



# Heatwave Fact Sheet

2016 Tasmanian State Natural Disaster Risk Assessment

**Heatwaves** are our most under-rated and least understood natural hazard.

In Australia, heatwaves kill more people than all other natural disasters combined, including bushfires and floods. Heatwaves also cause expensive livestock and crop losses, and damage critical infrastructure such as roads, railways and bridges.

Heatwaves are often widespread and are caused by a combination of factors, including large-scale weather systems working with more localised effects such as hard surfaces, evaporation and landscape features such as hills and valleys. It is recognised that a heatwave is highly likely to occur at the same time as a bushfire.

During a heatwave, people suffer from heat illness when the body absorbs more heat than it can dispel. Night-time temperatures are a critical factor in the impact of heatwaves, with higher temperatures preventing recovery from the impact of heat on body temperature and function. Some people experience the effects of extreme heat more than others, including the elderly, babies and young children, and people with ongoing health and mobility issues. It's important to know what these effects are, and what you can do for those most at risk.

The 2016 Tasmanian State Natural Disaster Risk Assessment identified that the highest heatwave risk is similar to the heatwave experienced on 3-4 January 2013 in Tasmania's southeast. This saw temperatures in the mid 30s and the low 40s over a prolonged period, combined with high night-time temperatures. In such a scenario, there is a significant increase in heat-related emergencies.

## Government, communities and individuals all have a role to play in preparing for heatwaves

### What is the Government doing?

Government is currently undertaking the following activities to help reduce the impact of heatwaves:

- maintaining a heatwave alert and monitoring system
- maintaining emergency response capability
- community education and awareness-raising programs encouraging individual awareness and preparedness to heatwaves
- identification of high risk populations
- maintenance of critical infrastructure susceptible to heat

### What can you do?

Communities and individuals cannot rely on government alone to prepare for and respond to heatwave events. You can help reduce the effects of future heatwaves by knowing what to do.

## What to do before, during and after a heatwave event

### BEFORE

- The Department of Human Services (DHHS) has extensive information on preparing for heatwaves. Visit [www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/alerts/standing\\_health\\_alerts/extreme\\_heat](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/alerts/standing_health_alerts/extreme_heat).
- Understand the impacts of heatwaves on you and the people around you, especially people at high risk. This includes the elderly, babies and young children, and people with ongoing health and mobility issues.
- Consider how heat affects temperatures inside your home or business and get ready when hot weather is forecast. This will depend on past experience, building age, materials, design and aspect. Draw curtains, blinds and awnings at the start of the day to keep as much sun out as possible.
- If you have air-conditioning, ensure that it has been recently serviced. If you have a reverse cycle air-conditioner, make sure you know how to set it to 'cool'.
- Understand the heatwave forecasts issued by the Bureau of Meteorology. The Bureau of Meteorology produces heatwave forecast maps over summer, showing colour-coded heatwave severity for the previous two three-day periods and the next five three-day periods. Visit [www.bom.gov.au/australia/heatwave/index.shtml](http://www.bom.gov.au/australia/heatwave/index.shtml).
- Put together your Emergency Kit.

### DURING

You can reduce the impact of a heatwave by following these steps:

- Stay hydrated. Drink two to three litres of water each day, even if you don't feel thirsty. Avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- Check that family, friends and neighbours know about the warnings and are prepared. Some people may experience the effects of hot weather more than others. Keep a close eye on those most at risk, including the sick, the elderly and the young.
- Dress lightly to help your body stay cool. Light-coloured clothing reflects heat and sunlight. Avoid synthetic materials.

- Take shelter and stay out of the sun. If you need to be outside, wear a shirt, hat, sunglasses and sunscreen (minimum SPF30+). Sunburn will affect your body's ability to cope with the heat.
- Get your Emergency Kit ready to go.
- Seek air-conditioned places. If you don't have air-conditioning at home, spend the day somewhere that does, like a library, cinema or shopping centre. If you do have an air-conditioner at home, make sure it is working (and is set to 'cool'). Fans will also help you stay cool. If you or those close to you are suffering heat illness, call for help immediately. Symptoms of heat illness include extremely heavy sweating, headache, vomiting, confusion and a swollen tongue. Your local doctor, hospital or health professional is a source of advice if in doubt.
- NEVER leave children or pets in parked vehicles, for any period of time.
- Make sure your pets and animals have plenty of shade and enough cool water to last the entire day and check on them regularly. Avoid exercising your dog in the heat of the day.

For the most up-to-date heatwave forecast information, visit the Bureau of Meteorology's website at [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au) or TasALERT at <http://www.alert.tas.gov.au>.

### AFTER

- Continue to check on family, friends and neighbours, particularly those most at risk.
- Keep drinking water regularly, even if you don't feel thirsty.
- Be careful around trees – they can drop limbs or branches when it is hot.



**For the most up-to-date information on reducing heatwave risk, refer to the 'Awareness' section of the State Emergency Service website [www.ses.tas.gov.au](http://www.ses.tas.gov.au) or the 'Public Health Alerts' section of the Department of Health and Human Services website [www.dhhs.tas.gov.au](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au)**