

Hot? You don't know hot, mister

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — It was a 102-degree punchline to an age-old straight line: How hot was it?

But not many folks were laughing Thursday when the subways turned to saunas and asphalt melted into adhesive during another brutal day of a heat wave.

How hot was it?

Too hot to sell ice cream. Mohammed Hassan stood, sweat dripping from his brow, alongside his ice cream cart at 52nd Street and Fifth Avenue. He had frozen fruit pops, lemon ices, chocolate and vanilla delights. What he didn't have was customers.

"When it's too hot, nobody buys ice cream," he said, mopping his forehead. "You need medium hot. Nobody wants to come out of their building in weather like this."

With good reason. The temperature in the city hit a record 100 during the afternoon. As if that wasn't enough, the humidity

pushed the heat index to 109 degrees. In layman's terms, a reading of 109 means "Get inside, stupid! It's really hot out here!"

It was really hot along all of the East Coast, especially from New York to South Carolina. The National Weather Service reported heat indices of 100 to 115 degrees throughout the region, and forecast more of the same for Friday. Among temperature records broken or tied Thursday were 103 in Newark, N.J., 102 at the airport in Baltimore, and 101 in Richmond, Va.

It's been hot since the Fourth of July, when the temperature in New York hit 95. Highs since then included 98 on Wednesday and a record 99 Thursday.

If you think it's hot above ground, try underground; in the city's subways. The conditions on the platforms brought to mind a tropical rain forest, minus the tropics, the rain and the forest. Sweltering temperatures had riders using their T-shirts as towels.

Different folks handled the stifling subterranean heat in different ways. The clerk at the 57th Street station appeared unruffled as she shuffled tokens out to dripping wet straphangers.

Why? Her tiny booth was the only section of the huge station with air conditioning.

Crowds at the city's tourist attractions were determined strictly by air conditioning. Hot spots to avoid were Rockefeller Center and Central Park. Must-sees were the ultra-cool Trump Tower and the dark, comfortable St. Patrick's Cathedral.

At a zoo in Syracuse, N.Y., even the Asian elephants — creatures raised in tropical climates — were uncomfortable.

"The animals are not doing

much; they are all sacked out," Alan Baker, senior elephant keeper at the Burnet Park Zoo, said.

The National Weather Service expects the heat and humidity to stick with the east coast for the rest of the week.

Blame a high pressure system that has stagnated over the Southeast and is expected to hover over the area for the remainder of the week. The National Weather Service said southwesterly air circulation around the system has pumped heat and humidity northward.

At the Newark airport in New Jersey, the temperature reached 103 degrees Wednesday.

"I throw a glass of water on myself to stay cool," said Juan Boya, who unloads baggage there. "It feels like 200 degrees inside the belly of those planes."

The heat wave has sent hundreds of people scurrying to stores to buy or rent air conditioners.

"That's all I've sold today," said Dick Kromer, an appliance salesman at a Sears store in Augusta, Maine. In Portland, the temperature hit 93 degrees Wednesday, breaking the record of 92 set in 1978.

The 97 degrees recorded at Concord, N.H., broke a 93-year-old record. Even at the top of the state's Mount Washington — the highest point in the Northeast — the mercury reached 68 degrees, breaking the 1971 record for the date of 65.

Farmers in the South are worried the prolonged heat and lack of rain

could devastate their crops. And several states issued ozone alerts as smog reached unhealthy levels.

Ozone, formed when sunlight reacts with hydrocarbons emitted by cars and trucks in the atmosphere, acts as a powerful respiratory irritant, inflaming lung tissues.

The elderly, very young children and those with respiratory problems were advised to stay indoors, preferably someplace air-conditioned.

The New York City Transit Au-

thority took the opportunity to issue a statement pointing out that 5,900 of its 5,939 subway cars are air-conditioned.

"We are having a heat wave, a tropical heat wave, but believe it or not, the subways are cooler than ever before," the TA said.

How hot was it? Let's ask *New York Post* funnyman Joey Adams. "It was so hot," Adams said, "Grant's Tomb had the front door open."