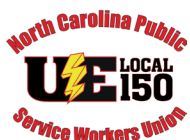


LOCAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT WORKERS NEED COMMONSENSE PROTECTIONS FROM HEAT

Hundreds of North Carolina workers visit the emergency room or miss at least one day of work every year because of heat-related illnesses.¹ Some have tragically lost their lives. One study led by researchers at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, conservatively estimates that at least 25 people in North Carolina died from heat-related causes on the job from 1999 to 2017.² One such worker was Anthony Milledge, a Charlotte sanitation worker who was thought to have suffered a fatal heart attack after laboring more than 12 hours on a hot July day in 2017.³



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FACT SHEET
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THESE HEAT DEATHS WERE PREVENTABLE

Commonsense safeguards such as written heat illness prevention plans, paid cool-down periods, no-cost drinking water, acclimatization protocols to help new and returning workers get used to the heat, and appropriate first-aid training for workers and supervisors should be the norm. However, the State of North Carolina does not have a workplace heat standard that explicitly requires these essential protections.

The lack of a specific heat standard puts local and state government employees—from sanitation workers and park employees, to university kitchen and groundskeeping workers, to road repair crews—in danger every time the temperature soars. The most harmful health effects of heat tend to disproportionately affect Black and Latine workers.⁴ Black people make up about 90 percent of UE Local 150, the North Carolina Public Service Workers Union.⁵

THE LACK OF BASIC HEAT PROTECTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT WORKERS IS ALSO COSTLY FOR TAXPAYERS—AND THE ECONOMY

Extreme heat can drive up workers' compensation costs and reduce productivity even if workers don't get sick or injured.⁶ No one does their best work when they are overheated.

The North Carolina Department of Labor (NCDOL) should immediately develop an occupational heat standard that requires employers to provide:

- Ready access to cool drinking water at no cost;
- Access to quality shade or mechanically cooled spaces;
- Mandatory, paid cool-down periods;
- An adjustment period for new and returning workers during times of high heat;
- A heat stress prevention program and emergency response procedures; and
- Annual heat stress prevention training in a language and manner that all employees can understand.

These elements have been recommended for decades by health and safety experts, scientists, and workers, and are standard practice across the U.S. military.⁷

The North Carolina General Assembly should also fully fund NCDOL to ensure it has the necessary resources and staff to keep workers safe.

Heat is the deadliest form of extreme weather in the United States, and summers are only getting hotter.⁸ The good news is that heat deaths are preventable with the right precautions in place.

North Carolina's essential workers can't wait for essential protections from the heat.

ENDNOTES

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- 3 Ames Alexander and Fred Clasen-Kelly, "Workers Are Getting Sick From the Heat and Charlotte Must Protect Them, Union Says," WBTB, August 23, 2017, <https://www.wbtv.com/story/36203915/workers-are-getting-sick-from-the-heat-and-charlotte-must-protect-them-union-says/>.
- 4 McClure et al., "Heat-Related Fatalities."
- 5 Dante Strobino (UE Local 150), personal communication via email, June 10, 2024.
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- 8 National Weather Service, "Weather Related Fatality and Injury Statistics," accessed June 4, 2024, <https://www.weather.gov/hazstat/>; North Carolina State Climate Office, "Climate Trends Plotter," accessed June 14, 2024, <https://products.climate.ncsu.edu/climate/trends/>.