

# Operation Fan-Heat Relief To Help Elderly Citizens

Raleigh--Human Resources Secretary Phillip J. Kirk Jr. is urging North Carolinians to donate electric fans or make cash contributions to Operation Fan-Heat Relief, a special emergency project to help elderly

citizens cope with the record-breaking heat wave in the state.

The project is a cooperative effort between the N.C. Division of Aging and the state's 18 Area Agencies on Aging.

"Many of our older citizens are very vulnerable to heat-related illnesses, especially those who do not have fans or air conditioners," Kirk emphasized.

"These older adults are highly susceptible to heat

stroke and heat exhaustion which can be life-threatening."

Many older citizens without fans or air conditioners are suffering from the heat and are in danger of serious health problems, he added.

During July, the hot weather has contributed to at least six deaths in the Southeast and two in North Carolina.

Elderly and disabled people who live in apartments or homes without fans or air

conditioning are at the greatest risk of suffering heat-related health problems.

Elaine Stoops, assistant secretary of aging, said that the donated fans will be given to those elderly citizens with the greatest need of relief from the heat.

"Our volunteers who deliver home meals, along with our home health aides and chore workers will be checking for heat stress caused by a lack of fans or air conditioning," she pointed out.

"In addition, North Carolina's 90 Senior Centers will be open providing a cool place for older adults."

Stoops noted that elderly citizens have a greater need for fans or air conditioning because they frequently have chronic health problems requiring medication that affects the body's natural defenses to cope with heat.

For example, diuretics, often prescribed for high blood pressure, reduce the amount of fluids and also affect the body's cooling system. During hot weather the body needs to perspire because the evaporated water has a cooling effect.

Stoops, who is also a registered nurse, said that certain tranquilizers and drugs used to treat Parkinson's disease interfere with perspiration.

These and other chronic medical conditions, such as circulatory problems, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and heart disease, often upset normal bodily responses to heat.

She stressed that the symptoms of heat exhaustion are dry mouth, sunken eyes, excessive thirst which is a sign of dehydration, sore muscles caused by heat cramps, excessive perspiration, weakness, cramps, dizziness, nausea, and feeling light headed.

The signs of heat stroke are hot dry skin, a lack of perspiration, a rapid pulse, and being disoriented.

Heat stroke is a tremendous strain on the body and is considered a medical emergency. A person with the symptoms of heat stroke should see a doctor or get to a hospital immediately.

Stoops added that health officials caution older adults to drink plenty of water, take cool baths and showers, and try to stay in the shade or breeze as ways to avoid heat-related illnesses.

It is also important for them to avoid alcoholic beverages, heavy meals and hot foods, and to get a doctor's advice about medication during hot weather.

Older people who cannot take care of themselves should be watched very carefully during the heat wave. They should be offered water or chilled liquids frequently, and kept as cool as possible. The most dangerous ages for heat stroke are 65 and over.

Persons wishing to donate electric fans or make cash contributions to Operation Fan-Heat Relief should contact their local Area Agency on Aging or call CARE-LINE toll free from anywhere in North Carolina at 1-800-662-7030.

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