



**WASHINGTON COUNTY, OREGON**  
**COOLING CENTER COORDINATION PROCEDURES**  
May 15, 2019

**I. PURPOSE**

The Washington County Cooling Center Coordination Procedures establish a process the County will use in preparation for and during excessive heat events to:

- Identify organizations with an interest in offering a facility as a public cooling center;
- Coordinate with local agencies, organizations, and county departments to provide specific information about each participating organization's cooling center; and
- Notify the public of available cooling centers using news releases, social media, and web postings.

**II. BACKGROUND**

Extreme heat events are a leading cause of weather-related deaths in the United States. Groups typically identified as "heat sensitive" or "heat vulnerable" include:

- The elderly and children
- People on certain medications and / or with preexisting conditions which make them sensitive to heat
- Outdoor workers and those exercising or doing strenuous activities
- People without a reliable source of cooling and / or water
- People not acclimated to the expected heat

According to the National Weather Service (NWS), the annual average number of days experiencing extreme heat (i.e., at or above 90°F) during the past 21 years in Hillsboro is 18. Figure 1 below shows the number of days at or above 90°F and 100°F dating back to 1998.

Although there is no known history of serious health-related consequences from prior excessive heat events in Washington County, the threat of heat-related illnesses and deaths is significant. Providing cooling centers for individuals and families to get relief from the heat is both prudent and appropriate.

**III. DEFINITIONS**

**Cooling Center**

An air-conditioned facility made available to the general public as a respite during excessive heat events. Typical cooling centers include churches, libraries, and shopping, recreation, and community centers.

**Excessive Heat Event**

Washington County Emergency Management (WCEM) defines an excessive heat event as one where peak daytime temperatures in Washington County reach or exceed 90°F for a prolonged period of time accompanied by the NWS issuing a Heat Advisory or an Excessive Heat Warning. Other factors considered are the overnight low temperatures, number of consecutive days experiencing these high temperatures, and humidity / heat index values.

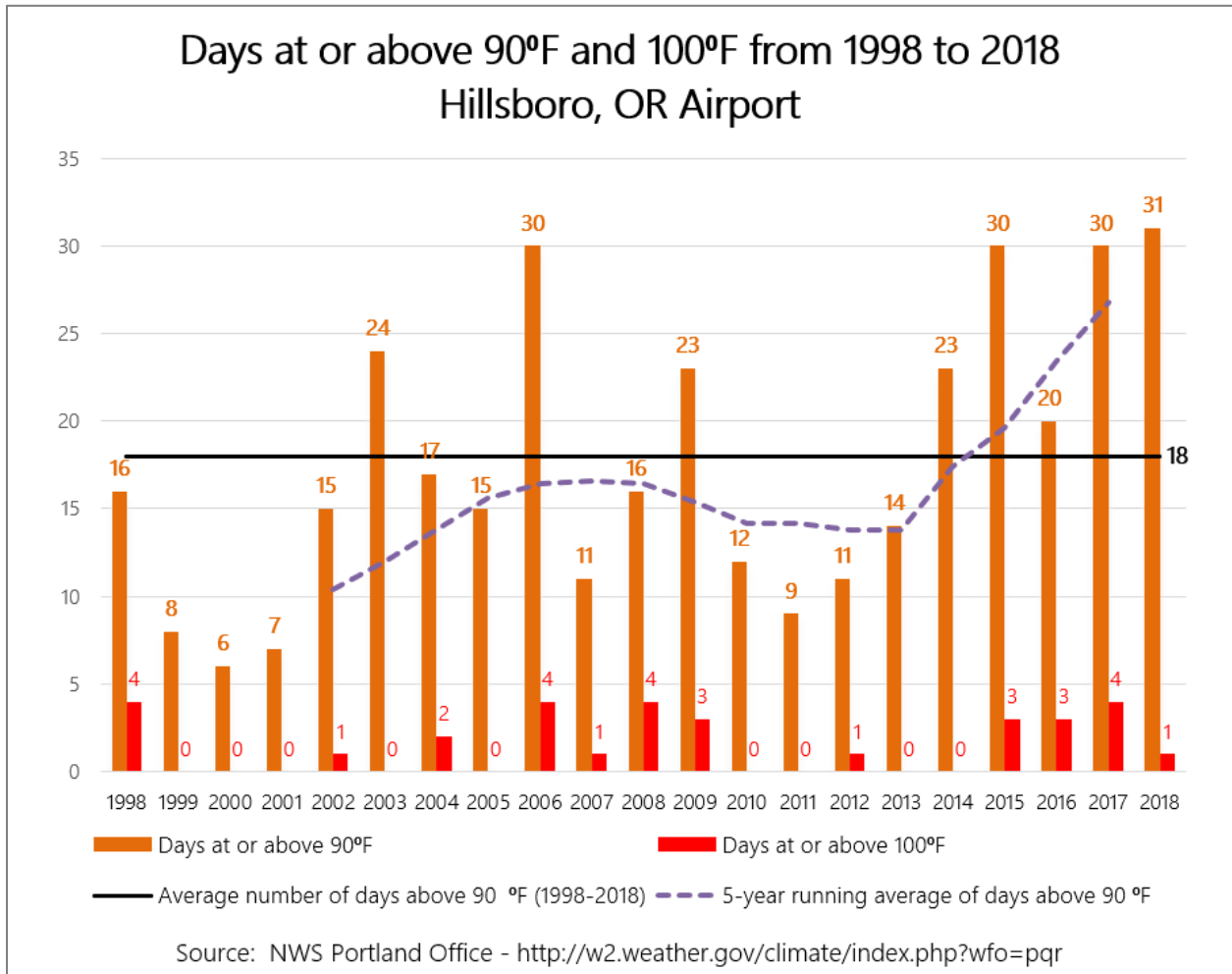


Figure 1: Time series of days at or above 90°F and 100°F from 1998 through 2018 at the Hillsboro Airport.

### Excessive Heat Warning

An alert issued by the NWS based on the HeatRisk forecast. Warnings are normally issued when conditions pose a high risk to health and usually involve prolonged durations of very high temperatures lasting for at least two days.

### Experimental HeatRisk Forecast:

An experimental forecast product to help emergency managers, heat health decision makers, and first responders quickly identify the potential for impactful heat. The product provides a color and numeric value that places forecast heat for a specific location into an appropriate level of heat concern. The HeatRisk values are produced from the current date through seven days in the future.

HeatRisk Values	Risk of Heat Effects	Level of Heat Concern
When the HeatRisk value is:	...the risk of heat effects are:	...as symbolized by this color:
0	Very Low	Green
1	Low	Yellow
2	Medium	Orange
3	High	Red
4	Very High	Magenta

Source: National Weather Service (<https://www.wrh.noaa.gov/wrh/heatrisk/>)

### Heat Advisory

An alert issued by the NWS based on the HeatRisk forecast. Advisories are normally issued when conditions pose a moderate risk to health and usually involve prolonged durations of high temperatures lasting for at least two days.

### Heat Index:

The Heat Index or the “Apparent Temperature” is an accurate measure of how hot it really feels when the relative humidity is combined with the actual air temperature.

## IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

Using the Cooling Center Registration Form (Tab A), WCEM will develop and maintain a list of organizations that may make a facility available as a public cooling center during excessive heat events. WCEM will also maintain an email distribution list for organizations that wish to be notified when the procedures are implemented. WCEM will review these lists and update them annually.

When an excessive heat event is forecasted or occurs and a decision is made to implement the procedures, WCEM will coordinate with other emergency managers in the county and cooling center providers to identify facilities that will be activated. WCEM will also coordinate with the County Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to assist with public health messaging.

## V. ACTIVATION CRITERIA FOR COOLING CENTER COORDINATION

WCEM staff monitors NWS forecasts for indicators of excessive heat events. The following criteria could trigger initiation of these procedures:

- NWS issues a Heat Advisory or Excessive Heat Warning;
- NWS issues an email weather briefing related to an excessive heat event; and / or
- Evaluation of NWS HeatRisk or other forecast products which show a high likelihood of the onset of an excessive heat event.

When triggering criteria are met, WCEM will consult with the HHS Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coordinator before deciding if the Cooling Center Coordination Procedures

should be activated. When activated, the implementation procedures listed below will be followed.

## **VI. IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES**

WCEM will manage cooling center procedure implementation in coordination with other county departments and supporting organizations. Specific roles and responsibilities include:

### **A. Washington County Emergency Management (WCEM)**

WCEM will take the following actions:

- Excessive heat events:
  - Notify and coordinate with HHS Public Information Officer (PIO).
  - Contact potential cooling center providers to verify participation and, if planning to activate a cooling center(s), document the days/hours of operation.
  - Develop a list of participating cooling centers and disseminate it along with the HHS news release in accordance with the e-mail distribution list.
  - Prepare a cooling centers map with event-specific information and provide the link to the HHS PIO for inclusion in the HHS news release.
  - Post cooling center information on the WCEM website using a callout pointing to the list on the HHS website.
- Post-event and/or post-season actions:
  - Lead an evaluation of the cooling center program and activations.

### **B. Washington County Departments/Divisions/Offices/Programs**

The County Administrators Office, Health and Human Services (Animal Services Division; Developmental Disabilities Program; Disability, Aging and Veteran Services Division; Mental Health Program, and the Public Health Division), Housing Services, and the Sheriff's Office will complete steps 1 – 3 below:

1. Refer callers inquiring about the cooling center procedures to WCEM.
2. Provide cooling center information to partner agencies, clients and customers during excessive heat events.
3. Provide feedback to improve the program, as needed.

### **C. Washington County HHS - PIO**

The Washington County HHS PIO will take the following actions:

- Excessive heat events:
  - Consult with the health officer to write and send news release(s) that include appropriate health messaging.
  - Develop and issue news releases in cooperation with WCEM.
  - Post the news release and the cooling center list on the HHS website.
  - Work with HHS staff to distribute the news release and list to organizations serving the county's non-English speaking communities.
  - Post information on Horizons (i.e., county intranet) and the county website.
  - Post information on social media.
- Post-event and/or post-season:

- Participate in an evaluation of the cooling center program and activations.

#### **D. Cooling Center Providers**

Organizations interested in offering a facility as a cooling center will be asked to do the following:

- Excessive heat events:
  - Notify WCEM when they plan to open a facility as a cooling center including the dates and hours of operation.
  - Notify WCEM of any changes to the cooling center(s) hours of operations.
- Post-event and/or post-season:
  - Provide information about the approximate number of people who used their facility as a cooling center.
  - Provide program improvement feedback to WCEM.

**Tabs: Tab A - Cooling Center Registration Form**