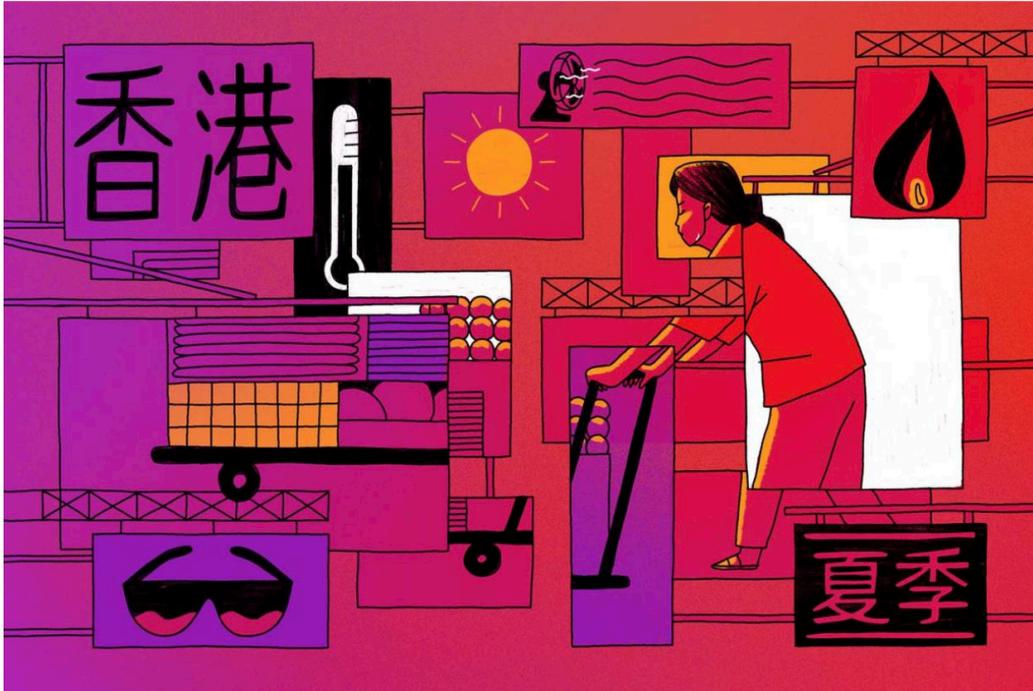


The Seattle Times

How record heat has wreaked havoc on four continents

By Somini Sengupta, TIFFANY MAY and Zia ur-Rehman



 **1 of 6** *Hong Kong: In this city of skyscrapers on the edge of the South China Sea, temperatures soared past 91 degrees Fahrenheit for 16 consecutive days in the second half of May. Not since Hong Kong started keeping track in 1884 had a heat wave of...* [More](#) 

Elena Manaenkova of the World Meteorological Organization said this year was “shaping up to be one of the hottest years on record. “This is not a future scenario,” she said. “It is happening now.”

Expect more. That’s the verdict of climate scientists to the record-high temperatures this spring and summer in vastly different climate zones.

The continental United States had its hottest month of May and the third-hottest month of June. Japan was walloped by record triple-digit temperatures, killing at least 86 people in what its meteorological agency bluntly called a “disaster.” And weather stations logged record-high temperatures on the edge of the Sahara and above the Arctic Circle.

Is it because of climate change? Scientists with the World Weather Attribution project concluded in a study released Friday that the likelihood of the heat wave currently baking Northern Europe is “more than two times higher today than if human activities had not altered climate.”

While attribution studies are not yet available for other record-heat episodes this year, scientists say there’s little doubt that the ratcheting up of global greenhouse gases makes heat waves more frequent and more intense.

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ing up to be one of the hottest years on record” and that the extreme heat recorded so far was not surprising in light of climate change.

“This is not a future scenario,” she said. “It is happening now.”

What was like to be in these really different places on these really hot days? We asked people. Here’s what we learned.

— Ouargla, Algeria: 124 degrees Fahrenheit on July 5

At 3 p.m. on the first Thursday of July, on the edge of the vast Sahara, the Algerian oil town of Ouargla recorded a high of 124 degrees Fahrenheit. Even for this hot country, it was a record, according to Algeria’s national meteorological service.

Abdelmalek Ibek Ag Sahli was at work in a petroleum plant on the outskirts of Ouargla that day. He and the rest of his crew had heard it would be hot. They had to be at work by 7 a.m., part of a regular 12-hour daily shift.

“We couldn’t keep up,” he recalled. “It was impossible to do the work. It was hell.”

By 11 a.m., he and his colleagues walked off the job.

Delivered weeknights, this email newsletter gives you a quick recap of the day’s top stories and need-to-know news, as well as intriguing photos and topics to spark conversation as you wind down from your day.

But when they got back to the workers’ dorms, things weren’t much better. The power had gone out. There was no air conditioning, no fans. He dunked his blue cotton scarf in water, wrung it out, and wrapped it around his head. He drank water. He bathed five times. “At the end of the day I had a headache,” he said by phone. “I was tired.”

Ouargla’s older residents told him they’d never seen a day so hot.

— Hong Kong: Over 91 degrees Fahrenheit for 16 straight days

In this city of skyscrapers on the edge of the South China Sea, temperatures soared past 91 degrees Fahrenheit for 16 consecutive days in the second half of May.

Not since Hong Kong started keeping track in 1884 had a heat wave of that intensity lasted so long in May.

Swimming pools overflowed with people. Office air conditioners purred. But from morning to night, some of the city’s most essential laborers went about their outdoor work, hauling goods, guarding construction sites, picking up trash.

One blistering morning, a 55-year-old woman named Lin gripped the hot metal handles of her handcart. She pushed it up a busy road, glancing over her shoulder for oncoming cars. She had fresh leafy greens to deliver to neighborhood restaurants in the morning, trash to haul in the evening. Some days, she had a headache. Other days, she vomited.

“It’s very hot and I sweat a lot,” said Lin, who would only give her first name before rushing off on her rounds. “But there’s no choice, I have to make a living.”

Poon Siu-sing, a 58 year-old trash collector, tossed garbage bags into a mounting pile. Sweat plastered the shirt onto his back. “I don’t feel anything,” he maintained. “I’m a robot used to the heat of the sun and rain.”

— Nawabshah, Pakistan: 122 degrees Fahrenheit on April 30

Nawabshah is in the heart of Pakistan’s cotton country. But no amount of cotton could provide comfort on the last day of April, when temperatures soared past 122 degrees Fahrenheit, or 50 degrees Celsius. Even by the standards of this blisteringly hot place, it was a record.

The streets were deserted that day, a local journalist named Zulfiqar Kaskheli said. Shops didn’t bother to open. Taxi drivers kept off the streets to avoid the blazing sun.

And so, Riaz Soomro had to scour his neighborhood for a cab that could take his ailing 62-year-old father to a hospital. It was Ramadan. The family was fasting. The father became dehydrated and passed out.

The government hospital was packed. In the hallways sat worn-out heatstroke victims like his father. Many of them had been working outdoors as day laborers, Soomro said.

Throughout the area, hospitals and clinics were swamped. There weren’t enough beds. There weren’t enough medical staff. The power failed repeatedly throughout the day, adding to the chaos.

“We tried our best to provide medical treatment,” said Raees Jamali, a paramedic in Daur, a village on the outskirts of Nawabshah. “But because of severity of the heat, there was unexpected rush and it was really difficult for us to deal with all patients.”

Every day that week, the high temperature in Nawabshah was no less than 113 degrees, according to AccuWeather.

— Oslo: Over 86 degrees Fahrenheit for 16 consecutive days

“Warning! We remind you about the total ban on fires and barbecuing near the forest and on the islands.”

This was the text message that Oslo residents got from city officials on a Friday afternoon in June.

May had been the warmest in 100 years. June was hot, too. By mid-July, a village south of Oslo recorded 19 days when the temperature shot up past 86 degrees Fahrenheit, or 30 Celsius, according to MET Norway.

Spring rains were paltry, which meant that grass had turned brown dry and farmers were having trouble feeding their livestock. Forests had turned to tinder. And city officials put a stop to one of the most popular Norwegian summer pastimes: heading out to the woods with a disposable barbecue.

“People not being used to this heat, they’re used to leaving a barbecue and nothing happens, Marianne Kjosnes, a spokeswoman for the Oslo Fire Department, said. “Now if a little spark catches the grass, you have a grass fire going.”

Public parks are off limits to barbecuing. So are the islands in the nearby fjord. The Oslo Fire Department’s Facebook page is trying to get the word out.

Per Evenson, a fire watchman posted in the tower on Linnekleppen, a rocky hill southeast of Oslo, counted 11 separate forest fires in one day in early July. Here and there, white smoke rose in the distance. By July 19, the civil protection department had tallied 1,551 forest fires, more than the numbers of fires in all of 2016 and 2017. The department said 22 helicopters were simultaneously fighting fires.

Wildfires were also erupting in Sweden. And one Swedish village just above the Arctic Circle hit an all time record high, peaking above 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

“This is really frightening if this is the new normal,” Thina Margrethe Saltvedt, an energy industry analyst who lives in Oslo, wrote in an email.

— Los Angeles: 108 degrees Fahrenheit on July 6

At least Marina Zurkow had air conditioning.

Zurkow, an artist, has long been grappling with climate change in her work. But she was still surprised when a day of extreme weather impacted one of her projects in a big way.

The name of that project, which was designed to make people think about the impact of climate change on how we eat, is “Making the Best of It.” It is only half in jest.

“It’s both trying to make the best of a bad situation,” she said, “and in another way it’s a commitment to making things as delicious as possible.”

The latest iteration of that project was to host a dinner for a new era of dry, hot weather in California. Less Mediterranean, more Mojave Desert.

Zurkow’s partners, a team of two private chefs called Hank and Bean, prepared an elaborate meal designed to make their guests chew on the impact of climate change. The menu included sage fritters, stuffed rabbit, flatbreads made of cricket and mealworm, and jellyfish. Lots of jellyfish.

There was jellyfish crudo with a Greek salad at the top of the meal. There was a jellyfish jelly, with redwood tip infusion and pine syrup at the end of the meal.

Why jellyfish? Because it’s considered invasive and therefore plentiful, Zurkow reasoned. It’s also zero fat and good protein. “American dream food,” she added, also only half in jest.

They had planned to serve dinner al fresco in the courtyard of a downtown Los Angeles test kitchen.

But nature had other ideas.

That day, the first Friday of July, air from the Mojave blew westward and stalled, compressed and extra hot, over Los Angeles. Downtown hit a high of 108 degrees. It was too hot to eat outside.

“Even if you’re talking about climate change, you can’t torture invited guests,” Zurkow said. “We had to move the dinner into the kitchen.”