

Heatwave news

July 2010 No. 4

In preparation for the coming summer, the cooler months allow us time to reflect on and evaluate how effective our heatwave plans were last summer.

The Department of Health is undertaking various initiatives to prepare for the 2010–11 summer season, including an evaluation of Victoria's heatwave framework, which commenced in June.

Councils are asked to play an integral role in evaluating past activities and resources developed to support heatwave planning. The intelligence gathered from the evaluation will inform the development of resources and projects around heatwave planning and response activation for the 2010–11 summer season.

The department will consider the outcomes of the evaluation and update the state heatwave plan later in the year.

In the meantime, the cooler months provide an ideal time for Victorian councils to undertake their own review and to update heatwave plans.

This newsletter aims to provide the latest information about heatwave issues, and to help councils with their review process.



Rodney Dedman
Acting Assistant Director
Environmental Health
Health Protection Branch

Heatwave plan for Victoria

The *Heatwave plan for Victoria* was developed and implemented during the 2009–10 summer season. The plan includes:

- implementing a coordinated statewide response to heatwaves
- developing and disseminating public health messages and communication resources
- activating the heat health alert system
- partnering with councils and other agencies.

The plan will be reviewed and updated following an evaluation of the state's heatwave framework.

For a copy of the 2009–10 plan, visit the department website at: www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/heatwave

Heat health alert system

The department's heat health alert system was implemented during summer 2009–10. Thirteen heat health alerts were issued from November to January; two of which were issued statewide.

Heat health alerts were issued when mean forecast temperatures exceeded 30°C throughout Victoria, except in the Mildura district where the mean forecast temperature threshold was 32°C. The daily maximum temperature is generally much higher than the mean forecast, which is the average of the forecast daily maximum temperature and the forecast following overnight minimum temperature.

Alerts were issued directly via email to councils, peak bodies and departmental programs. External service providers and the public could also access heat health alerts via the department's heatwave website at: www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/heatwave

Victoria's heatwave framework evaluation

In June, the Department of Health began an evaluation of its policies and resources for reducing health risks associated with heatwaves.

Among the components being evaluated are:

- the *Heatwave plan for Victoria*
- the *Heatwave planning guide*
- the heat health alert system
- communication resources.

The goal of the evaluation is to understand how effective the processes, tools and mechanisms implemented in the 2009–10 heatwave framework were in increasing the community's awareness of heat-related health issues and action to prevent heat-related illness.

The outcome of the evaluation will inform the revision and future development of various resources and policies, including the *Heatwave planning guide* and the *Heatwave plan for Victoria*.

Heat health education strategy for health professionals

Health professionals involved in frontline care are often best placed to identify individuals at risk and provide them with the information they need to protect themselves from the effects of heat.

The department is designing an education and training strategy for professionals working directly with vulnerable members of the community to help them prevent, identify and manage heat-related issues. The strategy is due for completion by August 2010.

Communication resources for the community

Resources advising people of how to prepare for and cope with a heatwave are now available in English and in 12 community languages.

The Department of Health produced posters and brochures to provide accurate and useful information to the public about reducing the impact of heat on their health.

These resources were distributed to local councils, general practice clinics and upon request to some direct service providers.

As well as English, the resources are available in Arabic, Cantonese, Croatian, Dutch, Greek, Italian, Macedonian, Mandarin, Polish, Russian, Turkish and Vietnamese.

Translated brochures are available in hard print via the online resource order form (http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/downloads/heatwave_rscs_orderform.doc).

Resources

Better Health Channel Fact Sheets
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Communication resources
www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/heatwave

Heatwave Plan for Victoria
www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/heatwave

Liveable & Just Toolkit
www.liveableandjust.vlga.org.au

To receive this document in an accessible format phone 9096 5425 and/or Environmental Health Unit.

Published by the Environmental Health Unit,
Department of Health, Melbourne, Victoria
Authorised by the State Government of Victoria,
50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.
© Copyright, State of Victoria, Department of Health, 2010
July 2010 (1007018)

Environmental Health Unit – Heatwave contacts

Christy Boucher has just returned from maternity leave!
She is available on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
Phone: 9096 5425

Miranda Fraser-Adams, Senior Project Manager,
Community Health Risk
Phone: 9096 5151