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So. Calif. prepares for weekend heat wave

By ROBERT JABLON, Associated Press

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LOS ANGELES (AP) — Southern California prepared Thursday for a scorching weekend that could see temperatures hit 120 in the deserts as a massive heat wave rolled through the West, authorities said.

The National Weather Service issued excessive heat warnings through Sunday night for some areas from Santa Barbara County south to the Mexican border. Forecasters expected a high of 93 in downtown Los Angeles on Saturday and triple-digit temperatures elsewhere in areas — even above 100 in the mountains. The highs could reach 115 to 120 through Sunday in San Diego County desert areas.

Experts warned people to stay out of the sun, wear broad-brimmed hats outdoors, drink lots of water and avoid putting pets and children in parked cars where the temperature can quickly soar. Drivers who might find themselves stuck in a hot car should carry extra cans of sunglasses, water, snacks and any prescription medications they may need, said Ken Kondo, a program specialist with the Office of Emergency Management of Los Angeles County's Chief Executive Office.

"You never know what could happen," Kondo said.

The county designated dozens of air-conditioned libraries and community centers as cooling centers where people could go to seek relief and planned to decide, based on temperature, whether to extend operating hours at some locations.

Los Angeles city officials also planned to decide whether to keep some buildings open until sunset to provide relief, especially for children, the elderly and people with medical conditions that might make them more susceptible to heat illnesses, said Steve Dargen, public health planner for the Los Angeles Emergency Management Department.

"We probably do this four or five times a summer," he said.

Tips for dealing with heat were being added to the website of Laguna Woods, an Orange County retirement city of 18,000 where the average age is 78.

Cafeterias in a gated community were open and "you can bring your laptop or your book and just sit," City Manager Louis Krome said.

The city, which is registered with the county as a cooling center location, also had several hundred people signed up for its free Sunday afternoon movies.

"We provide lemonade and popcorn," she said.

Highs could be 10 degrees above normal for the day on Friday and even 6 degrees above normal at the coasts, said Stuart Soto, a National Weather Service specialist.

The hottest temperatures were expected on Saturday and Sunday before beginning to ease but it still will be above-average through Tuesday, he said.

Southern California won't be alone in sweltering. A high-pressure system will cause much of the Western United States to suffer, Soto said.

The system, which covers most of the West, had its center over New Mexico but was moving westward.

"It's a huge one," Soto said. "We haven't seen one like this for several years, probably the mid- to late 2000s."

The pressure causes air to sink and warm, drawing down humidity.

"As the air warms, it can hold more moisture, and so what that does is take out the clouds," Soto said.

The California Independent System Operator, which runs the state's power grid, expected to cope with any surge in demand from the heat.

Demand usually drops on weekends as office buildings and some manufacturers shut down, and if there's a surge the system can bring more generators online and call a Flex Alert, where some customers voluntarily reduce their usage, spokesman Steven Greenlee said.

"We've been preparing all year for the summer," he said. "At least for the short term ... it looks like we're going to be OK."

However, Greenlee says the long-range forecast is for above-average temperatures through August. The grid also could be stressed in case of a disaster.

"All we need is another big wildfire or two that's going to take transmissions lines out," he said. "That's the risk that all of a sudden can turn out very, very pretty fast."

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Excessive heat warnings will continue for much of the Desert Southwest as building high pressure triggers major warming in eastern California, Nevada, and Arizona Friday June 28, 2013. Meanwhile, rain and thunderstorms will continue for much of the East. (AP Photo/Weather Underground)

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