

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

28 May 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to follow up on my letter to you last summer, dated 27 August 2020, urging you to tackle the growing risks from hot weather to public health and the economy by creating a cross-departmental National Heat Risk Strategy. Unfortunately, I fear that a lack of action by the Government over the past few months in addressing the growing threat from heat means that we face hundreds of preventable deaths across the country over the next few months.

I received a response to my letter on 1 December 2020 from Marie Turner, Head of Ministerial Correspondence and Public Enquiries on behalf of Lord Bethell at the Department of Health and Social Care, explaining that the Government had created the National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP) to “enable the country to be ready to respond to other health threats, now and in the future”.

Shortly before I received the response, Public Health England published ‘Heatwave mortality monitoring report: 2020’, indicating that 2556 deaths in England were linked to periods of hot weather last summer. This was the highest number of deaths since the Heatwave Plan for England was introduced in 2004. I am afraid that these figures confirmed the fears I expressed in my letter to you that the country is not adequately prepared for the risk of summer heatwaves, which are becoming more intense and frequent due to climate change, and that hundreds of preventable deaths are occurring each year as a result.

Despite these shocking figures, Public Health England has decided to make no significant changes to the Heatwave Plan for England, which was re-launched on 28 April 2021. It means that the Plan has still not been improved despite an official review by the Policy Innovation and Evaluation Research Unit at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, published in May 2020, which concluded that there “there is no definitive evidence of the impact” of the Plan since its introduction in 2004.

It is understandable that the Government, and particularly the Department of Health and Social Care, has been focused for the past year on tackling COVID-19. However, it cannot afford to ignore the growing threat from heatwaves which could trigger hundreds of preventable deaths over the coming months. The Met Office’s three-month outlook, published on 24 May 2021, indicates that there is a 65 per cent change of average temperatures and a 30 per chance of a hotter than average summer.

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**Chair:**  
**Professor Lord Stern  
of Brentford**

I urge you to immediately initiate the process of creating a National Heat Risk Strategy, as I outlined in my letter to you last year. This will require the involvement of many Government Departments, including the Department of Health and Social Care, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, as well as the Cabinet Office.

Summer heatwaves are natural disasters for the UK that have killed thousands of people over the past few years. The Heatwave Plan for England is demonstrably inadequate, and many lives could have been saved by a better strategy for managing heat risks. Please do not delay action any further on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R.E.J. Ward". The letters are cursive and connected, with a large, stylized 'W' at the end.

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 Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy  
Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Lord Bethell of Romford, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care