

Transcript for Heat Webinar 2: The IAC Asks: How Can New Jersey Prepare for & Respond to Heat Emergencies?

Webinar Transcript

April 24, 2025, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.



Laura Connolly 3:04

Alright, let's get started. Good morning, I am Laura Connolly, Public Information Officer for the Emergency Management Section of the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, and I'll be the moderator for today's discussion.

On behalf of the New Jersey Interagency Council on Climate Resilience, or IAC for short, we would like to thank you for joining us today to learn more about how New Jersey already prepares for and responds to climate-driven extreme heat emergency events to ensure the safety of our residents and if there are ways to improve our communication and responses as we prepare to face increasing extreme heat events.

The IAC was established by Governor Murphy through Executive Order 89 and consists of 26 state departments and agencies coordinating together at a state level to develop and implement short- and long-term actions to address and mitigate climate impacts on New Jersey's economy, communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. Part of the IAC's mission is to educate New Jersey residents about and prepare them for the impacts of climate change and the actions needed to protect New Jerseyans.

This webinar is the third in a series designated to educate the public on extreme heat. The first two in the series were held last summer; the first laying the groundwork for understanding warming weather patterns in New Jersey over time and expectations for that trend moving forward, and the second outlining the physical and behavioral health impacts extreme heat can have on our bodies and minds.

If you missed those sessions, both webinar recordings are posted on the events page of Heat Hub NJ. In addition, the IAC created short summary videos of those two webinars, emphasizing the highlights of those discussions and posted them on Heat Hub NJ. We encourage you to review those sessions or those summary videos, as the information provided by those panel experts is foundational for the more nuanced discussions that will happen over the next four webinars in this series.

Today, we are exploring heat waves as a natural disaster that, like hurricanes and flooding, require immediate short term actions and interventions to protect the public.

New Jersey's National Weather Service forecast offices generally defines a heat wave as three or more consecutive days with temperatures of 90°F or higher, with or without

high humidity, and covering a large area that exposes a high number of people to life-threatening heat conditions.

Extreme heat is the leading weather related cause of death in the United States, surpassing all other weather events. With New Jersey warming faster than the global average and all other states in the Northeast, we can expect that heat waves here will become more frequent and last longer. Preparing for this inevitability ensures that New Jersey can reduce the impacts of these events on our residents' health and well-being.

But how can we prepare, and when should we react? To answer those questions, we are fortunate to have a panel of three emergency health and response experts with a wealth of knowledge on preparing for and reacting to the dangers of extreme weather events. I'm going to briefly introduce each of the panelists but visit the events web page on Heat Hub NJ to view their full bios.

First up is Brayden Fahey. Brayden currently serves as the Director of Public Safety and Emergency Management for Hunterdon, New Jersey, where he oversees the county's 911 Communications, Emergency Management, and 1st Responder Training Center.

With 20 plus years of experience in emergency management and emergency services, Brayden holds New Jersey certifications as an emergency medical technician and firefighter and public safety dispatcher and has been recognized by the International Association of Emergency Managers as a Certified Emergency Manager. Brayden served many years on the executive board of the New Jersey County Emergency Management Coordinators Association and is the immediate past president of that organization.

Through his work with the Association, Brayden collaborated with the New Jersey Emergency Management Association to develop the New Jersey Certified Emergency Manager Credential and represented local emergency management interest to the state through participation in the New Jersey State Emergency Management Program Stakeholders Committee.

Brayden is a member of both the New Jersey All-Hazards Type 3 Incident Management Team and the New Jersey EMS Task Force.

Next up we have Steve Sarinelli. Steve brings over 30 years of experience in public safety and emergency services to his role as Director of Emergency Preparedness and Business Continuity for the Atlantic Health system, one of the largest nonprofit healthcare networks in New Jersey. Steve also currently serves as a Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator for Morristown, NJ.

He additionally serves as co-chair of the Hospital Subcommittee for the Northern New Jersey, Newark, Jersey City Urban Area Security Initiative and as a regional co-lead for the New Jersey Healthcare Coalition.

Previously, Steve held key leadership positions with the American Red Cross, including New Jersey Disaster Officer and National Disaster Director. He remains an active member of the American Red Cross National Incident Management Team and is a former member of the New Jersey State All-Hazards Incident Management Team.

Steve holds certifications as a Certified Emergency Manager and a Certified Healthcare Provider Continuity Professional.

And finally, we have Rebecca Sleeter. Rebecca is the Health Officer for the Salem County Department of Health and Human Services. In addition to her Master in Public Health from the University of South Florida, where she was awarded the Florida Public Health Student Scholarship Award, Rebecca has a Certified Public Health credential through the National Board of Public Health Examiners and is a registered Environmental Health Specialist. She is also certified by the New Jersey Department of Health as a LEED Inspector Risk Assessor.

Rebecca started in Salem County, enforcing New Jersey's public health and environmental regulations, and then acting as the Environmental Health Coordinator responsible for all environmental health programs. Her current role as Health Officer requires her to serve as Salem County's Health Chief Executive Officer and oversee all Health Department programs.

Thank you to each of you for joining us today.

Before we get to the questions, I'll lay out a few housekeeping items for the webinar. This webinar is being recorded, and that recording will be posted on the events page of Heat Hub NJ a few days after the event. Audience members are in listen-only mode to cut down on background noise during the discussion.

Today's format is interview-style, with panelists fielding specific questions from the moderator, followed by Q&A from audience members. If you have questions, please jot those down in the chat feature, and we'll do our best to get to them during the Q&A section.

OK, let's get started. Rebecca, this question is for you.

According to a 2024 report by New York State Insurance Fund findings from nearly 100,000 workers compensation claims submitted in five consecutive summer seasons from 2017 to 2021, on days where the temperature is 80°F or hotter, workplace injuries were 45% more likely to occur on average.

I'm sure that statistic may surprise some who may think of temperatures in the 80s as ideal summer weather, which is one of the reasons outreach about the dangers of extreme heat to the general public are often a challenge for officials from state, county, and local emergency management offices.

How can we most effectively help people understand that some hot days are a lot more dangerous than other hot days?

RS **Rebecca Sleeter** 11:33

So, one of the ten essential public health services that every local health department is required to deliver to their residents is to communicate effectively to inform and educate. Every local health department in New Jersey is required to employ a full time health educator to deliver health education and promotion services and to have a structured health education and promotion program in place.

Some of the goals and strategies of health education within a health department are to promote healthy behaviors, prevent illness and disease, and improve community health. Educational materials our department issues can be in the form of presentations, flyers, infographics, website content, fact sheets, and press releases. Information obtained for educational materials is always retrieved from trustworthy sources to ensure accurate information is being disseminated. We disseminate these materials via social media accounts, our website, our department app—which we launched last year—and press releases.

We also recently created a community request form where the public can go on to our website or app to request specific resources or presentations from our department.

We also are required to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate materials to ensure all populations have access to and can interpret the educational materials we distribute.

So, to summarize, effective and accurate education is key to a health department being able to deliver the message to residents that some hot days are more dangerous than others, and what steps residents can take to protect themselves.

LC **Laura Connolly** 13:09

Excellent.

Steve, this question is for you.

Extreme heat and heat waves in particular are the leading cause of weather-related deaths in the US. Why do you think they seem to get less attention and response prioritization than other weather-related disasters, such as hurricanes and flooding?

SS

Sarinelli, Steven 13:28

Sure. Thank you, Laura. Good question.

It really comes down to the lack of visuals and how it's covered also by the media and the amount of attention it's given. These events start out as very slow and gradual, and then as time goes on, the consequences are later and the impacts are later realized. If you think about other types of weather-related disasters, such as a tornado, it's a very dramatic impact, and there's a lot of visuals there, so I think that's right up front. And I also feel like people, you know, see extreme heat, a lot of times, as discomfort or inconvenience versus a life-threatening situation.

So, I think there's some misconceptions there, and we also associate warmer weather with recreation as well, so. Thank you.

LC

Laura Connolly 14:28

And just as a follow up to that, Steve, do you think that the view that heat is less dangerous than other weather-related disasters carries over to the public? What actions can state, county and local governments take to counter this view?

SS

Sarinelli, Steven 14:42

Sure, and thank you very much. It really is the perception that people have. Again, it's something that is not as threatening with our public, and they really, folks really lack the awareness about the signs of heat illness and the risks, particularly to our vulnerable populations and groups. So, providing, a government can provide better education.

Our government partners, as far as the public awareness campaigns, elevate the visibility of even our cooling centers or things folks can do during these types of events.

And then we can also, which is really important, is prioritize our most vulnerable population, which are the first ones to be impacted when we do have these types of extended heat events. Thank you.

LC

Laura Connolly 15:28

Thank you, Steve.

Brayden this question is for you.

Let's talk about the structure of emergency management in New Jersey. There is a state Office of Emergency Management organized under the Department of Law and Public Safety. There are also 21 county offices and some municipal-level offices, for example, Newark.

As someone who sits at the midway point of that hierarchy and is active in a professional network of county OEM managers, can you please explain the rules and responsibilities of each of these entities, both ahead of and during a statewide heat emergency? Also, how do they all coordinate to ensure priority response actions are in place?



Brayden Fahey 16:12

Sure. Thanks, Laura.

So, as you alluded to, in New Jersey, obviously there's the State Office of Emergency Management, the 21 counties each have a county Office of Emergency Management with a County OEM Coordinator, but there's also a municipal office and a Municipal Coordinator in each of our municipalities.

And so, you know, to your point, it's really important that we're coordinating, not only within that structure of those 3 levels of government, but we also work to ensure that, you know, we're engaging the health care sector and their emergency management personnel because of the impact, you know, that's far reaching from heat-related illness and events.

So, you know, it really is dependent on the county and the municipalities that are within as to which actions they take in response to heat-related situations.

You know, I can speak from experience in Hunterdon, we have designated cooling centers at the county level, and then dependent on the situation that, you know, that the scope of that particular instance of extreme heat, the municipalities may elect to, you know, open their own cooling centers as well.

And so, as the county OEM, we try to serve as that coordinating entity and the repository to make sure that we have an accurate understanding of which facilities are operational when. We try to share that with you know those in public health, human services. We frequently engage and are connected with NJ211 and also the state OEM.

So, you know, as all that information is funneled up from the municipal level through the 21 counties and up to all those partners, you know, that we have, we try to make sure that you know that's how we're ensuring that response actions are coordinated and are in place.

LC **Laura Connolly** 18:02

Thank you.

This question is for the group, the whole panel.

The IAC developed Heat Hub NJ because we learned that there was a gap in understanding about extreme heat while developing EHRAP. Messaging about impending heat waves to the public is critical to the success of any response actions that the state, county, and our local governments take; for example, standing up cooling centers.

Do you think the public understands what the National Weather Service's advisories and warnings mean with respect to extreme heat and know what to do when those advisories and warnings are issued to keep themselves and their loved ones safe? What mechanism for distributing that messaging—for example, social media websites, robo-calls—do you think is most effective?

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 18:54

I can start out with that just from my perspective.

I think we, the National Weather Service products have really evolved when it comes to extreme heat, and I think it's also unique to your geographical area. I think in the southern part of the country, you know, it's relative to where you're located, such as in the southern part of the country where there's more adaption to heat. Where if you're in the Northeast, if we had some hotter days, it's not as common because we face the season, so I think really providing that message and getting that deeper understanding, and it's also a translation of when the triggers would take place based on those things for when we would need to take some precautions for heat-related emergencies.

So, I think that the method of providing that would be multi-approach but working through local Office of Emergency Management, elected officials, and others to really help translate that. Even community groups that are engaged, others that also could be providing for vulnerable populations to help them prepare.

Thank you.

BF **Brayden Fahey** 20:05

And I would just piggyback on what Steve said.

You know, I think as we've seen the National Weather Service messaging become more robust. It's not just those alert products that they send, it's also the infographics that they're using.

I know, you know, at least in our county, we try to be the, you know, the lead agency that shares that information. And so, you know, again we share it with all those partners that we mentioned earlier with the hope that it's the, it's a consistent message that's going out. It's the same material that's being posted in different areas.

You know, and really taking that, that whole community approach by ensuring that, you know, it's not just government that's sharing the word, that, you know, we're sharing that with health officials, you know, Human Services. Because to Steve's earlier point, those are probably two of the main sectors that deal with the most vulnerable when it comes to heat related emergencies and situations.

RS **Rebecca Sleeter** 21:02

And then what I would also add to that is one of the most important elements of creating effective education and communication is creating content for all literacy levels.

So when you're creating content, you can't assume that someone will understand the content without providing some context that ensures your message is clear to your audience.

And, in our experience at the local health department, we find that utilizing multiple platforms is effective in disseminating messaging. So, for example, we push out messaging on our social media accounts, our website, our department app at outreach events so we can see people face to face, and also through press releases. So, utilizing those multiple platforms really ensures that message is reaching as many residents as possible.

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 21:48

Yeah. One thing I'll underscore as well, thank you, is that the National Weather Service is recognized as the authority when watches, warnings, and other types of alerts are issued, so really anchoring the messaging to those and being consistent with the National Weather Service also as that's being pushed out.

LC **Laura Connolly** 22:08

That's great.

You kind of touched on this already, but who are some of the most trusted messengers for these warnings? For example, the National Weather Service, State OEM, Department of Health, County OEM or other officials.

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 22:24

So from my perspective, again, I think you—and we just underscored that even through discussion—I think it's important for folks to know where to go for that trusted source information. And our local government, also just understanding what the National Weather, and translating, again as we indicated, our National Weather Service products.

And I think what Brayden had touched on as far as the graphics. The visuals are really a good comparison so people can understand like, what they're facing and then even the cascading impacts from those higher temperatures.

LC **Laura Connolly** 23:03

Great.

So, all this messaging is going out. How do you know when messaging is successful? How do we know when we're reaching the folks that are most hard hit by heat emergencies?

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 23:15

So I would—go ahead, Brayden.

BF **Brayden Fahey** 23:18

Oh, thanks Steve.

You know, I think, at least from my perspective, you know, certainly a lot of content is shared through social media, and we can look at views and likes and, you know, reactions and comments and things like that.

But from an emergency management perspective, I know that, you know, we try to use a metric in perhaps 911 call data that, you know, relates to heat emergencies. If that data you know is relatively low, you know, then folks are likely taking, you know, the appropriate preparedness measures.

The same can be said with you know EMS activity, you know, hospital census and what you know hospitals are seeing, and, you know, data that that's fed from emergency departments back to, you know, the public health sector.

So it's not just, you know, commentary or responses via social media or, you know, things like that. It's really trying to come up with some tangible information to say, yeah, it appears that the message has gone out based on behaviors and, you know, activity that's going on throughout the community. We get a pretty good feel for whether this is rising to a crisis level or whether, you know, the information seems to be received and folks are taking the appropriate steps.

SS

Sarinelli, Steven 24:40

Yeah, and thank you, Brayden.

I exactly use my same train of thought, and it's really hard to measure that level of preparedness, you know, to say what did we prevent? But I also feel like we can document, you know, how many folks participated in any educational campaigns or received specific preparedness measures or attended or visited our cooling centers.

Also, the healthcare data for emergency room visits and other things that we can really compare based on the efforts of that, but it does take some work, and aligning the data is challenging because you need to validate it, as well.

RS

Rebecca Sleeter 25:21

And then I just have one thing to—I'm sorry, one thing to add.

LC

Laura Connolly 25:21

Great. Oh, no, absolutely.

RS

Rebecca Sleeter 25:40

From my department's perspective, we actually employ a Program Development Specialist who reviews our existing social media and marketing policies to identify areas of improvement, which has really helped our department in ensuring equitable access to all of our resources and educational materials.

LC

Laura Connolly 25:46

Excellent. Thank you, Rebecca.

Estimates are that around 155 languages are spoken in New Jersey, with one in four homes speaking a language other than English. Most frequently, that language is Spanish. How are language barriers taken into account when preparing for and messaging heat waves and response actions?

RS **Rebecca Sleeter** 26:10

I can start off with that one.

So as I mentioned previously, the local health department has to ensure that we're disseminating educational material that's culturally and linguistically appropriate.

So, we translate all of our educational materials into Spanish, and in some circumstances, the New Jersey Department of Health, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, as well as some other state agencies will translate their materials into various languages, so we'll often utilize their materials.

And our department also, we have Spanish-speaking staff members who provide interpreting and translation services.

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 26:47

I would add, as we've touched on, the visual messaging becomes critical too, because that transcends any of the language barriers.

BF **Brayden Fahey** 26:59

I would just add to Rebecca's point, you know, locally for us, in Hunterdon, both our health department and the Emergency Management Office have done a lot of work with our community organizations active in disaster program. And so, you know, the agencies that are a part of that group have really great connections to a host of different resources, but also have you know, unique audiences that they can help us target and reach with regard to, you know, contacting and communicating with those—excuse me—who you know may speak a different language or may have, you know, special resource needs that might be an oversight on our end or, you know, need some greater attention.

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 27:47

It is a particularly great point too, when you're talking about even access to care and some of our more urban communities, as well. We have very diverse communities. I think it becomes very important to be able to provide it in that manner.

LC **Laura Connolly** 28:01

Excellent. Thank you.

Brayden, the next question is for you. What other entities are typically involved in heat wave response? For example, National Weather Service, local health departments, hospital ERs, local libraries, senior centers, local nonprofits and faith-based organizations, just to name a few.

BF **Brayden Fahey** 28:24

Sure. So, I think it, you know, again it falls back, at least from an emergency management perspective, that we're using that whole community approach.

So, you know, not only is it relying on the agencies that are identified in our County Emergency Operations Plan, you know, which do include local health, you know, county human services, and the like, but ensuring, you know, as I said earlier, that we have that connection to the healthcare sector, that we're engaging, you know, emergency services so they can kind of be the boots on the ground and communicate back, you know, their experience and the situations that they're responding to.

You know, I think, the specific actions that we can take, you know, from an emergency management perspective, again our core functions—arguably, but at least from my perspective—are information and intelligence gathering and sharing and, you know, coordinating the information that's going out to the public. And so, you know, that's a high-level action item that we take and it kind of, you know, filters down to, we gather as much information as we can, and it leads to the public dissemination, whether it's of the products that we spoke about earlier to ensure those that may be impacted, you know, have an awareness before it occurs, as well as cooling centers and different resources that are available to those that may need them.

LC **Laura Connolly** 29:54

Thank you, Brayden.

Steve, this question is for you. Recognizing that heat waves differ from other weather-related events because they happen over days rather than hours and their impacts are less visible, for example, emergency room visits versus housing destruction. What specific actions do emergency management organizations throughout the state prepare for and respond to heat waves?

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 30:19

Thank you.

Again, those are definitely unique challenges.

I would say, for sure, it's the integrated planning within the county and municipal levels as well to provide services such as those cooling centers.

Disseminating public information, whether it's through different platforms for community alerts or social media.

Identifying and promoting the cooling centers, you know, before the high heat days take into effect.

Pre-staging equipment such as generators or other resources, such as water for hydration at key facilities, as well as encouraging others, vulnerable populations, to take advantage of, specifically for New Jersey, Register Ready to really understand, you know, get themselves on a list for outreach, and we can assist our most at-risk individuals.

And then during the heat wave, opening up in our emergency operation centers to be able to coordinate activity or address unmet needs, and then working with the individual cooling centers to see if there are unmet needs. Do we need to extend the hours of those cooling centers? Or understand if there are accessibility issues, like if we need to help connect in transportation resources in certain areas and urban environments. Not everyone owns a car, so making sure folks can get there.

And then facilitating welfare checks of some of our most vulnerable residents and then coordinating with our utilities to help respond to outages and understand what the impacts are for estimated times of restoration during periods where the outages could occur.

Thank you.

LC **Laura Connolly** 32:11

Thank you.

Brayden, we've talked a little bit about cooling centers. So far, cooling centers are often touted as an effective emergency response action to deploy during heat waves. What are the barriers to identifying appropriate locations like cooling centers? What are the barriers to people using identified cooling centers?

BF **Brayden Fahey** 32:36

So, you know, I think, Steve touched on a lot of great points that also lent to this question, as well. But with regard to, you know, identifying those cooling centers, really we just need a space that's climate controlled. Obviously, you know generator backed-up is preferable.

And so, you know, locally in Hunterdon, we have a kind of a blend. So, as I said, the county operates cooling centers. Each of those facilities are generator backed up, so, you know, they're not at risk for a power failure. That's not the case for some of our municipal cooling centers, but if, you know, certainly we'll open them, and if there's an issue, we can transport those folks, you know, to one of the county centers that won't experience that kind of interruption.

But I think, you know, some of the barriers to people using the identified cooling centers once they're open, I would argue transportation is probably one of the biggest challenges that we face.

You know, Steve identified resources like Register Ready and the like. We, as he alluded to, that's essentially the game plan that we put in place. We work with one of our nonprofits. We use, you know, a database that they have, we use the database with Register Ready, we coordinate with our municipal OEMs, and so if there is a forecast high impact heat event, we work with all those stakeholders to ensure that we are, you know, contacting those residents that are susceptible to heat-related illness. We're, you know, trying to gauge if they're self-sufficient, if they're experiencing any challenges that would necessitate them needing a cooling center or some sort of long-term accommodation.

But I would say it's, you know, transportation is always one of the biggest challenges that we face in getting people to the resources that are available. Obviously, making sure that we're communicating it in a fashion that it'll reach a wide range whether, you know, in multiple languages or such.

And also, you know, we also have to acknowledge, you know, we want to target the entire population, and so dependent on what the facility is that we're using, that, you know, can have an effect and it can turn some people away. So we try to use, you know, anything from libraries to emergency service buildings to, you know, some of our private sector partners. You know, municipal or administrative offices. So, we try to employ a variety of resources for cooling centers that, you know, would make anybody feel welcome.



Laura Connolly 35:15

Thank you, Brayden.

Rebecca, what other entities are typically involved in heat wave responses? For example, local health departments, hospital ERs, local libraries, senior centers, local nonprofits, and faith-based organizations.

RS

Rebecca Sleeter 35:34

So, local health departments definitely play a role, mostly in assisting the Office of Emergency Management in pushing out updates and education to emphasize the risks of heat exposure, particularly to vulnerable populations, such as the elderly or those living with pre-existing conditions, and what steps they can take to stay safe.

First responders are also crucial for responding to heat-related medical emergencies and transporting individuals to medical facilities.

Healthcare systems, for treating individuals who are experiencing health effects from heat.

Local government, such as your townships, play a role in coordinating a response, as well, by establishing cooling centers, distributing water, and providing transportation.

Community organizations, such as faith-based organizations, social service agencies, and nonprofits, also support vulnerable populations by providing resources and services as well as education and outreach.

And lastly, I would say utility companies are pretty important as well for ensuring power and water services are maintained to residents during a heat wave.

LC

Laura Connolly 36:40

Thank you.

This question is for all the panelists.

What is NJ211, and what's its role during a heat wave? How effective is the NJ211 system at letting people know where to go during a heat wave?

RS

Rebecca Sleeter 36:57

So, I can start off with that.

New Jersey 211 serves as a quick access point for information and referrals to health, human, and social service organizations. It connects people with resources and support in their community. It provides education regarding heat waves, such as the effects on the body and protective measures you can take to stay safe. It can also provide information to locate a cooling center near you, and it also can provide utility assistance programs, information on those programs for those who are having difficulty paying their electric bills.

LC **Laura Connolly** 37:36
Excellent, thank you so much.
Steve, this question—

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 37:38
I will add that, I'll add one thing for NJ211 which—sorry, thank you.

LC **Laura Connolly** 37:39
Sure. Absolutely.

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 37:43
I think it's also an excellent source of where your needs are, because if you are able to track where the requests are coming from, and then you have unmet needs, you can use that data to also appropriately add resources.
Thank you.

LC **Laura Connolly** 38:04
Excellent.

Steve, heat waves can put a strain on the electricity grid, resulting in brown or blackouts. What are the added complications from having to deal with cascading emergencies? Is the state prepared to handle large scale needs, such as statewide blackouts during a heat wave?

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 38:24
Thank you. Great question.

And I will answer up to the point where, you know, basis of my knowledge on some of that as well, and I'll qualify it in a second, well, that the first part is the cascading impacts amplify the risk. You know, hospitals face an increased surge of patients as well as infrastructure. Additional strain is put on infrastructure when you start having electrical demand increase and power outages and brownouts.

These are most often seen in, you know, urban areas, but in the Northeast in general, including New Jersey, we have aging infrastructure where those cascading things do occur.

As far as the outages, and that multi-system stress really complicates the initial response to the heat, and then people that could compensate really have a challenge at that, so I think there really needs to be appropriate level and great coordination.

And to that point, in those circumstances, I feel like if you looked at the infrastructure, the more you can put in as far as mitigation, you're better off, and I think that's where, from a state perspective, our New Jersey Office of Emergency Management has done an excellent job working to do assessments and work with critical infrastructure statewide. You know, I've been involved with the assessments from healthcare facilities to others, and it's a real great program they have.

So, as far as the measure of whether the state's prepared, it's also whether folks are taking the information and doing something with it as well, because they own a piece of that. But there have definitely been programs. The Board of Public Utilities have done a lot, even working and sometimes mandating certain things on electrical utilities. As far as, you know, getting the grid back up and things they need to provide even to their customers, whether it's distributions of ice or water during these outages, and the utilities have been responsive, but I think all that is occurring at the state level.

So, I think we are as prepared as we can be given what we're facing as far as the challenges of our critical infrastructure aging, and I think there needs to be more emphasis and more planning to establish the increased amount of repairs and updating that needs to happen to those infrastructure, and those programs should be supported because we'll add that level of resiliency.

So, thank you.

LC **Laura Connolly** 41:05

Thank you, Steve.

Rebecca, this question is for you.

The populations most vulnerable to heat waves are quite varied, with some, such as the homeless, the elderly, or people with preexisting conditions and/or disabilities requiring more specialized attention during heat waves, for example, inability to get to cooling centers or lack of ADA accommodations. How can local health departments better serve these different communities to make sure no one gets left behind?

RS **Rebecca Sleeter** 41:37

So, specifically for our department, we have several measures in place to ensure we are reaching these vulnerable populations in any type of emergency.

It was mentioned previously, but we also utilize Register Ready, which is a voluntary and free program designed to assist first responders and emergency planners in identifying residents with access and functional needs that may need assistance in advance of emergency. This information helps emergency responders locate and evacuate these individuals during an emergency. And the system can also provide updates and information to those individuals

And through our Office on Aging, we have a program called Dial My Calls, which is an automated calling system used to provide updates and information, and through our Office on Aging, we're able to maintain a list of seniors and people with disabilities through this system.

And our County Office of Emergency Management utilizes a system called Everbridge as our emergency notification system provider, and through the system, the system can make phone calls to specific people or areas in the event of an emergency and is used for sharing important information.

And health departments also oversee and manage a local information network communication system called Links for disseminating public health information from the New Jersey Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and individuals can enroll and receive up-to-date public health news and information regarding certain incidents that occur in their county.

And lastly, through our Office on Aging, we have a program called SCOOT, which provides transportation for a variety of purposes. To be eligible, the individual has to be a county resident 60 years or older, be living with a disability, or be a resident of a rural designated area in Salem County per New Jersey Transit.

LC **Laura Connolly** 43:28

Thank you, Rebecca.

This question is for the whole panel.

What other emergency response actions can communities take to protect their residents?

RS **Rebecca Sleeter** 43:43

I can start with that one.

So, having emergency preparedness plans in place to include responses and actions needed in an emergency, as well as identifying partners and needed resources to carry out those actions, is really important. And then practicing those preparedness plans

through exercises and drills is really important to ensure those actions are feasible and realistic and that the resources needed are available.

And then, you know, we mentioned it quite often throughout this discussion, education and outreach is really important to inform residents of the resources available, protective actions to protect themselves, and how they can be prepared.

SS

Sarinelli, Steven 44:25

I would say, at the community level, make sure that they're working with their county Office of Emergency Management and actually having a plan, as Rebecca alluded to, I think is key, because I think that the, not a majority but a good portion, don't recognize the extreme heat.

Now, we're starting to see more with the cooling centers and other initiatives coming up but taking advantage of that through your hazard vulnerability assessments. Starting there and saying, what's our community need? What's our community demographic? What do they look like? Am I an urban setting? What types of resources are around? And then linking those things and working with their county emergency management so then you can identify also triggers for your community that we're going to take action or we're going to respond.

And then it's really developing in a plan what resources are there from staffing and really laying that out so you have that done in advance. And then making sure and encouraging, through a preparedness program, that your residents are doing the things they need to do for their self-care, Register Ready in advance or also taking other precautions.

Thank you.

BF

Brayden Fahey 45:35

You know, to add on to what Steve said, I think, you know in communities and especially at the municipal level, even our conversation today is so focused on, you know, those that are vulnerable to the heat, right? The folks that might be in their homes without air conditioning, maybe they're in their homes without power, the homeless population.

But I think, you know, as we really start to discuss heat and the impacts that it can pose to the community, taking a look at special events, as well, and, you know, that the cascading impacts that those can have.

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 46:15
Good point.

BF **Brayden Fahey** 46:19
You know, as we embark on World Cup events over the next two years that are going to coincide with the, you know, the hotter months in our seasons, you know, you gather a large number of people in any given space, whether it's a street fair to municipal level or something on the scale that, you know, that we're preparing for across the state now, that really has the opportunity to overwhelm every, you know, every level of government as well as the healthcare sector and you know, emergency service organizations just if those events, you know, in the in the World Cup, so to speak, were to coincide with, you know, a prolonged heat wave or heat situation.

So, it's also, you know it's looking at things like that, you know, to Steve's point about those hazard vulnerability assessments, kind of contingent on what's happening in the community at any given point, as well.

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 47:01
And I want to expand on one piece. I know I mentioned mitigation, but to be more specific about it, as well, for an example, look at your library, look at some of your public buildings. Do you have backup power? You know, when you're doing construction projects, evaluate those things to try to put the measures in place that make it more resilient. That can become a spot in your community to help you during periods of high heat or recovery from disaster.

LC **Laura Connolly** 47:33
Thank you so much.

That's all the questions that we have right now for our panelists. But what we'd like to do is take a few questions from the audience, if that's alright with you.

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 47:43
Certainly.

LC **Laura Connolly** 47:43
Our first question is from Hana.

Hana asks, “would love to understand how schools, children, and young people are being engaged in understanding personal emergency response planning and large scale efforts.”

RS **Rebecca Sleeter** 48:02

I can answer that.

So, at least from our perspective at the local health department, we're always trying to make it a goal of ours to get into our schools and to really get out there and, you know, educate people on various topics.

So, we're always actively working with our schools in that capacity. And, as I mentioned earlier, we have, on our website and our app, a form our community members can go in and fill out to request certain resources or presentations from our department.

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 48:31

I can speak to—not first-hand knowledge—of efforts from the American Red Cross and other programs that they have working with the schools.

I know that the curriculums are tight, trying to get time into those curriculums, but also fitting in preparedness programs.

They've had a program such as the Pillowcase Program that focuses on what to do for home fires, and then they add in risk-specific preparedness measures based on where the community is. So, there are things like that you can definitely reach out to. Plus, they have clubs in the schools, as well, to help promote it.

LC **Laura Connolly** 49:11

Thank you.

Shari asks, “how would an organization such as a church looking to becoming a cooling station?”

BF **Brayden Fahey** 49:20

I can take that one.

You know, the first step would be to reach out to either the county or the local, the municipal, Office of Emergency Management. Make contact with the OEM coordinator at the respective jurisdictional level and express the interest, really. You know, whether it's the county or the municipality, they'll return that call or, you know, respond to that e-mail and start the dialogue there and likely come out and conduct an inspection of

the facility and determine if it meets the needs in which are kind of set forth for that mission.

LC **Laura Connolly** 49:56

Thank you.

An audience member had asked about NOAA, having any cuts from NWS and NOAA.

Are you anticipating changes in communication from National Weather Service due to federal cuts?

BF **Brayden Fahey** 50:25

I mean, I can offer my opinion, but there's nothing fact-based, you know, behind it.

I certainly, I think all of us at different levels of emergency management are very much in tune and paying attention to, you know, different changes that are occurring at the federal level.

But I think, you know, NOAA and the National Weather Service are some of the greatest, you know, professional resources that we rely on. It's some of the strongest relationships that we, as emergency managers, have formed.

And I think that, you know, their alerts and their warning products and advisories are going to continue just because of the great work that they do, regardless of their staff size, truthfully.

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 51:07

Thank you.

LC **Laura Connolly** 51:09

Thank you.

Pat asks, "is there any coordination between heat and stormwater agencies? For example, a Superstorm Sandy-type event happening in July or August?"

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 51:30

Can you repeat that for me so I could? I apologize.

LC **Laura Connolly** 51:33

No, that's totally fine.

Is there any coordination between heat and stormwater agencies? For example, a Superstorm Sandy-type event happening in July or August?

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 51:46

Yeah. Thank you for clarifying. I don't have any background to appropriately answer it, though. Thank you. We can certainly get some information.

LC **Laura Connolly** 51:58

I think that's fair enough.

And we're going to put this question out to the group. I don't know if anyone has any background in this, but what is the status of New Jersey Bill S2422, Occupational Heat Related Illness and Injury Prevention Program that was introduced in January 2024?

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 52:26

I don't have any personal knowledge of it.

RS **Rebecca Sleeter** 52:29

Neither do I.

LC **Laura Connolly** 52:31

OK.

OK.

We have another question from the audience.

This is from Dan. Dan asked, "to all panelists: what are the entities involved with climate adaptation planning as it relates to heat impacts? How are communities planning long term to offset impacts, distinguishing between proactive versus reactive action?"

And I could repeat that if you need me to. "What are the entities involved with climate adaptation planning as it relates to heat impacts? How are communities planning long term to offset impacts distinguishing between proactive versus reactive action?"

SS **Sarinelli, Steven** 53:22

I can take a piece of it from the healthcare side and just say that from, and I hope I'm answering it directly or we can clarify, but essentially, what the health system I'm

involved with has done also is leverage alternate sources of power to even reduce our demand or footprint.

We integrate solar energy as well as use a cogeneration plant with natural gas to offset our ability so we can generate power and heat, which gives us what we need for our medical centers. I'm sure other organizations have done that, but it significantly reduces the amount of draw demand for power as well as provides a layer of back-up power in order for us to sustain our operations. And then we have a layer of solar that fills in to also lessen our draw, our demand, on that.



Laura Connolly 54:36

Thank you.

Does anyone else in the audience have any questions?

OK.

That is all the time we have for today's discussion.

On behalf of the IAC member state agencies and departments, I would like to thank our panelists for sharing their knowledge with us today. We hope the audience walks away with a better understanding of how New Jersey has prepared for more frequent and intense heat waves, what response actions happen during heat waves and how they can learn more about those actions, and what actions they in their communities can take to prevent them to protect themselves and their loved ones.

As I mentioned before, the recording of the webinar will be posted shortly on the events page of Heat Hub NJ along with the recording of the first two webinars in this series. We encourage you to visit Heat Hub NJ often as we regularly update and add new material to the site as it becomes available.

Thank you so much and please stay safe out there.

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