

Heat bakes Southeast, Midwest; 8 die

By DEAN FOSDICK
Associated Press Writer

A record-breaking heat wave that has sent temperatures to 100 degrees or more in 18 cities held on today across the Midwest and Southeast with "no relief in sight," baking crops, closing schools and causing at least eight deaths.

New temperature marks were set or tied in 25 cities in a dozen states Monday, from Missouri to the Carolinas, and although thunderstorms dropped as much as a half-foot of rain on sections of Nebraska by midnight, they may have done farmers more harm than good, a forecaster said.

"We see no immediate relief from the heat," said Harry Gordon, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Severe Storms Forecast Center in Kansas City, Mo. "The nation's high was 107 yesterday in Augusta, Ga., and Fayetteville, N.C., and we expect more of the same around there today."

The heat wave, which began Saturday, has broken records in up to 40 cities, some of which have stood since the late 1800s, Gordon said.

"Although we had some pretty good rains reported yesterday — not to mention wind damage in five states — any break from the heat will be short-lived," he said today. "And in areas like Burwell, Neb., where 6 inches of rain caused flash floods, you may see more harm than good to crops because of the pounding they took.

"The water simply came down too fast for it to soak in," Gordon said.

Public schools already in regular session in Nashville, Tenn., were ordered closed today and were to remain closed until a break in the heat. Officials will decide "on a day-to-day basis" whether conditions have improved enough for the city's 63,000 students to resume classes.

"In some classes the temperature today ranged from 96 to 100 degrees," said Charles Frazier, director of Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County schools. "We feel it's in the best interest of the students and teachers to close school."

Students were sent home early Monday in Pender, Dublin, Scotland and Buncombe counties in North Carolina and in the cities of High Point and Reidsville. Closings or short school days also were ordered in some Kentucky communities.

The deaths of two elderly St. Louis residents increased the city's heat toll to 35 since July 15, Health Commissioner William B. Hope said. Heat has been blamed for three deaths in Alabama, two in Missouri, and one each in North Carolina, Kentucky and Illinois.

The Kentucky Crop & Livestock and Reporting Service, meanwhile, listed the tobacco crop in poor condition and said many growers were being forced to begin harvesting earlier than usual because leaves were drying up.

Some North Carolina agricultural agents report-

ed that tobacco leaves are burned on the tips, resulting in reduced quality and prices. The soybean crop in North Carolina's southeast counties has been hard hit and corn yields are expected to be smaller than usual.

"It's a disaster throughout the Southeast," said Ralph Sasser, a southeastern district agricultural agent.