

# Record-Breaking Northwest Heatwave Linked to Hundreds of Deaths



By [Jake Johnson](#) | [Common Dreams](#)

The record-shattering heatwave currently scorching the Pacific Northwest has been linked to hundreds of deaths in the region over just the past week, with British Columbia alone [reporting](#) at least 486 “sudden and unexpected” fatalities since last Friday.

“There is a way out of this nightmare of ever-worsening weather extremes... A rapid transition to clean energy.”

—Michael Mann, Susan Joy Hassol

While it’s unclear how many of those deaths were a direct

consequence of the heatwave, the chief coroner of the Canadian province said in a [statement](#) that “it is believed likely that the significant increase in deaths reported is attributable to the extreme weather.”

In Oregon, the medical examiner’s office has received reports of [more than 60 deaths](#) believed to be tied to the dangerously high temperatures that have hit the state in recent days. On Monday, the temperature in Portland soared to a record 116°F—heat that was sufficient to [melt city power cables](#). In the city of Salem, located roughly 50 miles south of Portland, the temperature reached an all-time high of 117°F.

“The preliminary cause of death for... 45 people in Multnomah County, ranging in age from 44 to 97, was determined to be hyperthermia, an unusually high body temperature caused by a failure of the body to deal with heat,” the *Wall Street Journal* reported Wednesday. “By contrast, there were 12 deaths from hyperthermia for all of Oregon between 2017 and 2019.”

According to the local medical examiner, many of those who died in Multnomah County were discovered alone without air conditioning or a fan.

Washington state has also experienced record-breaking heat, with two weather stations in Chelan County [recording](#) a temperature of 119°F on Tuesday afternoon. At least 13 people have reportedly died in the Seattle area as a result of the heatwave—a number that is likely to grow as high temperatures persist and investigations into recent deaths across the state continue.

*The death toll from the heat wave is horrifying:*

- *321 excess deaths in British Columbia over six days.*
- *63 deaths attributed to heat in Oregon.*
- *16 heat deaths in the Seattle area. No official statewide*

tally yet. <https://t.co/XmfqxVcXP4>

– Mike Baker (@ByMikeBaker) [July 1, 2021](#)

CNN reported Thursday that “at least 676 people in Washington state visited emergency departments for heat-related symptoms from Friday through Sunday—before the heatwave hit its peak. On Monday alone, there were 688 heat-related emergency department visits.”

Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.), who represents the Seattle area, [said](#) Wednesday that the heatwave further demonstrates that “climate action is literally a matter of life or death—and it can’t wait any longer.”

Scientists have [directly attributed](#) the devastating Pacific Northwest temperature spikes to the human-caused climate crisis, warning that governments’ continued failure to slash carbon emissions in line with the current science will lead to even more intense heatwaves in the near future, with the elderly, the unhoused, [incarcerated people](#), and [unprotected outdoor workers](#) among the most vulnerable to such extreme conditions.

“We’ve long known that a warming climate would yield more extremely hot weather,” climate scientist Michael Mann and science communicator Susan Joy Hassol [wrote](#) in a *New York Times* op-ed earlier this week. “The science is clear on how human-caused climate change is already affecting heatwaves: Global warming has caused them to be hotter, larger, longer, and more frequent. What was once very rare events are becoming more common.”

“But there is a way out of this nightmare of ever-worsening weather extremes, and it’s one that will serve us well in many other ways, too,” they added. “A rapid transition to clean energy can stabilize the climate, improve our health, provide

good-paying jobs, grow the economy, and ensure our children's future. The choice is ours.”

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