



Extreme Weather

Every community member is resilient to extreme weather events and other climate threats

Goal: Every community member is resilient to extreme weather events and other climate threats.

Description

In a world of escalating climate-induced extreme weather, every individual needs to be prepared for, and capable of withstanding and recovering from, the impacts of extreme weather events and other climate-related challenges. This involves a combination of preparedness measures, strong infrastructure, effective emergency response systems, and a community-wide commitment to adaptation and sustainability.

The 2020 wildfires and the 2021 Heat Dome the Pacific Northwest experienced brought into sharp focus the grim realities of what global climate change is bringing to our region. While anyone can be impacted by climate disasters, people are not equally exposed to climate hazards, and those who contribute least to climate change are more often in harm's way. Climate disasters exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, which necessitates preparedness policies and practices that account for social, economic, and health disparities.

Multnomah County utilizes strategic emergency management planning to directly address a growing spectrum of environmental hazards. This focus is primarily aimed at building community resilience to prevent harm to the community in events such as extreme heat, winter weather, long-term power loss, wildfire and wildfire smoke, and severe flooding. These risks, amplified by changing climate patterns, require a more comprehensive and proactive approach to preparedness and response, including additional planning for alerts/warnings and evacuations, and new considerations, such as serving communities who relocate here due to climate impacts.

Ensuring every individual is prepared for climate challenges will save lives and strengthen our community in the face of increasing extreme weather events. By investing in preparedness, infrastructure, and response systems, as well as fostering a culture of resilience, a safer, more sustainable future for all residents is possible. Confronting inequities in systems and investing in community

capacity and leadership ensures the entire community can be climate resilient.

How we measure progress

Indicator 1: Number of deaths from hypothermia and hyperthermia.

Description: Multnomah County actively tracks deaths related to extreme weather events, including extreme heat and cold, primarily through the Multnomah County Medical Examiner's Office, the Health Department, and Regional Climate Health dashboards. The total number of excess deaths — the difference between the total number of observed deaths and the expected number of deaths — and instances of severe illness and injuries that are directly attributable to extreme weather events are critical metrics for evaluating the human toll of climate change and the effectiveness of interventions.

Current data: The June 2021 Heat Dome event, which saw record-breaking temperatures of up to 116 degrees Fahrenheit, was the primary cause of 69 heat-related deaths in Multnomah County. Heat-related mortality has decreased since 2021, but it remains a persistent issue. Data shows that the majority of heat-related deaths that occurred in 2021 happened among those living alone in multifamily housing in units that lacked central air conditioning, often on higher floors.

From 2023 to 2025, Multnomah County experienced an average of approximately three deaths per year due to heat. Divorced, widowed, or single men over the age of 60 were most affected. A majority of those who died in that timeframe (n=10) had underlying conditions that contributed to the death. Common conditions included hypertension, kidney disease, and diabetes. Almost all (n=14) were housed.⁶⁴

There were five deaths due to hypothermia in the 2024-2025 winter season, marking a decrease from the previous winter. People experiencing homelessness continue to face the highest risk for cold-related illness.

Data source: Multnomah County Health Department, [Summer Seasonal Hazard Brief](#)

Strategy 1: Support green building practices that create more climate resilient homes.

Why does this matter?

Supporting green building practices in Multnomah County is crucial for enhancing community resilience against extreme weather, reducing emissions, and lowering energy costs. These practices, which prioritize durable and energy-efficient designs, protect residents from rising wildfire risks, poor air quality, and heat waves. Advocating for local preference allows communities to implement higher standards and ensure that homes remain at safer temperatures and have clean air for longer during power outages or extreme weather events.

Putting this into practice

- Advocate at the state level to support advanced building codes, including codes that support or allow for local preference for implementation of building standards for housing that is more resilient to extreme weather.

Lead department(s)

Office of Sustainability; Health Department



STRATEGY CATEGORY

- ☒ County Strategy
- ☐ Investment Opportunity
- ☐ Community Leadership

STRATEGY TYPE

- ☒ Advocate
- ☒ Research
- ☐ Convene
- ☐ Implement

COUNTY CAPACITY

- ☒ Existing
- ☐ Additional
- ☐ New

COUNTY CONTROL



COUNTY INFLUENCE



COUNTY PRIORITY



Strategy 2: Participate in a working group to understand urban conflagration risk and raise awareness of prevention.

Why does this matter?

The devastating Los Angeles Fires in 2025, the Almeda Fire in southern Oregon in 2020, and previous urban wildfire conflagration in Oregon and elsewhere show that urban communities are vulnerable to rapid fire spread due to extreme weather brought on by climate change. Dry summer weather and east winds can combine to create ideal conditions for rapid structure to structure fire spread. The initial danger can be particularly acute in heavily wooded neighborhoods with steep slopes and narrow roads, but these risks also extend to adjacent urban areas where people are less likely to be aware of the danger they are exposed to. Once a wildfire is transmitted into a dense, urban neighborhood, it no longer needs vegetation to spread; wind driven embers spread fire from one structure to the next potentially resulting in exponential growth. Both rural and urban areas can face additional risk from limited evacuation routes.

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COUNTY INFLUENCE



COUNTY PRIORITY



Putting this into practice

- Increase awareness for people who live in areas of elevated risk and map out vulnerable populations in those areas.
- Partner with smaller cities and fire districts to increase awareness of wildfire risks.
- Work with partners to bring together experts from fire, emergency management, planning, and other relevant agencies to identify areas of highest concern and priority mitigation strategies.
- Research effective mitigation strategies from other communities.
- Consider other dimensions of risk, such as impacts on insurance including availability and premiums.

Lead department(s)

Office of Emergency Management; Health Department; Office of Sustainability





Strategy 3: Expand culturally specific outreach before and during extreme weather to ensure everyone in the community knows how to stay safe.

Why does this matter?

Multnomah County and its partners have response plans in place for periods of extreme weather. Responses can include opening dedicated warming/cooling centers and shelters, free transit to warming/cooling shelters, enhanced outreach, and more. Ensuring that the entire community is aware of resources, can take steps to protect themselves, and knows how to get help is vital for keeping people safe. The County utilizes communications platforms like its [Care for When It's Cold, Help for When It's Hot](#), and [Stay Safe During Smoke and Wildfire Season](#) websites during extreme weather events to connect people to critical resources and information, but more work is needed to ensure that this information is reaching all communities across the county.

Putting this into practice

- Create resource pages for wildfire and wildfire smoke.
- Assess the impact and effectiveness of communication efforts and adapt them to ensure they are effective in supporting culturally specific communities that may experience language or other barriers and other high-risk populations.
- Continue to invest in relationships with, and the capacity of, culturally specific communities and other high-risk populations to ensure maximum penetration of information during emergency activations.
- Partner with environmental justice organizations to support *community data* collection about community experiences and strategies regarding extreme weather, and incorporate into planning and programs.
- Develop comprehensive data collection and sharing systems to track climate-related impacts on houseless individuals, and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.

Lead department(s)

Health Department; Office of Emergency Management; Communications Office

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COUNTY CONTROL

Low Med High

COUNTY INFLUENCE

Low Med High

COUNTY PRIORITY

Low Med High

Strategy 4: Improve community access to emergency preparedness networks.

Why does this matter?

True resilience is rooted in social cohesion, where community connection serves as a vital lifeline during a crisis. By expanding access to Neighborhood Emergency Teams (NETs) and culturally specific education — by leveraging trusted community health worker models, for example — we can help ensure life-saving resources reach every resident wherever they are. Investing in community-based organizations to lead these efforts transforms neighbors into support systems, integrating disaster preparedness into the daily rhythm of community care so that no one navigates an emergency alone.

Putting this into practice

- Improve social cohesion by expanding access for residents to connect with other community members around emergency preparedness, including Neighborhood Emergency Teams (NETs), resilience workshops, and culturally specific offerings.
- Expand the number and reach of culturally specific resilience education opportunities and training, including leveraging a community health worker model and other popular education approaches.
- Support community-based organizations to lead and conduct their own programs. Incorporate these resources into social service and health education pathways.
- Develop cross-sector training and learning opportunities that promote collaboration between homelessness service providers, climate scientists, and emergency management personnel.

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COUNTY CONTROL



Low Med High

COUNTY INFLUENCE



Low Med High

COUNTY PRIORITY



Low Med High

Lead department(s)

Office of Emergency Management; Health Department; Office of Sustainability



Strategy 5: Develop a strategy to establish resilience hubs in every neighborhood in Multnomah County.

Why does this matter?

A network of resilience hubs transforms trusted local anchors — like community centers and houses of worship — into “islands of safety” that provide life-saving power for medical devices and cooling during extreme weather. This strategy matters because it shifts leadership to local grassroots leadership and mutual aid networks, ensuring emergency responses are culturally relevant and accessible to those most impacted by climate change. Unlike traditional shelters that sit idle, these hubs act as “steady-state” community assets that provide year-round programming like food access, strengthening the social bonds and energy independence necessary for survival long before a crisis occurs.

Putting this into practice

- In coalition with a broad range of community-based organizations and other government agencies, conduct a comprehensive assessment of community needs, ongoing resources needed to sustain resilience hubs, and potentially suitable locations in each neighborhood, prioritizing frontline and at-risk communities.
- Advocate for resources to develop and sustain a resilience hub network.
- Look for resources that would support solar panels and battery storage at resilience hubs in all neighborhoods.
- Work with community groups to help define what a resilience hub is.

Lead department(s)

Office of Sustainability



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Strategy 6: Increase access to efficient cooling and air cleaners in homes.

Why does this matter?

Increasing access to efficient cooling and air cleaners is a critical public health intervention. Many households across the county do not have the resources to purchase, or the physical ability to install, cooling or air filtration devices. Multnomah County and other local governments have implemented limited programs to connect low-income households to these resources, but more investment is needed to sustain and expand their reach. This includes exploring innovative funding through Medicaid waivers, ensuring that life-saving climate technology reaches the most vulnerable residents across all of Multnomah County. This strategy shifts our approach from reactive emergency response to proactive protection, ensuring that every home, regardless of ZIP code or income, can serve as a safe refuge during extreme heat and smoke events.

Putting this into practice

- Support legislative efforts that allocate funding for air cleaners and energy efficient cooling, like the Oregon Community Heat Pump Deployment Program.
- Increase funding and expand eligibility for programming to provide more residents with access to air conditioners, heat pumps, and air purifiers, especially for those outside City of Portland boundaries in Multnomah County.
- Explore expanded eligibility criteria for cooling through Medicaid's Health-Related Social Needs benefits.

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