EXTREME HEAT ON THE KANSAS PLAINS PRESENTS DANGER

Heat kills by taxing the human body beyond its abilities. In a normal year, about 175 Americans succumb to the demands of summer heat. Among the large continental family of natural hazards, only the bitter cold of winter takes a greater toll. In the 40 year period from 1936 through 1975, nearly 20,000 people were killed in the United States by the effects of heat and solar radiation. In the disastrous heat wave of 1980, more than 1,250 people died. Although most recent deaths from extreme heat have occurred over the eastern parts of the country, there have been a total of 6 fatalities in Kansas since 1998.

North American summers are generally hot, and Kansas summers see heat waves in one section or another of the state. They tend to combine both high temperatures and high humidity although some of the worst have been catastrophically dry.

Based on the latest research findings, the National Weather Service (NWS) has devised the "Heat Index" (HI), (sometimes referred to as the "apparent temperature"). The HI, given in degrees Fahrenheit, is an accurate measure of how hot it really feels when the relative humidity (RH) is added to the actual air temperature.

Just as you would use the NWS Wind Chill Chart in the winter, look at the Heat Index Chart as a guide during the summer. As an example, if the air temperature is 95F, and the relative humidity is 55%, the Heat Index -- or how hot it really feels -- is 110F. The Heat Index Chart can be found on the Internet at: http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/heat

The NWS will initiate alert procedures (advisories or warnings) when the Heat Index (HI) is expected to have a significant impact on public safety. The expected severity of the heat determines whether advisories or warnings are issued. A common guideline for the issuance of excessive heat alerts is when the maximum daytime HI is expected to equal or exceed 105F and a nighttime minimum HI of 80F or above for two or more consecutive days. Some areas and municipalities are more sensitive to excessive heat than others. As a result, alert thresholds may vary a bit from these guidelines. Excessive heat alert thresholds are being tailored at major metropolitan centers based on research results that link unusual amounts of heat-related deaths to city specific meteorological conditions.

Regardless, elderly persons, small children, chronic invalids, those on certain medications or drugs (especially tranquilizers and anticholinergics), and persons with weight or alcohol

problems are particularly susceptible to heat reactions. This is especially true during prolonged heat waves across the Sunflower State.

Heat Wave Safety Tips

Slow down. Strenuous activities should be reduced, eliminated, or rescheduled to the coolest time of the day. Individuals at risk should stay in the coolest available place, not necessarily indoors.

Dress for summer. Lightweight, light-colored clothing reflects heat and sunlight, and helps your body maintain normal temperatures.

Put less fuel on your inner fires. Foods (like proteins) that increase metabolic heat production also increase water loss.

Drink plenty of water or other non-alcoholic fluids.Your body needs water to keep cool. Drink plenty of fluids even if you don't feel thirsty. Persons who (1) have epilepsy or heart, kidney, or liver disease, (2) are on fluid restrictive diets, or (3) have a problem with fluid retention should consult a physician before increasing their consumption of fluids.

Do not take salt tablets unless specified by a physician. Persons on salt restrictive diets should consult a physician before increasing their salt intake.

Spend more time in air-conditioned places. Air conditioning in homes and other buildings markedly reduces danger from the heat. If you cannot afford an air conditioner, spending some time each day (during hot weather) in an air conditioned environment affords some protection.

Finally, don't get too much sun. Sunburn makes the job of heat dissipation that much more difficult. As a result, be careful on those hot and humid days in Kansas this summer.