

**CITY OF LOS ANGELES**  
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE



Date: July 29, 2022

To: Energy, Climate Change, Environmental Justice and River Committee

From: Carol P. Parks, General Manager   
Emergency Management Department

Subject: **COOLING CENTER OPERATIONS IN LOS ANGELES CITY**

As per motion CF#21-1277 made by Councilmember Krekorian dated 11/10/2021, I am reporting on the work of the Emergency Management Department (EMD) in collaboration with the Recreation and Parks Department (RAP) and the Climate Emergency Mobilization Office (CEMO) to determine opportunities to improve the network of cooling centers in the City of Los Angeles. EMD and the Chief Heat Officer held a series of meetings with various departments and agencies to create the framework and gather the data for this report. This report describes the progress made in updating the City's strategies to improve our cooling center network.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

To address the increasing risk the people of the City of Los Angeles face due to rising temperatures, EMD, RAP, and CEMO are updating the City's Hot Weather Response Guidelines to follow best practices for cooling centers, improving mapping and public knowledge of existing facilities, incorporating new measures of heat risk vulnerability into plans, and working with City and County partners, non-profit organizations and businesses to identify novel methods of providing heat relief to Angelenos.

**HEAT RESPONSE OVERVIEW**

The City of Los Angeles's response to dangerous weather conditions is described in the Adverse Weather Annex, which includes Hot Weather Response Guidelines. The annex has been in effect since 2014, and defines the roles and responsibilities of City departments and partners during extreme weather conditions. The Hot Weather Response Guidelines describe the process for identifying extreme heat scenarios and implementing emergency response programs designed to protect public health and safety. The guidelines describe weather thresholds for initiating response actions by City partners. When the weather forecast predicts a potential for extreme heat, the EMD duty officer determines what additional coordination will be needed to respond due to the severity of the weather. These responses, which will be coordinated with the Chief Heat Officer, can include adverse weather coordination calls with the City family, activation of additional cooling center sites, extending hours at existing sites, installing temporary water fountains, public information campaigns, and for severe situations, emergency alerts.

EMD has coordinated meetings with the Chief Heat Officer, City leaders, County, and Federal partners to update the Hot Weather Response Guidelines with the latest tools and resources. A number of meetings with partner agencies were held in June and July to review potential additions to the plan. Additionally, EMD hosted an Adverse Weather: Hot Weather Response Workshop on July 27, 2022 with over 40 City departments and partner agencies. The workshop provided a forum to educate stakeholders on the new [National Weather Service Heat Risk](#) criteria, how County agencies will align their actions, and included a collaborative discussion of each agency's actions during the different levels of Heat Risk. EMD is currently in the process of incorporating the workshop feedback into the City's Adverse Weather Annex and will present the changes to the Emergency Operations Board for approval.

## **COOLING CENTER OPERATIONS**

Cooling centers provide locations for members of the public to find relief from extreme heat and relax in an accessible, air conditioned facility where water and bathrooms are available. These cooling centers are traditionally hosted at City facilities, including libraries and recreation centers. The City has also created many "cool spots" for its residents that go beyond traditional cooling centers, and are discussed in more detail later in this report.

A cooling center map (<https://ready.lacounty.gov/heat/>) is maintained by the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management, which shows all cooling center locations in the county. When additional facilities are activated due to heat waves, it is updated with the new hours/days of operation of existing facilities, and any facilities that were added. Prior to 2022, while the 73 City libraries were designated as cooling centers, they were not included in the County's map, leading to the appearance that cooling centers were not generally available in the City of Los Angeles. As of July 2022, LA City libraries have been added to the county's cooling center map. The City of LA integrates mapping data on cooling centers with the county-wide map to ensure that residents can easily find cooling centers near them, regardless of the jurisdiction that operates the center. EMD and CEMO are also updating the LA City Geo Hub data with the support of the Chief Data Officer to create more comprehensive maps demonstrating various places where Angelenos can find relief from the heat, including cooling centers.

Library facilities are available to members of the public during their normal operating hours as a place to escape extreme weather during both the summer heat and winter storms. Libraries are regular cooling centers in LA, and the City has provided the data including the locations and hours of operation of these facilities to the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management. During extreme heat events that extend into the evening and/or weekend, some of these sites may operate for additional hours to provide refuge from the heat. Those extended hours are coordinated with EMD based on the Hot Weather Response Guidelines, and are published on City and County websites and shared via press releases and social media posts when they are activated.

The RAP facilities host a variety of activities, classes, and camps throughout the year which often assist parents with low cost childcare enabling them to work. These year-round programs provide safe places for participating community members to play sports, recreate and participate in social and cultural activities. In addition to programs and classes, recreation centers also offer "open play" hours where members of the public can access the center for drop in games as well as

senior citizen programs, classes and senior nutrition. During extreme heat events, EMD works with RAP to determine if specific recreation centers need to open as cooling centers to supplement the already available set of library cooling centers. RAP has no designated stand-alone cooling center buildings but rather utilizes existing infrastructure for activations. Facilities offer year round programs and activities and are only used as cooling centers during significant heat events as activation of a cooling center often results in the cancellation of planned programs and activities that directly impact the communities they serve. The additional sites are coordinated with EMD based on the Hot Weather Response Guidelines and are published on City and County websites and shared via social media posts and press releases when activated.

The following chart describes the impact of operating augmented cooling centers on different City facilities.

**Augmented Cooling Center Impact Chart**

	<b><u>Library</u></b>	<b><u>Recreation and Parks</u></b>
<b><i>Overtime Staffing Cost/Hour</i></b>	The Library does not incur any additional costs as a designated cooling center as all libraries are cooling centers only during normal public hours. No information was shared regarding costs for extended hours of operation due to logistical concerns (see below)	Sr. Recreation Facility Director - \$ 68 per hour Recreation Assistant - \$30 per hour (2 needed) Gardener Caretaker - \$46 per hour Electrician - \$77.86 per hour HVAC Mechanic - \$74.12 per hour
<b><i>Utility Cost/Hour</i></b>		HVAC - \$26.86/hour
<b><i>Total Cost/Hour</i></b>		\$292.79/hour
<b><i>Cost Notes</i></b>		The facilities are always running programming. The costs reflect what's needed in addition to the daily cost of the average facility. This number changes depending on the cooling center operating hours/ day.
<b><i># of Staff Needed</i></b>		4-6 people
<b><i>Logistical Concerns</i></b>	All lighting and HVAC systems are automated by computer software and the task to reprogram them for extended hours would be monumental.	
<b><i>Labor Concerns</i></b>		If programming is stopped to open a cooling center, employees working the stopped programs are impacted.

<b>Programming Impacts</b>		Cooling centers will have varying degrees of impact depending on the location chosen and hours of operation. There will be some level of impact depending on whether the center requires additional set up or requires us to stop programming. When programs are canceled this may cause a financial hardship for parents who rely on programs to substitute as childcare. This mostly affects underserved communities. When Senior programs are canceled or displaced this detrimentally affects one of the most heat vulnerable populations.
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## **UPDATED APPROACHES FOR ADDRESSING EXTREME HEAT**

City-sponsored cooling centers must meet specific accessibility and facility requirements, but they are not the only locations available to the public during extreme heat events. City splash pads and pools operated by RAP are an example of a type of facility that provides a “cool spot” for community members to find heat relief. RAP maintains a list of pool sites that is updated daily on their SwimLA website (<https://swimla.org/>). Expanding funding for existing aquatic facilities to operate year round would assist in amplifying the availability of splash pads and pools in the later hot fall months. At this time only 20 of the 51 pools are funded for year round operations while most facilities close in early September.

Other facilities can also provide safe spaces for the public to find heat relief. Local non-profits, religious organizations, and other community-based facilities may open their doors to welcome the public during adverse weather. In order for a facility to be considered an official facility by the City of Los Angeles, it must be inspected to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. It must also be open to all members of the public and have accessible water and bathroom facilities.

Chief Heat Officer Marta Segura is coordinating with nonprofit and for-profit organizations across the City of Los Angeles to assess their willingness to serve as areas of refuge during extreme weather. This is an ongoing process, and the results will be incorporated into updates to plans and procedures. The City has already invested in the Boyle Heights Cooling Center as well as another in Wilmington, which is at a city run Senior Center. There are more facilities being developed and there is significant interest from non-profits and religious facilities to serve as cooling centers. In addition, the Chief Heat Officer has been coordinating meetings to identify cool spots, where hydration stations, shade structures, tree canopies and other amenities that can provide some relief from the heat. These areas are spread throughout the City, and can be found in recreation and parks facilities, bus shelters, and other public facilities. CEMO and the Chief Heat Officer are designing a survey to send out to City and external partners to identify cool spots, cooling centers, and further explore partnerships with businesses such as malls and fast food organizations that can also offer their facilities and services during the heat waves. The City's Chief Data Officer has offered to map these in the City's Geo Hub to make them available to the public in future map iterations that identify refuge for cooling areas during heat waves.

## **NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION**

As climate change continues to drive temperatures to new extremes, the City of Los Angeles must proactively adapt plans and procedures to ensure that the impact of heat on the most vulnerable residents is mitigated. City departments must work together to review climate adaption, mitigation and response plans and update them to incorporate the threat of extreme heat. Seniors, people experiencing homelessness, and people with disabilities are at a higher risk for illness and death during heat waves, and plans and responses must be designed to specifically address their needs. EMD, CEMO, and the Chief Heat Officer are addressing these challenges by updating the Hot Weather Response Guidelines, improving mapping of heat relief sites, and working with partners to identify new approaches to heat mitigation in the City. EMD will continue to work closely with CEMO and the Chief Heat Officer to develop innovative approaches that address the needs of the people of Los Angeles during extreme heat weather.