update the climate science data and projections, address any changes in policy or infrastructure since the last plan, and modify the existing strategies or add new recommendations as appropriate.