

Global Warning: Lessons from the 2021 BC Heat Wave

UBCM Workshop, Sept. 15, 2021

Presentation by Mayor Barbara Roden, Village of Ashcroft

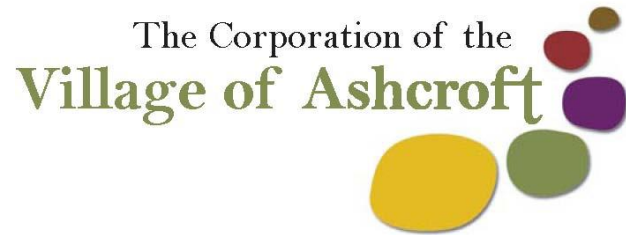
These notes about preparing for a heat wave are written from the perspective of a small, rural municipality, but many of the items touched on are relevant to all municipalities; it's simply a matter of scale. The notes under 'Communications' are applicable to any number of situations – not just heat waves – in communities large and small.

A key point to bear in mind is the need to begin preparations long before a heat wave is on the horizon. Ideally, the work should be done in winter/early spring, so that when a heat wave is forthcoming your plans are well advanced and ready to be put into action. Better to be proactive than reactive.

COOLING CENTRES

Take stock of what space(s) you have in your community that might be suitable for a cooling centre. Air conditioning and washrooms are essential; WiFi, access to the space outside regular office hours, and kitchen/food prep space are all considerations.

Beware spaces that are too large. Ice arenas and curling rinks are probably too large and too hot, with no air conditioning and poor ventilation.



Municipal space has ‘pros’ – you own and manage it, no fee – and ‘cons’: staffing could be an issue. In summer, municipalities without much staff/crew to begin with have many projects on the go and people on holiday. Are you prepared to open municipal space on the honour system if you don’t have a staff member you can spare to oversee it?

Private space: Look around your community and see what public/private partnerships you can forge. Church halls, community centres, seniors’ centres, schools, libraries: anything that has meeting rooms or space available is an option to be pursued. Speak with whoever controls/rents this space to hammer out the details, such as whether or not volunteers might be available to staff it. Once the details have been settled, you now just need to pick up the phone to get your cooling centre up and running when you need it.

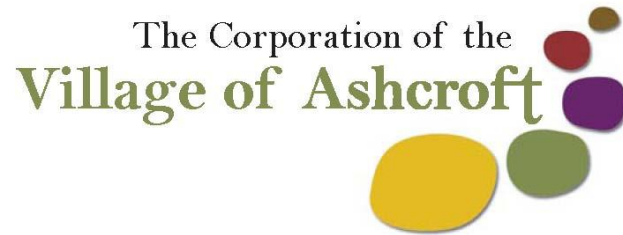
When will you need it? That depends on what a heat wave looks like in your community. Do some research about average temperatures and what you’re accustomed to, then set some appropriate parameters: if the temperature will be XX or higher for XX or more days in a row, your cooling centre will be activated.

MESSAGING/PSAs

Do people in your community know the difference between heat exhaustion and heat stroke, the symptoms of both, and what to do if they suspect someone is suffering from either? In places not accustomed to temperatures in the 30s, they might not.

Find a good online resource where you can download simple guides about heat exhaustion/heat stroke, and get them ready to go in a handy PSA to be distributed to your residents. See the CDC website at <https://bit.ly/2XhPsnL> for an example.

While you’re at it, put together a handy checklist of heat wave dos and don’ts. Don’t garden or walk the dog at 11 a.m.; do stay hydrated; keep blinds and curtains and windows closed during the heat of the day; etc. Again, there are many online resources that are good places to find this information, such as this page at Health Canada: <https://bit.ly/3tTM0eZ>.



Prepare a simple communication detailing when a cooling centre will be open in your community, where it will be located, and what hours it will be open. If you have this ready to go, all you need to do when a heat wave is on the way is fill in the dates and get the message out.

Go to Crown Publications and order a stock of the free 'HELP/OK' signs from PreparedBC that can be displayed in someone's front window. Stock #35459/product #7550001541. Go to <https://bit.ly/2XnIldc> to order.

COMMUNICATION METHODS

- Your municipality's website

- Your municipality's Facebook page

- Other popular/reputable Facebook pages serving your community. Check with the page moderator to see if you can post/share information there, or if they can do it for you; that's just good netiquette. Pro tip: Anything with WTF in the name of the group can safely be ignored.

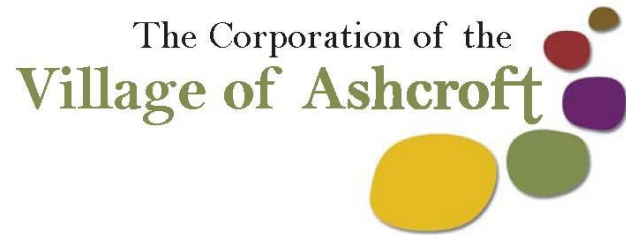
- Your municipality's electronic message board(s) (good for simple messaging like 'Cooling centre open 123 Main Street')

- Municipal newsletter

- Mail drop. This might not be feasible in larger centres; in Ashcroft it costs less than \$200 to do a mail drop to every post box in town.

- Utilize mailings you have to do anyway. Property tax assessments are mailed out in May; include your heat wave PSA(s) with them.

- Local media. 'The press, Watson, is a most valuable institution, if you only know how to use it,' as Sherlock Holmes once remarked.



- Emergency notification system. Like electronic message boards, this is best for short messages ('Cooling centre being activated' with location, dates, and times). Ashcroft uses Voyent Alert!; subscribers can sign up for the app or for text messages, emails, or landline phone calls (important in areas with poor connectivity or a large number of people without smartphones or computers).

- Local organizations. Take your PSAs and the HELP/OK signs to your seniors' centre, food bank, E. Fry Society, Better at Home coordinator, community centre, home health nurses, community paramedic, and anyone else who can distribute this information to people who need it (particularly people who might be shut-ins, housebound, or have mobility issues).

- Have large, clear, simple posters made up with your cooling centre information, and put them up all around town when a heat wave is on the way and you are going to be activating your cooling centre. What bulletin boards does everyone look at? Every community has them; in Ashcroft it's the post office and the grocery store. Free, easy, and guaranteed to get noticed.

Heat waves are part of our 'new normal'. Best to get your ducks in a row and your information prepared now, for when – not if – it is needed in future.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at broden@ashcroftbc.ca.

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