The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

Focus: Heat and Climate Change

Global warming is making hot days hotter, rainfall and flooding heavier, hurricanes stronger and droughts more severe. This intensification of weather and climate extremes will continue to be the most visible impact of global warming in our everyday lives.

It is also causing dangerous changes to the landscape of our world, adding stress to wildlife species and their habitat.

In our previous bulletins, we have discussed the effects of climate change, describing how the Earth could become hotter if we fail to reduce emissions from burning fossil fuels and if we don't stop deforestation.

The World Meteorological Organization reported that 2000-2009 was the hottest decade on record, with eight of the hottest 10 years having occurred since 2000.

It's not just the heat that poses threats. Scientists say global warming is speeding up the cycling of water between the ocean, atmosphere and land, resulting in more intense rainfall and droughts at the

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on global warming and hot weather
- To help journalists discuss with their listeners the effects of extreme hot weather conditions
- To help journalists engage their communities in the search for solutions to protecting themselves from heat-related diseases

The Problem: Hot Weather Due to Climate Change

The Malawi Meteorological Department says a hot, dry season in Malawi lasts from September to October with average temperatures varying between 25 and 37 degrees Celsius. However, the hot season could be extended to November.

In this bulletin we will discuss the effects of hot weather and we will also talk about the measures that aid the body's cooling mechanisms and prevent heat-related illnesses.

The hot season has just begun and already we are having minimum temperatures of 17 degrees Celsius and maximum temperatures of between 29-30 degrees.

High temperatures can be potentially dangerous to our health.

People suffer heat-related illness when the body's temperature control system is overloaded.

The body normally cools itself by sweating. Under some conditions, sweating is not enough to cool down the body.

In such cases, a person's body temperature rises rapidly. Very high body temperatures may damage the brain or other vital organs.

Several factors affect the body's ability to cool itself during extremely hot weather. When the humidity is high, sweat will not evaporate as quickly, preventing the body from releasing heat quickly.

Other conditions that can limit the ability to regulate temperature include old age, obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, poor circulation, sunburn, and drug and alcohol use.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand that hot weather can be dangerous to people.

You can discuss with your listeners about measures they can take to aid the cooling mechanisms of the body and prevent heat-related diseases.

Make the following points:

To protect your health when temperatures are extremely high, remember to keep cool by using the following tips:

Drink more liquids, particularly water, regardless of your activity level. During intense exercise (playing football, netball or even tilling the land) in a hot environment, drink 2-4 glasses of cool fluids each hour.

During hot weather, you will need to drink more liquid than your thirst indicates. This is especially true for people 65 years of age and older. It's because as a person ages, their bodies have trouble responding to extreme temperatures. Keep in mind: very cold beverages should be avoided since they can cause stomach cramps.

Wear as little clothing as possible when you are at home. Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. In the hot sun, a wide-brimmed hat will provide shade and keep the head cool. Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and causes a loss of body fluids. It can also cause pain and damage to your skin.

If you are unaccustomed to working or exercising in a hot environment, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, stop all activity, get into a cool place, or at least in the shade, and rest, especially if you become lightheaded, confused or weak.

If you must be outside, try to plan your activities so that you are outdoors either before noon or in the evening. While outdoors, rest frequently in a shady area. Resting periodically will give your body's thermostat a chance to recover.

Also let your listeners know that those at greatest risk of heat-related illness include: infants and children up to four years of age, people 65 years of age or older and people who are overweight and those who are ill or on certain medications.

Do a vox pop with a few people from your area and find out how their bodies react to hot weather and ask what they do to cool down.

Interview an official from the Meteorological Department and find out how global warming/climate change has contributed to extreme hot weather conditions and what people can do to adjust to the situation to avoid heat-related diseases.

Contact a local clinic and arrange a talk show with a nurse or doctor about staying healthy in the heat. Ask them to describe the symptoms of heat stroke and what to do should it happen to you.

Run public service announcements daily about why it's important to stay cool in the heat.

Useful Contacts

- Meteorological Department-Chief Meteorological officer; (265) 1 822 014
- Secretary for Environment and Climate Change Management; +265 1 771 11
- http://www.metmalawi.com/weather/weather.php
- http://www.who.int/globalchange/climate/summary/en/