



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

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## Opening Statement

**Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)**

Subcommittee on Environment Hearing:  
*Silent Killer: The Rising Problem of Extreme Heat in the U.S.*  
July 21, 2021

Good morning to our witnesses and thank you for joining us here today. I'd like to welcome everyone to this hearing to discuss the very pressing problem of extreme heat in this country.

Being from Texas, my constituents and I can expect and prepare for high summer temperatures. However, other parts of the country do not have the infrastructure needed to handle extremely high temperatures. Just last month, news reports documented the record-breaking "heat dome" in the Pacific Northwest. In Portland, maximum daily temperature records were broken every day for three consecutive days. The resulting heat even melted transit power lines and halted public transit.

In Washington state, extreme temperatures fractured roads and sidewalks. Regions where daily June temperatures usually only reach 70 degrees saw temperatures nearing 120. Beyond the damage to infrastructure, this heat cost lives.

According to state medical examiner, the extreme temperatures since this June killed over one hundred people in Oregon alone. Because attributing fatalities to heat is so difficult, the actual heat-related death toll is likely much higher.

With heat stress often aggravating preexisting medical conditions, these deaths will be concentrated among our elderly and the very young.

Beyond events like last month's "heat dome", dangerous temperatures are a constant concern for many Americans. One year ago, we held a hearing to discuss the intersection of COVID-19, extreme heat, and environmental justice, highlighting the unequal threat from urban heat islands.

Historically redlined neighborhoods are often home to our most vulnerable communities. In these neighborhoods, concrete is more abundant, trees are scarce, and air conditioning is rare. This leads to urban heat islands that can be as much as seven degrees warmer than other parts of a city. The unequal exposure to extreme heat in urban heat islands can cause harm beyond just public health. Extreme heat has also been linked to worse educational outcomes for children.

The prevalence of urban heat islands throughout the U.S. is amplifying the heat stress from the uptick in unseasonable warmth in this country. The Northeast saw some of its warmest June

temperatures in almost a decade. Within a span of five months, Texas went from experiencing some of its coldest temperatures on record to bracing for an unusually early heatwave.

These temperature extremes have led to energy grid failures and water shortages, imperiling the lives of millions. We are seeing the climate crisis happen right before us.

When addressing crisis of extreme heat, our federal science agencies have a critical role to play. I look forward to the discussion with today's esteemed panel on how we can better coordinate federal resources to address the worsening extreme heat in this country.

Thank you and I yield back.