

Summers are getting warmer, and some A.C. public housing residents are feeling the heat

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ATLANTIC CITY — Some evenings inside Ida Lee Corchado's School House apartment were so hot in recent years, breathing became difficult.

On the worst nights, she said, temperatures felt like they reached 80 degrees. For weeks, she called the building's owner requesting an air conditioner, and eventually, one was installed. But others are still enduring the heat.

"It gets very hot. You can smell the mist in the middle of the hallways... Especially in the morning, the sun comes in from this side," said Corchado, 50, while pointing at the building. "So we'd switch ourselves to the living room.

As the earth gradually warms, summers are getting hotter in Atlantic City— a trend that may be good for beach days, but bad for residents living in public housing units without central air.

From 1970 to 2018, the average minimum daily temperature in Atlantic City from June to August has risen 3.3 degrees, according to [Climate Central](#), a nonprofit news organization that analyzes global warming. That's 0.6 degrees higher than the national average.

And even more noticeable, climate scientists say, are warmer nights, which are driving the increase in average temperatures. In Atlantic City, there were 17 more nights above 65 degrees in 2017 than in 1970.

The reason behind the trend: A hotter planet leads to more water evaporation, which causes higher humidity, said Sean Sublette, meteorologist with Climate Central. This cycle could be amplified in Atlantic City, he said, an island surrounded by water.

"When it is more humid, the atmosphere does not cool as much at night," Sublette said.

The nationwide trend is a cause for concern, even locally, said Atlantic City Housing Authority Executive Director Thomas Hannon.

Only about half of the island's 1,600 public housing units have air conditioning, Hannon said. There is no federal or state requirement that public housing provide central air, and much of Atlantic City's housing stock is outdated.

During heat waves, when it's above 90 degrees for three days or more, Hannon said the housing authority opens up air conditioned community rooms in some of its buildings until about 10 p.m. to help keep residents cool.

As the city looks to update its public housing, Hannon said adding cooling systems will be a priority. The future Stanley Holmes Village and Buzby Village redevelopment projects will include adding central air, he said.

"It's certainly a concern," Hannon said. "We've all noticed it getting warmer earlier in the year."

Some residents aren't able to cool off at night, when they'd normally get a reprieve from the heat, because of the hotter than normal nighttime temperatures, said State climatologist David Robinson.

"These residents can't catch their breath. Particularly those who don't have air conditioners," Robinson said. "In the past, at least their rooms would be cooler at night, you could open a window and cool it of, and it'd take awhile to warm it up during the day. That's missing now."

And another byproduct of all this heat: possible rising cooling costs in the future. Across the U.S., the average energy expenditures in the Northeast was [\\$174 per household in 2015](#).

That may not be the case in Atlantic County though, where the average residential customer has seen a 15% decline in total energy usage since 2010, said Frank Tedesco, spokesman for Atlantic City Electric.

As summers get warmer, he said, people can take steps to ensure they're not paying more in energy costs from air conditioners running throughout the day and night.

Residents can make use of ceiling fans, run heat-producing appliances sparingly or install a programmable thermostat to automatically adjust a home's temperature while sleeping.

Atlantic City Electric also runs an Energy Wise Rewards program, which lets customers install either a web-programmable thermostat or an outdoor switch installed at no cost. Atlantic City Electric will cycle the participants' air conditioner compressors off and on for short intervals during periods of peak electric demand, such as heat waves.

"There are lots of steps customers can take to ready their homes," Tedesco said.

Running air conditioners constantly can exacerbate warming temperatures and urban heat island effects, said State climatologist David Robinson.

The cooling units emit heat into the atmosphere, which pavements and concrete soak up.

"Even the buildings and rooftops hold heat from the previous day," he said. "They're slow to release it at night and that keeps the cities warmer."