

HEAT WAVE ADVERSELY IMPACTS BUSINESSES PRODUCTIVITY AND PROFITABILITY



The unusually hot summer is taking a toll on the workers. Not all have the luxury of working in air-conditioned comfort, with water coolers at their disposal and iced coffee breaks. There are many who are condemned to working outside all day, thirsty and soaked with sweat, with not even shade to provide them with some respite from the sweltering heat. Tyler Vickery, working for the 'We Do Lines' had just finished his work, that included three to four hours of pushing a line-stripping machine loaded with paint across an asphalt lot. The mercury was pushing 111 degrees when he got into his truck. "The heat, when it comes off the asphalt, can take your breath away," Vickery said. "When I took off my hat, it was like I had put it underwater and the same with my shirt. It was 100 percent soaked in sweat." He said that he does not remember if they ever had a summer that was hotter than the current one adding, "I didn't feel like I was going to pass out, but several times I knew I needed to sit down right away and drink water." Even though the temperatures this week had tapered off somewhat, there were still in their nineties, Vickery's observation that there were perhaps the hottest he has ever experienced is not far from the truth. June temperatures and the Fourth of July heat broke earlier established records that had stood for decades. This summer will go down in our history as one of the hottest and longest-lasting heat waves and a record setter in every sense of the phrase. Jeff Weber, a scientist with the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo., made an alarming prediction. He predicted that rising heat commencing in the Southwest will flow eastwards, which will lead to discomfotingly high temperatures for almost ten days. These he said would be followed by about three to four days of slightly low temperatures, following which the dreaded heat wave would return. The prediction could mean that the current respite in the temperatures could be short lived and that the worst is not yet over. The latest heat wave has already claimed 46 lives across the country. Chris Couri, co-founder, president and CEO of 'We Do Lines,' said that the danger is very real and that employers would be well advised to take safety precautions. His employers, he said, wore reflective clothing, hats and collared shirts; drank plenty of water and took breaks sitting inside the trucks with the air-conditioning on. Couri admitted that for all its problems, this hot weather was best for his business. Energy sapping heat does slow down the pace, he says, but we are "not trying to set any world records" to finish a job. "We have to take advantage of the weather if it's hot and dry, which are the best conditions for what we do," he said. But not all are as fortunate to turn a dicey situation to their advantage. Not only is work physically draining, they have seen loss in profitability as well. Farmers in Midwestern United States, known as America's bread basket, looked on helplessly as the searing heat baked their farms and wilted their crops. The June weather was the tenth driest climate in the country's history, with the 10-day spell of uncommon, remorseless heat from the end of June through the first week of July destroying much of the nation's supply of corn and soy. Tom Norton, who fancies himself as a Lawn Doctor and operates a service by the same name in the Boston area, says that in the high heat, the products, like fertilizers and pesticides, that he uses on lawns, can actually have a negative burning effect on the lawns, so he has to use slow-release products. Moreover, he says, he hates it when customers call to cancel or postpone lawn service, as he puts it, "the one thing worse than working in the heat is not working in the heat." Norton understands the feelings of the lawn owners. "They don't want to waste money caring for their lawns when their lawns are burnt from the sun anyway," he said. "That doesn't help us financially. As much as I love the summer, we can spend a lot of time on customer service issues and problems that come with the heat, like insects and drought conditions." When Indianapolis temperatures soared to 105 degrees, 'The Best Chocolate in Town' outlet saw one of its air conditioning units conk out. Apart from making indoors working very difficult, what was of even deeper concern to the supervisor Nancy Bain was that, without the air-conditioning the chocolates would melt. All attempts to save them failed and she had to throw them away. "It is sad," she said. She said that the shop had to sustain a certain temperature to maintain the chocolates taste and texture. However, every time a customer walked in he brought with him "a blast of hot air." Unable to fix things, the shop had to close for many days, resulting in losses between \$500 and \$800 a day. Bain said, that it was not unusual to have this sort of weather once or twice in the summers, but for it to continue unabated was "absolutely a concern." However, the cruelest job this summer is not the ones where you have to work in the open sun, but in the crypt like insides of Times Square subway station, where Jainol Abedin, works at a small newsstand. "When it's 90 degrees outside, it's 100 in here. It's hot, dusty, noisy- there's no fresh air," he said. "The heat makes me feel tired." He says sales have increased as customers stressed by the heat seek cold drinks at his store. But they have to endure the heat for a relatively short period, as they escape to the air-conditioned comforts of subway cars. Meanwhile Abedin continues to swelter and roast in his booth. Abedin seems resigned to his fate, but he cannot be blamed when he winces, "this is only the beginning."