

Phoenix is getting hotter, but ASU is exploring ways to help

As Arizona Heat Awareness Week highlights the dangers of extreme heat, researchers are working on keeping the Valley livable for decades to come

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News
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As Phoenix continues to break heat records year after year, it raises concerns that in 30 to 50 years, the area will no longer be habitable.

But [Matei Georgescu](#) is optimistic.

Georgescu is a researcher at Arizona State University and a professor in the [School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning](#).

He believes that with thoughtful planning, strategic adjustments and a solution-oriented mindset, the Phoenix metropolitan area can remain a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

“I think human ingenuity will be such that we'll adapt — we'll adapt physiologically and we'll adapt technologically,” he said.

Georgescu is one of many ASU experts working to address extreme heat-related problems that the Phoenix metropolitan area is facing.

Starting with [Arizona Heat Awareness Week](#), which runs from May 4–8, we'll be featuring some of these experts and their science-based solutions to extreme heat-related problems — so that 30 years from now, it will still be cool to live in Arizona.

Raising awareness

Arizona Heat Awareness Week is designed to bring attention to the severity and danger of Arizona's sun-saturated cities. Now in its second decade, the campaign is especially critical as Maricopa County continues to experience unprecedented heat seasons.

“Heat Awareness Week is Arizona’s formal call to action to treat extreme heat as a serious public health threat rather than just a seasonal inconvenience,” said Eugene Livar, the chief heat officer for the Arizona Department of Health Services. “While busy areas like Phoenix and Tucson see high numbers of cases, our rural and western counties often face the highest illness rates per capita, which is why statewide coordination is so essential. Underestimating this silent killer leads to devastating results.”

Statewide, 2024 was the hottest summer on record, enduring 113 consecutive days of temperatures at or above 100 degrees, along with 39 nights that did not cool below 90 degrees.

This year, Phoenix continued its streak of record-setting temperatures with its hottest March on record. The city reached triple digits on March 18 — 45 days earlier than average — and saw a historic nine-day streak of 100 degree heat, with highs reaching 105 degrees multiple times.

Understanding risks

Despite the growing intensity of heat, misunderstandings about its risks persist.

One of the most dangerous is the belief that extreme heat only affects vulnerable populations.

“The reality is that everyone in Arizona is at risk, regardless of age or fitness level, though certain groups like the elderly, the young, the unhoused, those with chronic illness and outdoor workers face a significantly higher risk,” Livar said. “This lack of awareness turns deadly because people often fail to notice how quickly mild symptoms can turn into life-threatening heat stroke. Many people also do not realize that common medications can significantly increase heat sensitivity.”

According to the Maricopa County Department of Public Health, in 2024 there were 977 confirmed deaths attributed to environmental heat.

Recognizing the signs of heat illness is a critical part of prevention. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include dizziness, extreme thirst, heavy sweating and nausea. Heat stroke, a medical emergency, can cause confusion, unconsciousness, rapid breathing and sudden behavioral changes. Moving to a cooler area is recommended for heat exhaustion, while heat stroke requires an immediate call to 911.

Arizona’s year-round heat and high daily UV exposure put residents at an increased risk of skin cancer. Protective measures including hats, gloves, long sleeves and plenty of sunscreen are essential for protection.

From a statewide perspective, Livar emphasized that awareness is the foundation of prevention efforts. Education likely contributed to a decline in heat-related emergency visits and deaths in 2025.

“Consistent campaigns help residents navigate a world where heat deaths are now among the leading causes of mortality in many Arizona counties,” Livar said. “On the other hand, a lack of awareness of tools like signing up for ADHS heat alerts and [Heat.AZ.gov](https://heat.az.gov) prevents people from finding the cooling and information they need.”

Planning is critical to staying cool today and creating a city that is safe from the intensity of the sun in the future.

“Maricopa County is the hottest, most populous county in the United States,” said [Erinanne Saffell](#), a senior Global Futures scientist and associate teaching professor in ASU’s [School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning](#), who is retiring in May after 17 years with ASU. “We want people to enjoy our beautiful state, but also understand how dangerous extreme heat can be — and how to stay safe.”

As the state climatologist, Saffell helps lead the Arizona Heat Awareness Week efforts, and she has simple but critical tips for residents: stay hydrated, avoid outdoor activity during the hottest part of the day, and look out for friends, family and visitors. Also, carry an extra bottle of cold water to hand to someone on the streets.

“Ultimately, it’s up to all of us to help keep each other safe,” she said.

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Main image



The sun sets behind saguaros near Crimson Trailhead at Utery Park in Mesa, Arizona. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University