News

Riding the spring heat wave

BY STEPHEN PETERSON SUN CHRONICLE STAFF

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In 100-degree temperatures and irony just as high, North Attleboro High School graduates Elijah Harris, Jordan Laythe, Kevin Connolly and Kyle Kummer, who are all employed by the North Attleboro Park and Recreation Department, work on the outline of the "North" logo on the floor of the deep end of the empty town pool - which is scheduled to open June 29. (Staff photo by Mark Stockwell)

It is still two weeks from the official start of summer but it might as well have been July or August Monday as the thermometer peaked at 101 degrees - the highest temperature in Attleboro in nearly two years.

The high was at 6:30 p.m., believe it or not, and the temperature was still in the 90s after 7 p.m., according to the Attleboro Water Department.

Monday's high easily broke the record for the date of 95 degrees set in 1959.

It marked the first official heat wave of the year as it was the third consecutive day of 90-degree plus weather. Saturday and Sunday both had highs of 96, the latter a record for the date by 2 degrees.

Today will make a fourth straight day of such temps as a high of 94 degrees - which should feel like 101 with the humidity, is forecast, AccuWeather said. Tonight is expected to bring showers and thunderstorms to cool things off. The New England office of the Environmental Protection Agency issued an alert for unhealthy air quality for today for most of New England, including all of Massachusetts except Cape Cod and the Islands and all of Rhode Island.

MIKE GEORGELarissa Basque, a swim instructor at the Skinner Pool in Plainville, cleans leaves out of the pool Monday in preparation for the pool season.

"As this heat wave continues, we are expecting more unhealthy air quality for Tuesday in most of southern New England," said Robert W. Varney, administrator of EPA's New England office. "On these days, EPA and the medical community suggest that people limit their strenuous outdoor activity."

Exposure to elevated ozone levels can cause serious breathing problems, aggravate asthma and other pre-existing lung diseases, and make people more susceptible to respiratory infection. When smog levels are elevated, people should refrain from strenuous outdoor activity, especially sensitive populations such as children and adults with respiratory problems, officials say.

When ozone is forecast to be unhealthy, EPA asks the public to help reduce ozone-smog by using public transportation, car pooling and/or combining trips; refueling cars at night; and avoiding the use of small gasoline powered engines such as lawn mowers, chain saws, and leaf blowers.

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Cooler air and northwesterly winds are forecast for Wednesday, which should bring an end to poor air quality, the EPA said.

Wednesday is forecast to have a high of 84 degrees, with lower humidity than Monday and Tuesday, AccuWeather said.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, PETA, offers the following advice for pets for the hot weather: Keep dogs inside as soaring temperatures can cause heat stress and be fatal - if dogs must be left outside, they should be supplied with ample water and shade, and the shifting sun needs to be taken into account as even brief periods of direct exposure to the sun during a heat wave can have life-threatening consequences; walk with your dog, don't run, as dogs will collapse before giving up, at which point it may be too late to seek help; never leave a dog in a parked car in warm weather, even for short periods and even with the windows slightly open; dogs pads easily burn on heated asphalt and pavement and sand; and make sure neighbors dogs, if outside, have adequate water and shelter.

Sturdy Memorial Hospital in Attleboro reported no emergencies related to the weather Monday.

However, several students had to go home from Bishop Feehan High School in Attleboro due to illness, according to Principal Bill Runey. He said some of the students who weren't feeling well hadn't eaten breakfast and had had some caffeine, which could have contributed to their symptoms of feeling ill and dehydrated.

"After we gave them some fluids, they were still not feeling well," Runey said, so their parents were contacted and some of the pupils went home. Other parents made their kids stay in school, the principal added. The school has very limited air conditioning.

Making an announcement over the PA system Monday, Runey urged students to eat breakfast and keep hydrated.

The school also postponed a charity volleyball tournament scheduled for today in the school's gymnasium, which the principal described as a "greenhouse."

Due to the hot weather expected today, Bishop Feehan girls are being allowed to wear sneakers and boys don't have to wear ties.

The hot weather has descended on us abruptly this year. Friday's high was just 65 degrees, with Saturday's high a staggering 31 degrees higher.

However, the end of May of last year, there nearly was a heat wave, with a high temp one day of 96 and the third day just falling short by 2 degrees of a third day of 90-degree weather, water department records show. And the highest temp last year was in June, 99 degrees June 27.

The last heat wave was in early August. There were two heat waves last July and one the end of June. The last time the temperature hit 100 or above was 101 in August 2006.

Sun Chronicle Intern Matthew Rocheleau contributed to this story.

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