

# A review of extreme heat and climate-related legislation, policies, operational practices, and emerging data

This document provides an overview of governmental actions related to extreme heat and climate at Metro, local agencies in greater Portland, the State of Oregon, and the federal government, and highlights emerging data and research that underscore the growing threat of extreme heat and climate change and the need for local and regional action.

## Summary of governmental actions

The following section details the legislation, policies, and practices that guide climate-related efforts in the region.

### Metro

In 2008, Metro Council adopted Resolution No. 08-3940 to define a successful greater Portland region, which included statements like "The region is a leader in minimizing contributions to global warming" and "Current and future generations enjoy clean air, clean water and healthy ecosystems."

In 2014, Metro Council adopted the Climate Smart Strategy – a set of policies, strategies and near-term actions to guide how the region reduces greenhouse gas emissions – as part of the preferred land use and transportation scenario in the Regional Framework Plan that is required by the State.

In 2023, Metro Council adopted five-year strategic targets that include a target titled “Meeting our Climate and Resilience Goals” that states, “we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

In 2024, Metro Council declared the following climate-related legislative value and principle for the 118<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress that introduce the ideas of adaptation and resilience:

- **Tackle Climate Change and Restore Climate Stability:** Metro supports efforts, policies, and bold investments to combat and adapt to climate change and reduce

### Local action is needed

**Despite the critical need for federal assistance, state and local governments cannot expect federal agencies to provide meaningful help before, during, or after dangerous heat events.**

- State and local policymakers will need to take the lead to help protect residents from extreme heat.
- Near-term changes in the federal funding landscape are unlikely.
- State and local governments need to act now by:
  - Appointing leaders empowered to oversee extreme heat planning and response
  - Budgeting for extreme heat on an ongoing basis
  - Planning for heat emergencies and longer-term heat resilience

**Source:** *In the Hot Seat: State and Local Governments Must Protect Their People from Extreme Heat* report prepared by the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC) (2025)

greenhouse gas emissions at the local, regional, state, national, and international levels.

- **Improve Ecosystem Resilience to Climate Change:** Metro supports actions and funding for communities and ecosystems to become more resilient and reduce vulnerability to natural hazards, especially floods, earthquakes, and catastrophic wildfire.

In November 2025, Metro Council adopted Resolution No. 25-5532, which endorsed the findings and recommendations in the Comprehensive Climate Action Plan for the Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Statistical Area. As part of the resolution, Metro Council directed Metro’s chief operating officer to work with Metro Council to identify priority climate actions for Metro to implement in the next five years.

In December 2025, Metro completed the Cooling Corridors Study, which identified actions to support building regional heat resilience. The project team presented the study to Metro Council in October 2025 and highlighted five near-term priority actions, which included the recommendation for Metro Council to formally declare extreme heat and climate change as issues of metropolitan concern and designate May 1 through September 30 as the greater Portland region’s official heat season.

### Local agencies

In 2020, the City of Portland declared an immediate mobilization effort initiating greater action, resources, collaboration, and new approaches to restore a safe climate. This declaration acknowledged that the Portland metro area faces a human-made climate emergency and that frontline communities are the most impacted by climate change, and it committed the City to using a new

### Heat seasons

Metro has not yet formally adopted a heat season for the agency or the region.

Metro currently starts communication about heat safety and training in May, but may adjust to earlier dates if high temperatures start to occur earlier, flexing needs with Metro operations to best care for on-site employees. Regardless of timing, Metro’s heat illness prevention policy is triggered by certain heat index thresholds, starting at 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

At the local level, there is no known legislation designating an official heat season.

**However, city and county agencies observe May 1 to September 30 for monitoring and reporting practices and standard operating procedures related to heat.** This time period is consistent with guidance from the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists. The Oregon Health Authority typically observes this period in reporting but extends beyond September to November in some cases, highlighting the importance of flexibility in the designation of a heat season as the climate continues to change over time.

Like Metro and local agencies, the State has not formally established a heat season, but similar to Metro’s heat illness prevention policy, the State adopted an administrative rule in 2022 that outlines required heat illness prevention practices for workplaces when the heat index equals or exceeds 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

climate justice and equity-focused approach that centers Black, Indigenous, other communities of color and youth from those communities in the next chapter of climate action planning and implementation.

Several agencies in the region are already working to respond to the worsening heat crisis. In 2023, Multnomah County, Washington County, and Clackamas County partnered with 125 volunteers to map differences in temperature throughout the region at the neighborhood level and to engage local communities to better understand and address inequitable risks posed by extreme heat. This heat mapping project produced several maps and a report that can be used to inform actions the three counties and partners take to build regional resilience to hotter summers. Each year, Multnomah County and Washington County track annual heat-related deaths, illnesses, and hospitalizations and publish seasonal hazard and health impact reports. Additionally, the three counties host websites dedicated to sharing information related to heat, such as the locations of cooling centers and other cool spaces, tips on how to keep cool at home during hot weather, and resources on transit and bill payment assistance.

### State of Oregon

In 2007, the Oregon Legislature first established greenhouse gas emission reduction goals for the state through House Bill 3543, which called for reducing emissions to at least 10 percent below 1990 levels by 2020, and reducing emissions by at least 75 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. In 2020, Governor Kate Brown issued Executive Order 20-04 to further advance the State of Oregon's greenhouse gas emission reduction goals by setting targets of at least 45 percent below 1990 levels by 2035, and at least 80 percent by 2050.

In 2025, Governor Tina Kotek issued three executive orders to address climate change:

1. **Accelerating Wind and Solar Energy Development in Advance of Elimination of Federal Clean Energy Tax Credits (No. 25-25):** Issued to direct relevant state agencies, boards, and commissions to take steps to accelerate the development of solar and wind projects in Oregon.
2. **Directing State Agencies to Take Urgent Action to Promote the Resilience of our Communities and Natural and Working Lands and Waters (No. 25-26):** Issued to prioritize and increase the pace of the adoption of climate resilient strategies in existing state programs.
3. **Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Advancing Oregon's Clean Energy Future (No. 25-29):** Issued to increase the pace and scale of Oregon's response to reducing carbon pollution while strengthening grid reliability and energy affordability.

## Federal government

In 2025, Congresswoman Marilyn Strickland (WA) and Congressman Mike Lawler (NY) introduced the **Cool Corridors Act of 2025**, which proposes to reauthorize the Healthy Streets program to enhance the resilience, accessibility, and safety of transportation corridors across the nation by supporting strategic investments in tree canopy, shade infrastructure, and other nature-based cooling strategies along pedestrian, bicycle, and transit routes. Additionally, Senator Ruben Gallego (AZ) introduced three bills that underscore the critical need to respond to extreme heat across the country. These bills have not yet been passed and approved by the President, underscoring the need for local, regional, and state governments to determine ways to take action without federal support.

- **Extreme Heat Emergency Act:** This bill proposes adding extreme heat to the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) list of major disasters, which would qualify extreme heat disasters for major disaster assistance from the federal government.
- **Excess Urban Heat Mitigation Act:** With support from U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley of Oregon, this bill was proposed to create a competitive grant program to provide funding to combat the causes and consequences of urban heat islands.
- **Extreme Heat Economic Study Act of 2025:** This bill was proposed to direct a federal study to determine the growing financial impacts of extreme heat.

### Extreme heat is a growing and critical threat to public health in the nation and greater Portland region.

**Extreme heat is the leading weather-related cause of death in the United States.**<sup>1,2</sup> A 2024 study found that the total number of heat-related deaths recorded in the U.S. had more than doubled between 1999 and 2023.<sup>2</sup>

**Nearly 7 in 10 U.S. residents reported that someone in their household had experienced heat-related health problems** and yet most were not aware of life-saving resources in their area.<sup>2</sup>

**The year 2023 was the second warmest year on record in the greater Portland region**, second only to the year of the historic 2021 heat dome. In Multnomah County, there were 141 visits for heat-related illness (HRI) in emergency rooms and urgent care centers and three lives lost due to heat.<sup>3</sup> Those numbers increased in 2024 with 170 emergency and urgent care HRI visits and four deaths associated with heat, marking the fourth year in a row the county lost residents due to extreme heat. **Notably, there were no fatalities related to heat in the five years prior to the 2021 heat dome.**<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United State, National Weather Service. *Weather Related Fatality and Injury Statistics*. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, [www.weather.gov/hazstat](http://www.weather.gov/hazstat). Accessed 2 Feb. 2026.

<sup>2</sup> United States, Government Accountability Office. *Extreme Heat: Limited FEMA Assistance Highlights Need for Reevaluation of Agency's Role*. GAO-25-107474, 30 Sept. 2025, [www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-107474](http://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-107474).

<sup>3</sup> Multnomah County Health Department (2024). *Summer 2023 Health Impact Report*. Multnomah County, OR. Environmental Health Services.

<sup>4</sup> Multnomah County Health Department (2025). *Summer 2024 Seasonal Heat Hazard Brief*. Multnomah County, OR. Environmental Health Services.