

Precinct Reporter

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SB Black and Brown, Heat Takes Health Toll

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Staff Writer

Heavy pollutants. Ozone hole. Sweltering heat. Poor communities. It ain't easy being Black, Brown and Green.

Finally, this week's Inland Empire thermometer dropped a few points down from the low 100s, but the cool front won't last long.

The month-long stretch of searing summer heat has the poorest Californians getting hit by perhaps the harshest impact of global warming—not being able to turn on their air conditioner during triple digit days.

Some are finding refuge from the stubborn heat wave at the San Bernardino Community Action Partnership cooling center.

Carolyn Debevec, director of CAP family development program, said it's just a cool place to hang out, in more ways than one.

But she added that many more people in the community should come out, for information about how to cut their energy bill by one-third, along with several other free resources that CAP offers.

HEAP, the federally funded Heating Energy Assistance Program workshops, have been really picking up, she said.

"That's one thing that we want to do while they're at the cooling center, to give good information about our programs," she said. "That's why we're working with the weatherization program collaboratively on this project."

Early each morning, they hold a HEAP workshop. Later, people can hang around, munch on free snacks and drinks, and just stay cool. The program is also distributing flyers in the community and plan to run a huge banner on the building.

"I don't think enough people realize the program is here, I think more people think that it's not just for homeowners. You can be a renter, as long as your landlord agrees, there's no cost," she said.

She said that older people, too, are vulnerable to the heat; they won't turn the air on. Some are too proud to ask for help, but in dangerously high temperatures, pride can be life-threatening. Others, she said, don't try to get into the program because they don't feel that they qualify.

"There are income guidelines, but in this county there are so many people who meet those guidelines," she said.

Heat and pollution is nothing

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Health Toll

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to play around with, that's the latest on a study from Berkeley.

Choking under pollution and existing health problems, blacks in Los Angeles are twice as likely to die from the dirty air and heat combination than the general population.

"Climate change does not affect everyone equally in the United States," said Rachel Morello-Frosch, associate professor of Environmental Science, Policy and Management at the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley. "People of color and the poor will be hurt the most—unless elected officials and other policymakers intervene."

The study, "Climate Gap: Inequalities in how climate change hurts Americans and how to close the gap," was a joint effort of researchers UC Berkeley, Occidental College, and University of Southern California.

The study's researchers recommend policymakers intervene and focus on technology to identify vulnerable neighborhoods, develop outreach to prepare low-income communities of color on how to deal with extreme weather conditions.

Also, they suggest cutting

back on free pollution permits to the oil sector, which have facilities disproportionately placed or grandfathered into poor Black and Brown neighborhoods.

"As America takes steps to prevent climate change, closing the Climate Gap must also be a top priority," said Dr. Manuel Pastor, Professor of Geography and American Studies & Ethnicity at the University of Southern California and director of the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at USC's Center for Sustainable Cities.

"If we protect those who are most vulnerable, we will protect all of us. Properly maintaining the levees would have shielded the Lower Ninth Ward and would have saved all of New Orleans against Hurricane Katrina. Similarly, by choosing policies that shield against the very real dangers facing low-income neighborhoods and people of color, we will insure that climate policy will be effective for the entire nation," he said.

The San Bernardino Community Action Partnership cooling center is located at 696 South Tippecanoe Avenue in San Bernardino; (909) 723-1553.