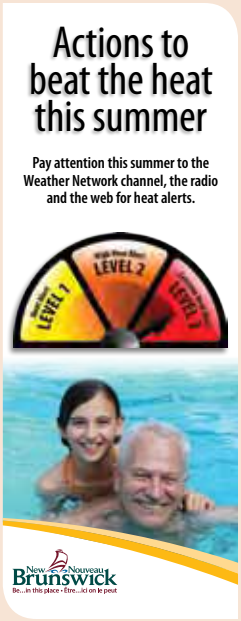
Case Study 1

How Fredericton Developed a Heat Alert and Response System from the Ground Up

The City of Fredericton, New Brunswick (N.B.), is one of four Health Canada pilot communities that introduced a HARS in 2009. The specific HARS objectives were to:

- develop partnerships with local stakeholders to support their engagement
- develop heat alert and response protocols
- increase public awareness of heat-health risks and change behaviours
- increase community support to at-risk populations during heat episodes
- identify best practices for communication and share information among agencies to reduce heat-health risks among the public



Source: City of Fredericton and Government of New Brunswick

Early in the development stages, a lead organization (N.B. Department of Health, Health Protection Branch) was identified and a project coordinator was assigned to supervise and roll out the HARS. A core group of stakeholders was recruited, including the District Medical Officer of Health, Canadian Red Cross, the N.B. Emergency Measures Organization, Environment Canada, Meals on Wheels, and the N.B. Home Support Association. To gain their interest on heat-health issues and HARS development, stakeholders were provided with health and environment data, including:

- Environment Canada data demonstrating that Fredericton has historically experienced a higher number of days (along with the central portion of the province) with humidex values above 35 compared with other regions in the Maritimes
- mortality curves demonstrating strong relationships between non-traumatic deaths, temperature and humidex
- temperature projections showing that by 2041 the number of days in Fredericton with temperatures above 30°C/86°F is expected to double
- experiences of other communities (e.g. Europe in 2003 and Chicago in 1995) demonstrating potentially severe detrimental heat-health outcomes

The lead agency established a HARS Advisory Committee to provide guidance on how to develop the HARS, including a public education program to reduce morbidity and mortality during extreme heat events. Regular committee meetings, e-mail updates, telephone discussions and personal contact with the individuals representing organizations were necessary to keep everyone engaged and focused. Information provided by community partners on the needs of the target audiences, availability of data and information resources, identification of community-specific risk factors and educational opportunities helped shape development of the HARS.

Partners gave one-on-one training to their clients about heat-health risks and the HARS. They also distributed material directly to heat-vulnerable people, including older adults, homeless people, and people living alone with mental illnesses or physical limitations. The City of Fredericton also played a key role in the awareness campaign by including heat-health information on their website and in water utility bills mailed in the spring to 16,000 households in the city. In addition, a direct link to heat-health resources is displayed on the City of Fredericton homepage during the summer months. When an alert is issued a message is disseminated for its duration and a press release is sent to news agencies.

For more information on the Fredericton HARS, visit ***www.fredericton.ca/heatalert****.*