

Heat-related fatalities claim 24 lives in Philadelphia

The Associated Press

The heat wave steaming the East Coast slacked off from a full boil to a simmer Sunday, but the death toll rose to 45, with 24 more heat-related fatalities reported in Philadelphia.

After days of triple-digit heat in some areas, temperatures fell into the relatively cooler mid-90s, and people throughout the region gratefully accepted the small amount of relief. More hot, humid weather was forecast for today and Tuesday, however.

In Philadelphia on Sunday, 24 people were declared dead of heat-related causes, raising the

city's death toll to 41, according to Dr. Robert K. Ross, the city's health commissioner.

Many of the dead were senior citizens who lived in apartments without air conditioning, and many had underlying conditions such as heart disease or diabetes, leaving them vulnerable to the heat, Ross said.

In many jurisdictions, a heat death is defined strictly as hyperthermia, a much higher than normal body temperature. But in Philadelphia, any death in which heat played a part is termed a heat death, Ross said.

Other cities reporting one death each during the heat wave were: New York City; Allentown,

Pa.; Brooklawn, N.J.; and Keene, N.H.

Meanwhile, beaches, lakes, rivers and pools were packed again Sunday from New England to Miami. Among the frolickers were nudists gathered for the American Sunbathing Association's celebration of clothes-free tanning.

"I don't see anybody seeking shade at this moment," Hessa Schneider, president of the Maine Coast Solar Bears, said at a nude picnic in Richmond.

In the Merrimack Valley in Massachusetts, about 600 Harley-Davidson motorcycle enthusiasts, many in leather outfits, made a fund-raising cruise for the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

"It felt like a hairdryer," biker Dave McKenzie said of the sweltering ride, which was followed by a barbecue and carnival.

The mercury rose to record heights in North Carolina. Raleigh's high of 99 degrees, eclipsed a record of 97 set in 1966. Wilmington and Asheville tied previous records of 99 and 92 respectively.

Afternoon thunderstorms that briefly broke the heat and humidity downed power and telephone lines in Catawba and blew down trees near Hickory.

Lightning accompanying the storm was blamed for a forest fire in Pender County.