

Housing Co-ops and Coping with Extreme Heat and Smoke

Many people look forward to the longer days of summer and the season's warmer temperatures. When things get too hot, health and safety can be at risk. Take a few moments to get ready!

Before the Heat Hits

- Share information and resources. Boards can send out messages to everyone individually and print out and post some of the core messages in common areas or bulletin boards.
 - **Tips to Beat the Heat** (a BC Housing resource) is a good resource because it's available in many different languages: [English](#), [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#) (simplified), [Filipino](#), [French](#), [Korean](#), [Kurdish](#), [Persian](#), [Punjabi](#), [Spanish](#). Consider printing a couple of copies in the languages most relevant to your co-op!
 - **Staying Healthy in the Heat** (Government of Canada) offers [another poster option](#).
 - See also HealthLink BC's multilingual [Beat the Heat](#) resource (available in [English](#), [Chinese](#), [Farsi](#), [French](#), [Korean](#), [Punjabi](#), [Spanish](#), and [Vietnamese](#)).
- Talk to staff, your management company or any committees responsible for self-managed properties. Ensure that everyone has been trained on relevant co-op procedures, potential health risks and how to prepare for extreme heat or smoke. Share this checklist. Check the functioning of heating/cooling equipment and perform regularly scheduled maintenance.
- Where staff work onsite, are your co-op's office spaces suitable for work in high heat? Is there sufficient air circulation? Carry out a risk assessment to guide action; consider alternative work arrangements and read more about heat stress at [WorksafeBC](#).
- Encourage members to prepare through an **emergency preparedness session**. Find public areas where cooling is an option and distribute that location information.
- Set up a community network so that members can look out for each other. Consider a list of more vulnerable members and find volunteers to agree to check on them, especially when things get hot. Vulnerable groups include older adults, people with disabilities, those who work outside, infants and young children, and those with chronic illnesses or who take certain medications.
- Purchase supplementary [cooling equipment](#) such as fans or [portable air conditioners](#). (Larger, longer-term purchases should be part of your overall asset management plan).
- Create a **shaded/cooling area outside** (taking advantage of existing trees/plants, using temporary or permanent outdoor structures like tents or pergolas, or by adding a spray station). If there are pets at the co-op, consider water bowls and spaces for them.

When There's a *Heat Wave Warning* (see [public weather alerts](#) and [public health alerts](#))

- If you have building-wide cooling systems, turn them on.
- Review your **emergency checklist** (and safety and security materials if you have them).
- Prepare the building by **closing windows and blinds** in common areas and hallways to minimize heat gain (and open at night when it is cooler outside).
- Warn members and initiate regular (optional) checks on those who have been identified as more vulnerable.
- Limit co-op activities** (social or volunteer) to times where heat stress will be minimized.
- If you have more limited cooling for a common meeting space, consider allowing broad access, so there's a refuge for people. (Your common area should be accessible.)
- If there are spare portable fans, offer them to those most at risk at the co-op.

Smoke from Wildfires and Other Air Quality Concerns

Warm temperatures can be accompanied by dry conditions and wildfires. In recent years, smoke from wildfires has been a significant health concern.

- Learn the risks and appropriate actions. You can share resources with members directly and on bulletin boards. Here are a couple of examples:
 - HealthLinkBC's [Wildfires and Your Health](#) (also available in [Chinese](#), [Farsi](#), [French](#), [Korean](#), [Punjabi](#), [Spanish](#), and [Vietnamese](#))
 - [How to prepare for the wildfire smoke season](#) (available also in [Arabic](#), Chinese – [simplified](#) and [traditional](#), [Farsi](#), [French](#), [Korean](#), [Punjabi](#), [Spanish](#), and [Vietnamese](#)). This resource is available in video form ([1](#) & [2](#)) for those who communicate in ASL.
- Keep an eye on [public health warnings](#) about **smoke exposure** and the [Air Quality Health Index \(AQHI\)](#).
- Consider adding [air filtering systems](#) (portable or as capital items included in your asset management plan). This may be especially useful for common rooms.
- As with heat, have a plan to assist those most vulnerable and limit exposures for all. If work outside is necessary, use appropriate [N95 respirators](#).

This Year, For Next Year

Some preparations will take more time or effort to implement. What you start today might not be ready until next year but that's all the more reason to start acting now.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken and update the response plan for next year.
- Learn more about creating cooling rooms and how to [minimize communicable diseases](#).
- Review your **asset management plan** (or pursue one if you don't already have one): consider whether any cooling strategies are scheduled or should perhaps be advanced.
 - Increase shading
 - Upgrade insulation and windows

- Move to installing heat pumps which can efficiently cool and heat
- Review and upgrade mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems for improved indoor cooling and air quality.
- Update your **emergency plans** with a focus on weather-related challenges
- Consider your **landscaping**: are there options to create more shaded/cooled spaces outdoors? Do hard surfaces (like asphalt) make sense, or would it be better to gradually introduce softer materials that don't heat up so much.

For Individual Members

- Avoid the sun as much as you can and limit activity during the warmest parts of the day
- Dress in loose-fitting, breathable clothes
- Take cooling showers when you feel you're overheating; use damp towels or cooling packs
- Drink lots and lots of water
- Use electric fans where they make sense
- See how your family members, friends and neighbours are doing. (And [pets!](#))
- If you face particular health challenges, talk to medical professionals and develop a personal plan.

- If temperatures are too high, consider refuges either within the co-op (air-conditioned common rooms?) or outside the co-op (such as at community cooling centres).

Note: efforts to limit the spread of communicable diseases may impact access to public (cooling) spaces.