

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SWA 2AA

27 August 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to urge you to tackle the growing risks from hot weather to public health and the economy by creating a cross-departmental National Heat Risk Strategy.

The Office for National Statistics published on 25 August figures suggesting that hundreds of deaths in England and Wales resulted from heatwave conditions during the week ending 14 August. These continue a trend of significant mortality from summer hot weather which is estimated by Public Health England to have claimed the lives of more than 3000 people between 2016 and 2019.

In addition to the death and illness due to high temperatures, the UK has also been paying a large price for these extreme weather events through lost productivity and damage to infrastructure. It is well-known that workers are less effective when outdoor and indoor temperatures exceed comfort thresholds, although there has been no systematic study of the costs to the UK economy. Vital infrastructure, such as transport networks, are also vulnerable to heat. Over the past few years, national train services have been disrupted by both the buckling of rails and the thermal expansion of overhead cables.

The UK does not currently have a national strategy for managing the multiple risks posed by hot weather. The Government introduced a Heatwave Plan for England after high temperatures in August 2003 killed more than 2000 people in the UK and tens of thousands across Europe. However, an official review by the Policy Innovation and Evaluation Research Unit at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which was commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care and published in May 2020, concluded that "there is no definitive evidence of the impact" of the Heatwave Plan. In particular, it found that most heat-related deaths in recent years have occurred outside of the alert periods of the Heat-Health Watch Service operated by the Met Office and Public Health England.

The risks from hot weather are growing because of climate change, with increases in the frequency and intensity of hot days and nights. England's warmest summer on record occurred in 2018, and the UK's hottest daytime temperature of 38.7°C was measured in July 2019. On current trends, peak daytime temperatures on some summer days could exceed 40°C within the next few years.

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Chair:
**Professor Lord Stern
of Brentford**

The Government should now ensure that the new National Institute for Health Protection revises the Heatwave Plan for England and acts on the recommendations of the report by the Policy Innovation and Evaluation Research Unit.

While the Heatwave Plan for England has been focused on the efforts of the health and social care sector, it is clear that a broader strategy is required to deal with the multiple impacts of hot weather. For instance, many of the UK's homes and workplaces are prone to overheating, creating a risk to both health and productivity. According to the Committee on Climate Change, about 20 per cent of homes already overheat in the current climate, even in relatively cool summers.

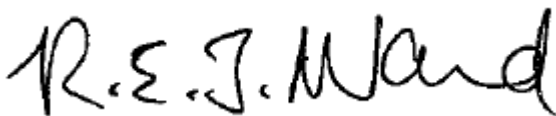
Therefore I believe that we now need a National Heat Risk Strategy that should be implemented not just by the Department of Health and Social Care but also by other parts of Government, including the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Transport, and Her Majesty's Treasury.

Among the issues that the National Heat Risk Strategy should address are:

- retrofitting existing homes and workplaces to reduce the risk of overheating, and implementing regulations to ensure new buildings do not overheat;
- adapting other existing infrastructure, including for transport, energy and communications, to make it more resilient to the growing effects of hot weather and ensure that all new infrastructure is similarly resilient to our warming climate;
- engaging with businesses and communities to raise awareness of the risks of hot weather and the options for adapting to it;
- increasing research on the effects of hot weather on health and productivity and the options for managing the risks; and
- working with local policymakers to tackle the risks of hot weather, particularly in cities which are more exposed because of the urban heat island effect.

The introduction of a National Heat Risk Strategy would not only promote prosperity and well-being, but it would also demonstrate the UK's leadership on climate change adaptation and resilience at a time when it holds the Presidency of the COP26 United Nations climate change summit.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R.E.J. Ward". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bob Ward
Policy and Communications Director

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cc Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer for England