

HEAT BACKS OFF HERE, BUT 2 DEATHS REPORTED

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Thunderstorms fed by welcome cooler air brought relief from heat Sunday evening and the likelihood of milder days this week. But the hot weather may have taken two more lives.

The storms were heaviest in Pike County, Mo., where more than 2 inches of rain fell. Lambert Field reported 0.15 inches Sunday evening.

But the biggest news was the temperature change - down 20 degrees at Lambert Sunday from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., when it was 75 degrees. At 9 p.m. Saturday, the temperature had fallen only to 89.

The National Weather Service forecast a high today of 90 or 91, with less humidity, and a high of 86 Tuesday. Last week's high temperature was 101 on Thursday.

The weather service issued no heat advisory Sunday, when the temperature peaked at 96 degrees at 2:40 p.m., with a heat index of 102. City and St. Louis County health officials said they had kept a heat alert in force but might downgrade it today if the forecasts pan out.

St. Louis police said they knew of two more deaths that may be heat-related. If autopsies blame the heat for those and three reported on Saturday, that would bring this hot spell's death toll to nine. Investigators for the offices of the St. Louis and St. Louis County medical examiner said Sunday that they could not classify any deaths as heat-related until doctors perform autopsies today.

Police released only sketchy details - and no names - of the two dead. One was a 36-year-old man discovered in his home in the 4000 block of South Grand Boulevard at 7:30 p.m. Saturday. The other was an 82-year-old woman found dead in her home in the 3400 block of Tennessee Avenue at 3 a.m. Sunday.

On Sunday afternoon, the 3400 block of Tennessee was quiet except for the drone of occasional window units in the brick houses and two-family flats. Behind one house, two mothers and eight children were splashing in an above-ground pool to keep cool.

In Gravois Park nearby, seven girls, ages 3 to 13, had abandoned their sandals and were dashing under a sprinkler system set up by the city on metal bars that looked like a large portable coat rack. Their house was plenty cool, they said, but the sprinkler was fun.

The nearest Salvation Army cooling center, at 2740 Arsenal Street, reported that no one had come in Sunday to escape the heat.

From Saturday morning to Sunday morning, emergency rooms in hospitals in the city treated 27 people for heat-related ailments and admitted eight of them, health officials reported. In St. Louis County, 22 people were treated and released.

About 16,000 customers of Union Electric in north St. Louis County had to put up with a power outage that began at 9:30 a.m. Sunday and lasted nearly three hours, a UE spokeswoman said. But overall usage was far short of last week's peak, she said.

On the Mississippi, 335 boats filed past the Rev. Michael Sandweg in Portage des Sioux for the annual Blessing of the Fleet, said Jeanette Eberlin, a spokeswoman.

"We figure that that was a great crowd," she said, given the hot sunshine and some doubt over the date. Because of this spring's flooding, organizers waited until late June to announce the blessing would be held on the traditional third Sunday in July.

The boat Kathy's Delight, decorated for a wedding in silver and white balloons, won the best-decorated award for pontoons, she said. The pontoon's decorations came complete with bride in veil and swimsuit and groom in tie, big hat and trunks.

In the last week, attendance at some local attractions bolstered the arguments that St. Louisans are a sensible lot who take it easy in the heat.

"A lot of people got smart and stayed home in the air conditioning," said Walter Lundt, manager of the Shaw Park Pool in Clayton. "Our water is real hot and not real enjoyable to get in, just like all the other pools, I suppose. We get bigger crowds on nice, cool sunny days. They don't want to fry."

At the Raging Rivers Water Park in Grafton, the park has been full for the past six days, with people waiting at the gate to get in, said

Kristie Prather, marketing director.

The biggest attraction is the 18,000-square-foot wave pool, where the temperature has been 80 to 85 degrees, she said.

"We have a 103-day season, and this is the weather we look for," Prather said.

At the Muny Opera, customers are being turned away every night from its production of "Cinderella," said Laura Peters, the director of marketing.

"The heat doesn't affect the Muny as much as one might think," she said. "St. Louisans aren't really intimidated by weather like this," she said.

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