



# Operation Weather Survival

A Community Collaborative to Protect Citizens  
During Extreme Temperatures

Regina L. Greer

Director – United Way 2-1-1 and OWS Chair

St. Louis, Missouri



# What is OWS?

- Operational Weather Survival is a network of public and private organizations that work together to prevent illness and death caused by extreme hot or cold temperatures
- OWS is comprised of members from the utility, faith-based, non-profit, civic, and government agencies



# The Mission of OWS

- OWS realizes that a coordinated “community” response to reach those most vulnerable is the only way to exceed – especially as we continue to face more extreme summer and winter weather.
- “Comprehensive response plans are necessary to reduce heat-related morbidity and mortality. Plans should provide for coordinated action across government authorities, involve private sector participants and be responsive to variable risk factors.”  
– *American Journal of Public Health*
- Success is measured based on ensuring no deaths occur during these periods



# The History of OWS

## **July 1980: the first prolonged period of extreme heat since 1966**

- Mayor declared heat emergency
- National Guard searched door-to-door, in conjunction with area social service agencies
- Army Reserve supplied portable AC
- American Red Cross opened emergency shelters
- 113 heat deaths occurred

## **1981: Developed Response**

- Lessons learned from 1980 were incorporated
- OWS formed out of meetings between city officials and social service agencies
- A Wet Bulb Globe Thermometer mounted on the roof of the county health building
- Health officials began surveillance of heat-related illness occurrence



# 1982 and Beyond...

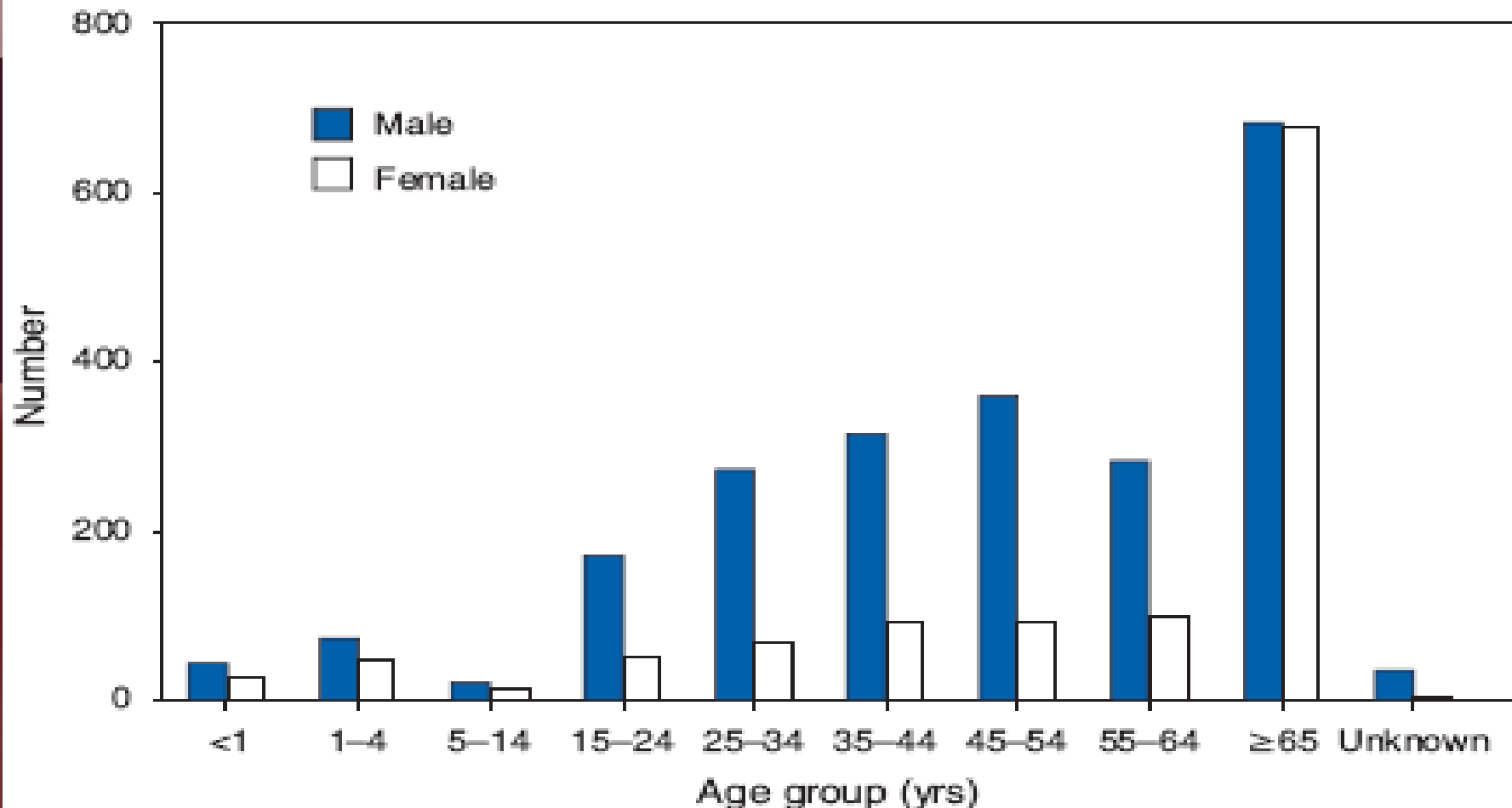
- 1982: OWS began as a formal contract between St. Louis City and social service agencies
- 1983: Began coordination between City and State EMA
- 1990: City and State health officials met with surrounding metros to develop common language for describing hot weather health advisories
- First official "heat warning" was issued July 7, 1991
- 1997: Use of Wet Bulb Globe Thermometer was discontinued and the use of the current advisory system developed by the National Weather Service was adopted



# Response Plans

- OWS operates two (2) response plans:
  - Hot Weather
  - Cold Weather
- Both plans include the following:
  - Press releases inclusive of hot / cold weather tips and preparedness information
  - Use of media packets
  - Recruitment of cooling and warming sites in the region and dissemination of this information to the public
  - Identification of partnerships / funding for supporting programs (AC, LIHEAP, etc.)
  - Tests of the Advisory System
- Response is triggered by the National Weather Service and Health Emergencies declared by the appropriate local/state government entity

**FIGURE. Number of heat-related deaths,\* by sex and age group — United States, 1999–2003**



\* Exposure to extreme heat is reported as the underlying cause of or a contributing factor to death (N = 3,442).



# OWS Structure

- Chair
- Vice Chair
- Secretary
- Sub-Committee Chairs (4):
  - Extreme Weather Planning – Hot Weather Response
  - Extreme Weather Planning – Cold Weather Response
  - Media / PR / Marketing & Education
  - Resource development
- Member Agencies

# OWS in Action



- Meet quarterly and more frequently during periods of extreme temperatures
- MOU's are established with OWS and all participating member agencies
- Cooling / Warming sites are recruited annually
- Information is housed on the United Way 2-1-1 website AND disseminated via 2-1-1
- Local media are partners in the communications process as well
- Vulnerable populations are encouraged to seek shelter when needed
- Media information / magnets / window clings used

Year	HRD	HRI
1981	113	
1983	35	348
1995	57	470
1997	4	153
1998	5	291
OWS Effectiveness		



# The Future of OWS

- Social media integration
- Support of special needs registries
- Electronic communications with cooling / warming sites
- Continued targeting of vulnerable populations
- Continuation of strong community partnerships and ties
- Separate link / section for OWS and associated preparedness info on the 2-1-1 website
- Links with the CDC and grant opportunities



# OWS Member Listing

- Ameren UE
- American Water
- St. Louis County Community Action Agency
- City of St. Louis Dept. of Health
- City of St. Louis Dept. of Human Services
- Home Services, Inc.
- Human Development Corporation
- Jefferson County Health Department
- Laclede Gas Company
- Mid East Area Agency on Aging
- MO Division of Family Services
- National Weather Service
- North East Community Action Agency
- St. Charles County Dept. of Health
- The American Red Cross
- St. Louis County Dept. of Health
- The Salvation Army
- The Society of St. Vincent de Paul
- United Methodist
- United Way of Greater St. Louis



# Wrap Up / Questions

**Thanks for the opportunity!**

For more information on forming an OWS Coalition in your community, contact me at

[regina.greer@stl.unitedway.org](mailto:regina.greer@stl.unitedway.org)

Or

314-242-1880