

# ASU launches heat preparedness center with federal investment

**The first center of its kind in the nation will bring groups together to study how extreme heat affects public health, infrastructure and vulnerable populations**

By Sandy Keaton Leander, ASU News  
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Arizona congressional members Greg Stanton and Yassamin Ansari joined Arizona State University leaders May 8 to announce a \$2 million federal investment to create a new ASU center designed to develop solutions that will help mitigate the dangerous effects of extreme heat.

The new ASU Center for Heat Preparedness, the first of its kind in the nation, will bring together researchers, community members, industry leaders and policymakers to study how extreme heat affects public health, infrastructure and vulnerable populations. The center will also develop actionable strategies to help cities prepare for worsening heat, a threat state officials say is more dangerous than ever and getting worse.

Speaking at a press conference at the Phoenix Bioscience Core in downtown Phoenix, Stanton said that as a matter of public policy extreme heat must be treated as a natural disaster and that families should not have to choose between keeping the air conditioning turned on and putting food on the table.

“It is a threat to our power grids, our water supply, our transportation systems and most urgently to human life,” Stanton said. “Extreme heat kills more people than all other weather events combined — more than hurricanes, more than floods, more than tornadoes.”

Stanton went on to say that the Federal Emergency Management Agency should be involved in responding to extreme heat. In 2025, Stanton, along with U.S. Rep. Mike Lawler of New York, launched a bipartisan Extreme Heat Caucus, which is working on legislation to improve the federal emergency response to heat.

Ansari said federal funding, coordination and data are needed to better protect residents and respond more effectively to extreme heat events. She added that Arizona must continue leading with innovation, resilience and urgency in the face of the climate crisis.

“This investment is a commitment to climate action and building long-term resilience in our communities, and these funds support Arizona’s work in developing practical solutions that are needed to address the growing dangers of extreme heat, whether that be protecting public health, strengthening infrastructure and building a more resilient economy,” Ansari said. “I am particularly proud of this work addressing issues pertaining to climate change.”

Stanton, a former Phoenix mayor, and Ansari, a freshman congresswoman and former Phoenix City Council member, worked together to secure the funding for ASU to do this work. They said the investment reflects the growing need for climate resilience in Arizona, where multiple heat records have been shattered in recent years.

ASU officials said the new center will bring together nearly 170 skilled researchers who are focused on heat research, a multidisciplinary collaborative effort that is already producing results to protect against the impact of rising temperatures that now last over a longer time period.

“Much of the world is facing or will face conditions like we are experiencing in Arizona today,” said Sally C. Morton, executive vice president and chief research and innovation officer for ASU Knowledge Enterprise. “ASU is uniquely positioned to lead our state’s response. We are built exactly for this type of challenge.

“In doing this work, we will partner directly with city leaders, first responders, industry and community organizations to develop practical strategies. And as the congressman said, action. Not just words, but action implemented in our communities.”

Maricopa County reported more than 600 heat-related deaths in 2024, according to Stanton, continuing a trend of rising fatalities tied to extreme temperatures. While 2024 saw a decrease in deaths compared with 2023, the center is launched as Arizona braces for another year of potential prolonged high temperatures.

Researchers at the center will study how heat affects infrastructure, public health systems and vulnerable populations, while also developing predictive models intended to help communities prepare for dangerous heat events before they escalate into emergencies.

“Extreme heat is one of the most urgent challenges facing Arizona and our nation,” Morton said. “It’s not a future threat. It is here and escalating.”

The federal funding announced May 8 will support the center for its first two years, though university leaders said they expect the work to continue beyond that timeline. The work is already underway, and the Center for Heat Preparedness will be fully operational by this fall.

“What makes this moment different,” Morton said, “is that we are not just responding. We are building the capacity to get ahead of it.”

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

**Main image**



U.S. Rep. Yassamin Ansari and U.S. Rep. Greg Stanton speak about the \$2 million federal investment in ASU's new Center for Heat Preparedness during a press conference in downtown Phoenix on May 8. Photo by Deanna Dent/Arizona State University

## Gallery



ASU Executive Vice President Sally Morton speaks about the new Center for Heat Preparedness during a press conference in downtown Phoenix on May 8.



ASU Associate Professor David Hondula (left), director of heat response and mitigation for the city of Phoenix, speaks with U.S. Rep. Greg Stanton after the press conference announcing the Center for Heat Preparedness in downtown Phoenix on May 8.



U.S. Rep. Yassamin Ansari (center) speaks with event attendees after the May 8 press conference announcing the Center for Heat Preparedness.