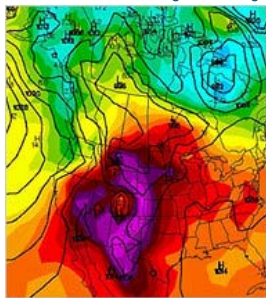


Heat ... Wave? Bubble? Dome? Seeking an Apt Name as the Hot Days Pile Up

By ERIK ECKHOLM
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"Everybody talks about the weather, but I guess TV meteorologists have to do it more cleverly," said Jay Trobec, a weatherman at KELO-TV in Sioux Falls, S.D., as he sought to explain why the phrase "heat dome" is suddenly being heard and seen everywhere.

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DuPage Weather Lab

The "heat dome" is actually a large high-pressure systems in the mid- to upper atmosphere that push warming air to the surface and hold it there. [More Photos >](#)

"I could call it Heatmageddon, but we just had Carmageddon," he added, referring to last weekend's freeway closing in Los Angeles.

Heat dome — the condition tormenting the middle and eastern parts of the country this week — is not a standard scientific label, but it has been used sporadically over the years to describe sprawling high-pressure systems in the mid- to upper atmosphere that push warming air to the surface and hold it there.

Mr. Trobec said that because the impact on local farmers and ranchers had been so severe, he has personally avoided colloquialisms to describe the weather, simply calling it a "long, intense heat spell."

In interviews on Friday, experts marveled at the viral spread of "heat dome" even as they differed on how apt the metaphor really is.

For those who want a metaphor, "heat bubble" might be more descriptive, some experts said — but then, the evocation of a bubble bath hardly carries the more ominous and attention-grabbing overtones of a Thunderdome or an Astrodome.

"I've used 'heat dome' off and on over the years, but I think it's a little bit misleading; it's not shaped like that," said Gary England, a weatherman at KWTW in Oklahoma City. "I usually say 'a large zone of hot air.' "

The heating effects of the high-pressure lid, however it is labeled, have been magnified this week by the drought afflicting the Plains and the South: with the soil so dry, less solar energy is used in evaporating water and more is devoted to making humans feel as if they are inside an oven.

Mr. England, a longtime weatherman who had a bit part in the movie "Twister," said that a number of his viewers this week had even complained about his routine descriptions of the heat — calling the temperature "blistering hot" and referring to unguarded car seats as "blazing saddles."

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Hot, Hot, Hot

Much of the country was blistered by triple-digit temperatures on Friday, according to the National Weather Service.



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Between the drought and the heat, many viewers are having a tough time, he said. "They hear that idiot weatherman saying it's hot, hot, hot and they say, 'I know it's hot, you fool.' They just want to hear when it's going to end."

Mr. England said that in response, he tried one day this week to get through the entire weather report without using the word "hot," instead using phrases like "no significant changes in the pattern."

"It was possible, but I had to think really hard to avoid the word," he said. "The anchors tried to lure me into using it."

Eli Jacks, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Silver Spring, Md., said that he had no idea where the term "heat dome" originated, and that while he prefers the term "heat wave," the dome metaphor was "an apt way to describe this huge bubble of hot air."

The excruciating weather this week, he added, involves "a very large swell in the atmosphere that has expanded eastward."

"Think of it as the crest of a wave," he said.

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