***Stay Cool*:**

**Advice for Vancouver Tenants in a Heat Emergency**

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***Our Hot Earth***

Scientists now agree that the Earth is warming. Human activity is the cause, making the Earth hot – too hot in some places for humans to live comfortably.

This trend will not reverse. It’s our “new normal.”

So residents need to learn how to adapt to a hotter climate. Vancouver is no exception.

***Our Hot City***

In Vancouver, this summer, we’re in for another ***heat dome***: a high-pressure system that traps warm air underneath it. We’ll certainly have another *heat health emergency* **THIS SUMMER.**

Extreme heat is a killer.

This year could be worse than last year when nearly 500 [British Columbians died](https://bc.ctvnews.ca/sudden-deaths-recorded-during-b-c-s-heat-wave-up-to-719-coroners-say-1.5494848) after a stifling heat wave in June. Nothing like that had ever happened before.

Most people who died in BC were:

* older people
* living alone
* living in apartment buildings
* without air conditioning
* some with underlying health conditions or with a disability.

Vancouver was very hard-hit. In our local Vancouver Coastal health region, 45 people die on average in the last week of June. But in 2021, **193** people died: over three times the average.

***Extreme heat*** killed our neighbours. People like us.

Across BC, temperatures were above 40 C from late June to early July. In Vancouver, the temperature on Friday, June 25th was 31 to 34 degrees.

**Forecast**: The forecast is for more hot days to come. This year will be very warm and dry for the west coast, including the valleys leading up to the mountains. We’re in for a *sizzling summer*, in July. Temperatures will reach 35 degrees. This health emergency is a***Code Red.***That’s because extreme heat is a silent killer. When things go wrong, they really go wrong. When things get hot, humans get sick. Some will die.

**We must adapt**  Experts agree we need to *adapt* to this new climate risk. It’s “baked into our future.”

***My Cool Me***

Heat is very hard on bodies, especially on older bodies. So we need a personal plan to keep cool.

Here are some suggestions for keeping yourself cool when it’s hot.

**STAY COOL**

1. Put ice on your wrists and other pulse points to reduce body temperature.
2. Use cotton or linen sheets on your bed.
3. Spread a beach towel on your bed. Wet a large towel and place it over your body on the bed. Aim a fan at the towel. This old Australian trick will help you get to sleep at night.
4. Put damp sheets in the freezer and use them before bed.
5. Freeze damp towels and cycle them back to the freezer when thawed.
6. The same works for clothes, so you can cool down your pajamas or nightie by freezing them.
7. Remove a memory foam mattress topper if it retains heat.
8. Eat small, cool meals more often.
9. Take lukewarm to cool baths, sponge baths, or showers.
10. For baths, fill the tub first with lukewarm or room-temperature water and get in. Gradually, let the lukewarm water out, and refill it with cold water until you're in a mostly cold bath. You'll feel cool for a long time afterward.
11. Wear clothing made from breathable material like linen or cotton.

**STAY INSIDE**

1. Create a cross breeze: Locate a fan across the room from a window. For really hot nights, place a frozen water bottle in front of the fan (then you can enjoy a cold bottle of water when you wake up). You might even briefly open your apartment door to get a cross-breeze if there is a nearby window in the hallway outside your door. Create a natural flow of this cooler air to the rooms you're using. Close the doors of any rooms not in use, but keep doors open to places like your bedroom and bathroom. This ensures that cool air flows where you need it most.
2. Wait till evening to do chores or other activities when it’s coolest.
3. Avoid going outdoors, especially between 10 am and 4 pm.
4. Always walk on the shaded side of the street.
5. Rest if you feel tired.
6. If you have to go outdoors, wear light-coloured, loose clothes (preferably cotton), sunglasses and a sun visor or a brimmed hat or use an umbrella.
7. Never stay in a car, or leave anyone, including your pets, in a car.
8. Avoid all strenuous activities.
9. Use a delivery service rather than walking to the store for groceries.

**STAY HEALTHY**

1. Keep in touch with your neighbours and support people. Make sure you do check in on each other regularly.
2. Keep hydrated: drink lots of water and juice. Limit alcohol and caffeinated drinks.
3. Drink cool peppermint tea: A peppermint teabag in a glass of cold water will cool you down (the [**natural menthol**](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10744889/)will stimulate cool receptors in your body).
4. Use mint or menthol products. Mint refreshes the skin and leaves a cooling sensation.
5. You can rub cooling topical ointments with medicated vapors (such as Vicks VapoRub) or peppermint lotion on your skin. Bathe with peppermint soap, use lip balm with peppermint oil and brush your teeth with mint toothpaste.
6. Take care of your pets. Maybe one of your folks could write this one?
7. **Watch for signs of heat stress**. Sweating is the first sign it is too hot, but other [effects of heat exposure](https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/programs/geh/climatechange/health_impacts/heat/index.cfm#:~:text=Prolonged%20exposure%20to%20extreme%20heat,%2C%20cerebral%2C%20and%20cardiovascular%20diseases.) are very serious. Watch out for these symptoms:

* **Heatstroke**: With heatstroke, our body can't keep up with its own demands to self-cool through sweat. We're no longer able to sweat, so our body temperature rises. It can reach 104 degrees or higher — putting our health in serious danger.
* **Heat exhaustion**: Our body temperature rises but at a slower rate than with heatstroke. Heat exhaustion is often associated with dehydration. It involves an increased level of sweating and typically happens from overexertion in high heat conditions.

Please seek medical attention if someone is experiencing symptoms of a heat-related illness.

***My Cool Unit***

You can do a few things to make your unit, apartment, or condo cooler. Most of them don’t cost much.

1. Buy a portable air conditioner and put it in your bedroom. You can add water and ice cubes to it. You can buy these small units online. They cost upwards of $60.00 and need no installation, just a power outlet to plug it in.
2. Organize to install an air conditioner in a window. Your building manager can probably help you install one in a window and you can remove it in the winter. You may need to pay for it and for the installation.
3. Use portable fans creatively to cool down spaces: If you have multiple fans, set them up so they intersect, the air hitting you from multiple directions. If you're using a box fan big enough to fit within an open window, face it *out* rather than toward you. While the fan's air won't blow on you, the room will still cool down as the hot air gets pulled out of your apartment. You can maximize this effect with a simple household item: fill a large bowl with ice or ice packs and put it in front of your fan. As it blows across the ice, it creates a portable air conditioner that can move with you from room to room.

Once the heat decreases, close the window and direct the fan's breeze back towards you.

1. Consider using lighter-colored or neutral curtains or blinds to help reflect heat out. You might also invest in [black-out curtains](https://www.zebrablinds.com/blog/do-blackout-curtains-block-heat-06-2020-27/#:~:text=Blackout%20curtains%2C%20because%20of%20the,the%20blackout%20curtains%20gets%20reflected.).
2. Lower your blinds and/or close curtains to block the sun during the hottest parts of the day.
3. Consider using temperature control film that can block nearly 80 percent of solar heat and up to 99 percent of UV rays. *Spectrally selective window film* is the best option, as it also allows plenty of light in. Note: it cannot be easily removed.
4. If you have an [air conditioner](https://www.apartmentguide.com/blog/best-air-conditioner-for-apartment/) in your unit, cool things down while you’re home with a setting around [72 or 73 degrees](https://www.apartmentguide.com/blog/best-ac-temperature-to-save-on-cooling-costs/), but know that on especially hot days, your AC will need to work pretty hard.
5. Do not use the stove or oven to cook. Microwave ovens are okay. Redirect your cooking energy. Try out a Crock-Pot. If you must cook, try to cook later in the day.
6. Unplug unused electronic equipment and devices that might draw heat (like printers or television sets --even in “sleep” mode). Just keep things turned off: try to limit turning on unnecessary lights or electronics.

### At night: if the temperature drops below your apartment’s indoor temperature, open your windows. Be sure to close them early in the morning before the heat increases. Angle fans to suck in the cool, outdoor air.

***Cooling down your building on hot days***

Your landlord or strata council can do specific things to help cool down your building:

1. **Install a fine mist sprayer** at the main entrance so you can cool down before entering our building. This is an easy and inexpensive option, suggested by the City of Vancouver.
2. **Create a temporary, informal cooling room in your building.** Cool the downstairs front lobby space with fans and/or air-conditioning and providing seating where a small number of people can sit and rest to cool down. This was a City of Vancouver recommendation following last year’s heat dome. You need to check with a Fire Inspector to ensure that you are not blocking the exits but this is such a good idea that it will probably get support from them (especially if there are alternative ground-floor exits).

It’s much better to stay cool with neighbours who can check on you as you chat and share a conversation rather than getting hotter and hotter alone in your unit.

***Above all***

Above all, please remember that last year emergency services in Vancouver were completely swamped. We cannot rely on them exclusively in this sort of emergency. People died waiting for fire trucks and ambulances to arrive. It’s critical to check in on your neighbours and make sure someone is checking in on you on a regular basis.

***My Cool Neighbourhood***

1. We have only one Vancouver cooling centre near our church: the West End Community Centre located on Denman Street. For further information, phone 311.
2. You can take pets to the cooling centre.
3. If you can go out, walk on the shaded side of the street and go to cooler public spaces such as the Denman Mall or the Joe Fortes Branch of the Vancouver Public Library on Denman Street.

***My Cool Community***

It’s critical that we keep in touch with family and friends during a heat emergency. So it’s good to have a list of contact numbers on the fridge and have them on speed dial on your telephone.

Anyone who’s feeling at all vulnerable should contact their building manager immediately so he or she can check in on you regularly.

We don’t want any of our neighbours dying the way people died alone last year in the heat dome. In order to stay safe, **we MUST stay connected**.

Being alone and isolated is the riskiest thing we can do in a heat emergency.

It could kill us. No kidding!