

New study determines whether people react to heat advisories

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Oppressive summertime heat claims more lives than all other weather-related disasters combined, including tornadoes and hurricanes. During 2003, a heat wave across Europe killed as many as 40,000 people.

"Heat is a stealth killer," says Dr. Scott Sheridan, Kent State associate professor in geography. Funded by the Environmental Protection Agency, Sheridan recently finished conducting a study on how effectively heat warning systems have been implemented in four cities for which he developed heat warning systems, including Dayton, Ohio, Philadelphia, Phoenix, and Toronto, Ontario.

Sheridan surveyed residents 65 and older in each of the four regions about their perception of heat vulnerability, their knowledge of options for dealing with the weather, and why they did or did not take action to avoid negative health outcomes during the heat emergency.

He found that almost 90 percent were aware a heat warning was issued, but only about half of the people did anything about it. Many thought messages were targeting the elderly and did not view themselves as part of that group. For those who did change their behavior on hot days, it was not necessarily due to heat warnings issued by weather forecasters but instead based on their own perceptions of heat.

Source: Kent State University

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