PHA Disaster Readiness, Response, and Recovery

EXTREME HEAT

Extreme heat is a multi-day period of higher than typical heat (e.g., above 90 degrees) and high humidity. Among all weather-related hazards, extreme heat is responsible for the highest number of annual deaths. Older adults, children, pregnant women, individuals with certain medical conditions, particularly respiratory and/or obesity-related conditions, and individuals that work outdoors are at greater risk from extreme heat exposure.

Responding to extreme heat occurances can be challenging for public housing agencies (PHAs). Emergency funding is rarely available, and as the climate contiues to change many communities are newly encountering this issue. This document highlights best practices to assist PHAs in addressing the challenges posed by extreme heat.

Readiness

Best practice actions PHAs may take to prepare for extreme heat include:

- **educating** staff and residents on the signs of heat-related illness and actions to take to stay cool (a variety of resources in multiple languages can be found at www.ready.gov/heat)
- **identifying** places in the community where residents can go to get cool, such as community cooling centers, libraries, and shopping malls, or contacting the local health department to find cooling centers
- **coordinating** with community partners to provide transportation to/from cooling centers
- **creating** cooling centers within PHA properties, particularly those with many seniors or other high-risk individuals
- **establishing** policies regarding the use of window and portable air conditioners
- **identifying** and mitigating potential fire hazards due to extra dry vegetation conditions

PHAs may want to consider mitigation projects to improve resilience against extreme heat events by:

- **adding** insulation and weather stripping
- **installing** a powered attic ventilator or fan
- **installing** air conditioners for residents

Response

During a period of extreme heat, best practice response actions PHAs may take include:

- **assessing** the impact on business operations, residents, and staff
- **contacting** community partners and implementing established plans
- **communicating** with residents about the location of cooling centers and, if not on PHA property, transportation options
- **posting** materials about the signs of heat illness and resources for cooling in shared spaces and on social media and the PHA's website
- **partnering** with agencies for wellness checks on residents for signs of heat-related illness (consider prioritizing or providing additional assistance to high-risk residents and those with special needs)
- **identifying** and taking additional precautions for staff with high risks such as age or working conditions
- **monitoring** for updates on the local news or radio and downloading the FEMA App to receive real-time weather alerts and more

Tip: *When temperatures are above 95 degrees, electric fans may make you feel more comfortable; however, this will not actually cool your body temperature, resulting in a false sense of security.*

Recovery

After a period of extreme heat, best practices include:

- **communicating** changes to residents and staff, such as the closure of cooling centers and return of staff to regular work sites and duties
- **conducting** a debrief to identify opportunities for future improvements (including residents, front-line staff, and community partners)
- **providing** information about financial assistance for increased cooling costs (e.g., LIHEAP, local utility company, and other local or state programs)
- **taking** resident feedback and documenting lessons learned