

State Assessing Impact

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After a week of triple-digit temperatures, North Carolina farmers are counting their losses, utility companies are struggling to meet record power demands, air-conditioning repairmen are working day and night and beer and ice-cream sales are booming.

As the state bakes in the record heat, people are trying to come up with ways to stay cool.

"We're selling cold beer and soft drinks hand over fist," said Mike Brawley of Mike's Discount Beer Inc. in Charlotte. "People want something to cool them off."

At Carowinds Theme Park on the South Carolina line near Charlotte, tourists have flocked to Ocean Isle this week to let the waves wash over them.

"Everybody wants to get in the water to get cool," said a Carowinds spokesman. "It's been one of our busiest times this summer."

But the heat wave will cost consumers. Crops and livestock already have been severely damaged by the scorching weather. Power-company spokesmen say customers should brace themselves for higher electricity bills for August — possibly the hottest August on record for the state.

"There's no doubt, when we set demand records, bills will be higher," said Andy Thompson, a spokesman for Duke Power Co. "And when we have to buy electricity to meet customer demand, that's expensive and it will be passed along to the customers in their bills."

Duke customers used 11,554 megawatts of electricity Tuesday, surpassing the record of 11,536 megawatts set Monday. The utility was forced to buy power from Appalachian Power Co.

Carolina Power & Light Co. customers used 6.9 million kilowatts Tuesday, just short of the record 6.92 kilowatts used Monday.

North Carolina, along with the entire Southeast, has sizzled in record-breaking temperatures this week. National Weather Service officials say this month may turn out to be the hottest August ever recorded in the state.

In Raleigh Tuesday, the temperature hit 100 for the fifth day in a row. Asheville recorded a high of 98, breaking its 1968 record of 93 for that date. Charlotte had a high of 93, up from its 1967 record of 99.

The hot spot in the state was Fayetteville, with a blistering 106.

A series of storms moving across the state early Wednesday lowered temperatures into the 70s. Winds in the Fayetteville area were clocked at 70 mph and hail was reported.

Agriculture officials say relief from the storms may be too late to help crops and livestock.

Statewide, the North Carolina Agriculture Department said poultry farmers lost more than 600,000 broilers between Friday and Tuesday. The state's poultry producers process 8 million to 9 million broilers each week.

Agriculture officials say it will be a few weeks before they have estimates on how much the heat will cost farmers and consumers but they say they expect the losses to be "disastrous." The poultry industry is the state's second-largest agribusiness behind tobacco, bringing in \$780 million a year.

In Union and Duplin counties — the state's top broiler and turkey producing areas — farmers have lost thousands of birds to the heat.

"Since last Friday, we've lost about 130,000 broilers and probably 20,000 to 30,000 turkeys," said M.C. Howell, Union County agricultural extension agent. "When the temperatures hit 96 degrees and stay there for four hours or more, birds start dying." Farmers have been hauling dead birds to the Union County landfill all week.

He said Union agriculture officials will apply this week for disaster aid for farmers who have lost their crops and poultry to the heat.