

BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
12TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY

Congress of the United States
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July 6th, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Deanne B. Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW.
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Mr. President and Administrator Criswell,

In light of the heat waves across the United States and the growing threat of more to come with climate change, I write to you today to inquire what plans the federal government and FEMA have in place to address heat emergencies.

Studies indicate that living in higher ambient temperatures is the cause of an estimated 12,000 premature avoidable deaths in the United States each year. Heat threatens the lives of children, the elderly, outdoor workers, and more as prolonged exposure leads to unexpected health risks, such as heat cramps, heat stroke, and death, as well as exacerbates pre-existing and chronic illnesses. Heat also disproportionately harms low-income communities and communities of color as larger populations of these groups live in urban areas which are subjected to the urban heat island effect, resulting in surface temperatures well above their suburban counterparts. Moreover, in many of these poor minority communities, residents struggle with significant medical conditions, like heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure, which become fatal illnesses in heat waves. Unfortunately, in some cases, medical professionals attribute heat related deaths to these common conditions, ultimately obscuring and masking the seriousness of exposure to prolonged heat.

At the moment, the Northwest region of the United States is experiencing record high temperatures. This region, whose typical climate is mild and rainy, is now seeing an unprecedented number of deaths and hospitalization attributed to this heat emergency. On the other side of the country, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut are receiving similar weather advisories as they anticipate temperatures over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. New Yorkers are being asked to reduce their appliance and air conditioning use to avoid blackouts as temperatures force greater energy use. These heat waves and record high temperatures are not new to us. They are reoccurring natural disasters that are becoming more frequent as climate change continues and must be addressed.

For many Americans, living in high temperatures and unexpected heat emergencies is not simply an inconvenience or nuisance, it is a life-threatening natural disaster worsened by climate change that warrants action and assistance from the federal government. We need to recognize that these heat waves are not singular events. Rather, they are part of a pattern that we have been watching for decades. Because of this, I request a response on the following questions:

- Does the federal government have a strategic national response plan for heat waves?
- Has the federal government directed agencies or departments to coordinate with state and local officials in developing heat emergencies plans?
- What is FEMA's role and responsibilities in supporting local communities during heat emergencies?

I look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bonnie Watson Coleman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Member of Congress