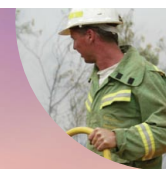
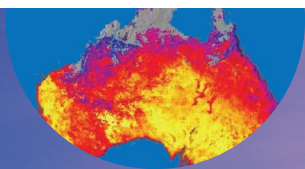


Heatwave



With the hot weather firmly behind us, it is important to begin planning for heatwaves for the coming summer season.

Local councils and the Department of Human Services are developing and implementing heatwave plans. The department will support councils through funding and providing the Heatwave Planning Guide.

The importance of these actions is highlighted in a report from the Chief Health Officer showing 374 additional deaths during January's heatwave. Unfortunately, this is only a glimpse of the future.

State and local governments can work together to ensure plans are in place to inform and protect those most vulnerable in our communities.

Noel Cleaves

Acting Assistant Director
Environmental Health

Chief Health Officer January 2009 Heatwave report

In late January 2009, Victoria experienced an unprecedented statewide heatwave with Melbourne experiencing three consecutive days of temperatures above 43°C and little overnight relief.

A report by the Office of the Chief Health Officer concluded that there were 374 additional deaths during this time in the previous 5 years. A report can be found at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/chiefhealthofficer/publications/heatwave.htm>

Heatwaves webpage

The Environmental Health Unit has recently updated the webpage to provide you with up-to-date information about heatwaves. Visit www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/climate/heatwave.htm for more information

Pilot Heatwave Planning Projects

All of the 13 pilot projects have completed their heatwave planning process. An outline of each of the projects can be found on the Environmental Health website.

The Environmental Health Unit will be undertaking a formal evaluation of the pilot projects to assess the processes undertaken.

This evaluation is expected to be completed before the 2009–10 summer season.

Heatwave Planning Guide

The Heatwave Planning Guide is designed to assist local councils develop a heatwave plan that can be implemented into existing municipal plans. The guide places a priority on developing strategies aimed at protecting vulnerable population groups in the community. Those most vulnerable include the elderly, people with a disability, people with a pre-existing medical condition and people who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

Drawing on the experiences of the 13 pilot projects, the 2009 heatwave and international knowledge, the guide provides:

- information about heatwaves and municipal planning
- guidance on how to develop a heatwave plan
- examples of stakeholders and partners to consider in the planning process
- actions recommended for councils to incorporate in their heatwave plan
- advice on developing a communication strategy
- templates and checklists to assist in the development process.

Examples and tips from the pilot projects are scattered throughout it.

A hard copy will be printed following final comments from the Heatwave Planning Guide Forum. The final version will be presented in a ring binder allowing local councils to update the document easily. A draft copy can be found on the Environmental Health Unit website.

Heatwave Planning Guide Forum

On 12 June 2009, the department released the Heatwave Planning Guide at a forum.

The forum presented case studies from 4 of the 13 pilot projects, introduced the latest version of the Heatwave Planning Guide, and gave local councils an afternoon to workshop some of the issues they may face in developing heatwave plans.

The forum was attended by around 120 people from:

- local, state and Commonwealth governments
- emergency services
- primary care partnerships
- community health services
- greenhouse alliances
- non-government organisations
- academia
- consultancies.



Statewide roll out of heatwave planning

The department is providing local councils with a grant and the Heatwave Planning Guide to assist them in developing and implementing a heatwave plan for the 2009–10 summer. Pilot projects are not eligible for the grant, but are encouraged to use the guide to review and revise their plans for the upcoming summer.

Local councils will receive funding through a Funding and Service Agreement. Most local councils who accepted the grant prior to May have received their funding already. The remaining local councils will receive the funding in the 2009–10 financial year.

Local councils will submit a copy of their heatwave plan to the department prior to the commencement of the 2009–10 summer season and also assist in evaluating the guide.

Community register

On 6 April 2009, Minister Neville announced that \$1 million would be allocated to the establishment of community registers in Victoria in 2009/10. The Office of Senior Victorians, Department of Planning and Community development is responsible for implementing the initiative.

It is intended that the community registers will be staffed by volunteers and housed at local police stations. The elderly and people with a disability will be eligible to self-register for the community register.

There are currently at least 20 registers in Victoria, 18 of which are located in police stations.

The registers will be an opportunity to share public health information about heatwaves and heat-related illnesses to those enrolled.




Scoping climate change impacts on population health and vulnerabilities

Understanding how climate change affects health and wellbeing will better enable the Department of Human Services, other government departments, agencies and community organisations to adapt their services and policies to the needs of Victorian communities.

The department is currently working with Arup, the ANU, Curtin University and Buchan Consulting to develop a model which will forecast impacts and identify vulnerable individuals who will be most affected.

To create a model which accurately forecasts the impacts of climate change, the project team is seeking to integrate existing knowledge and data from within the department and other government agencies and statutory authorities actively researching and monitoring climate change and/or its impacts.

Once finalised, the model will be implemented to generate a detailed assessment of the climate change impacts on health and vulnerabilities.

The Project Team is keen to hear from individuals and organisations that have been, or are involved in, capturing data related to the impacts of climate change, and/or researching the impacts of climate change which may affect human health. Please contact Thomas Mitchell, Environmental Health Unit, on 03 9096 5279 or via Thomas.Mitchell@dhs.vic.gov.au.

Vulnerability Mapping

A Geographic Information System (GIS) map of factors that increase the risk of heat-related illness in the elderly across metropolitan Melbourne is being developed by Monash University.

The study, funded by the department, is expected to be completed at the end of July.



Green Paper: Climate Change

The Victorian Government has released a Climate Change Green Paper, which outlines the risks facing Victoria and the likely impacts of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, and also proposes ways the state can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to the impacts of climate change and become a leading low carbon economy.

This release also starts a four month public consultation period, which will lead to the development of a Climate Change White Paper. We encourage all those interested in climate change and health to provide feedback on the Green Paper to the Department of Sustainability and Environment or attend a public forum.

For information on the Green Paper visit:
<http://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au>

Resources

Keeping Cool Survey: Aid Conditioner Use by Australians with MS, MS Australia by Dr Michael Summers and Dr Rex Simmons

http://www.mssociety.org.au/live/documents/MsAustralia_KeepingCool_SurveyPolicy_ImplicationsReport_2009.pdf

Community Engagement and Climate Change: Benefits, Challenges and Strategies, Department of Planning and Community Development, Victorian Government

<http://www.vcooss.org.au/documents/VCOSS%20docs/Climate%20Change/CCCE%20Final%20Report%20Jan%2031%202009.pdf>

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