

Tragedy strikes immigrant family again

By **ANDREW SELSKY**
and **NATHAN HOWARD**
Associated Press

ST. PAUL — On his 38th birthday, Sebastian Francisco Perez, an immigrant from Guatemala, played chess with his nephew. The next day, he went to work at a nursery in a rural town as the thermometer soared well above 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

Perez collapsed that day, June 26, as a heat wave baked the Pacific Northwest in all-time, record-high temperatures. The workers had been moving irrigation lines when they noticed Perez wasn't there and found him. They called his nephew, Pedro Lucas, who arrived to find his uncle unconscious and dying.

Paramedics tried to revive him, but Perez didn't make it. A database of the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration listed his death as heat-related.

Hundreds of people are believed to have died in the historic heat wave that hit Oregon, Washington state and British Columbia. The death of Perez underscores the dangers that farmworkers, most of them immigrants, face as they work under the hot sun, driving rain and snow, often packed in vans to travel to job sites.

In 2019, two of Lucas' cousins and a third person were killed when a pickup truck slammed into a van near Salem carrying them and 10 other Guatemalans home from work at a Christmas tree farm.

The fact that tragedy has struck Lucas' family again leaves him in disbelief.

"I don't understand the things that sometimes happen," Lucas said in a phone interview in Spanish.

Last time, he used donations to pay a funeral home to have the bodies of his two cousins and the other man returned to Guatemala from Oregon.

Lucas said the family is awaiting an autopsy report on Perez. Lucas said Perez had worked in the heat before and did fine.

Perez had lived in the United States before, and returned about four months



Nathan Howard/AP Photo

A worker, who declined to be named, looks at a photo of Sebastian Francisco Perez, who died in June while working in an extreme heat wave.

ago. He supported his wife, who stayed home in Ixcán, Guatemala, a town near the Mexico border.

"He liked to be in the United States," Lucas said. "In Guatemala, the economy is not good. There's a lot of poverty, so you look out for your welfare and your future."

Reyna Lopez, the executive director of a northwest farmworkers' union, known by its Spanish-language initials, PCUN, called the death "shameful" and faulted both the nursery and Oregon OSHA for not adopting emergency rules ahead of the heat

wave.

Aaron Corvin, a spokesman for Oregon OSHA, said the state is "exploring adopting emergency requirements, and we continue to engage in discussions with labor and employer stakeholders."

He added that employers are obligated to provide ample water, shade, additional breaks and training about heat hazards.

An executive order issued in March 2020 by Gov. Kate Brown would formalize protecting workers from heat, but it is coming too late for Perez. Brown's order focuses

on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and also tells the Oregon Health Authority and Oregon OSHA to jointly propose standards to protect workers from excessive heat and wildfire smoke.

They had until the end of June to submit the proposals, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, the two agencies requested the deadline be pushed back to September.

Lucas remembers his uncle's last night as one of joy as they played games.

"He was happy with me that night," he said.

West gets hotter days, East gets hot nights

By **SETH BORENSTEIN**
Associated Press

As outlandish as the killer heat wave that struck the Pacific Northwest was, it fits into a decadeslong pattern of uneven summer warming across the United States.

The West is getting roasted by hotter summer days while the East Coast is getting swamped by hotter and stickier summer nights, an analysis of decades of U.S. summer weather data shows.

State-by-state average temperature trends from 1990 to 2020 show America's summer swelter is increasing more in some of the places that just got baked with extreme heat in June: California, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Oregon and Colorado.

The West is the fastest-warming region in the country during June, July and August, up 3 degrees on average since 1990. The Northwest has warmed nearly twice as much in the past 30 years as it has in the Southeast.

That includes Portland, which set a record 116-degree high that was 3 degrees warmer than temperatures ever recorded in Oklahoma City or Dallas-Fort Worth.

Although much of the primary cause of the extreme heat was an unusual but natural weather condition, scientists see the fingerprint of human-caused climate change, citing altered weather patterns that park heat in different places for longer periods.

"The ridiculous temperatures in the Pacific Northwest may on one hand be considered a black swan (ultrarare) event, but on the other hand are totally consistent" with long-term trends, said meteorologist Judah Cohen of the private firm Atmospheric and Environmental Research. "So I am not going to predict when is the next time Portland will hit 116 but I believe hotter summers for the broader



Nathan Howard/Associated Press

A farmworker wiped sweat from his neck while working in St. Paul as a heat wave baked the Pacific Northwest in record-high temperatures.

region are here to stay."

Climate change is altering and weakening the jet stream, narrow bands of wind that circle the Earth flowing west to east. Those changes allow key weather-producing patterns of high and low pressure to stall in place. High pressure is stalling more often in the West in summer, said Pennsylvania State University climate scientist Michael Mann. High pressure brings hot and dry weather that, when stalled, can create what are known as heat domes. Low pressure brings wet weather.

Another factor is higher water temperatures in the Pacific Ocean that also generate more so-called high-pressure ridges the

West, said Gerald Meehl, a National Center for Atmospheric Research scientist who studies heat waves.

These patterns are showing up so often that their effects can be seen in long-term data. The U.S. Northwest, western Canada and Siberia, which also just saw a stunning heat wave, are among Earth's fastest warming land areas during summer since 1990, Cohen said.

The Midwest is warming slower during the summer than either coast. That's because stalled low pressure areas often drive cooler air into the Great Lakes region, said North Illinois University climate scientist Victor

Gensini.

Water explains the big difference between western and eastern heat trends, scientists said.

"In western states where drought has been expanding and intensifying during the past decade, soil moisture has been declining. Dry soil heats up faster than moist soil during the day because all the solar energy goes into heating rather than into evaporating moisture," said Jennifer Francis, a climate scientist at the Woodwell Climate Research Center. "Dry soil also cools off faster at night."

That's partly why the West, which is getting drier by the decade and is mired in a 20-year megadrought, is seeing those crazy triple digit daytime temperatures.

The East is getting wetter by the decade, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration records show, and the East Coast is seeing its biggest warming increase at night. The overnight lows in New Jersey and Delaware have warmed 3 degrees since 1990, the biggest increases in the nation.

Water vapor is a greenhouse gas, Francis explained, "So at night it traps more of the heat."

Kathie Dello, North Carolina's state climatologist, attributes the trends to human-caused warming. "There's no other explanation," she said.

She added that while the extreme daytime highs may be eye-popping, warmer nights can also be dangerous. "Warm nights may not sound like a problem but they are a public health risk for people who lack sufficient cooling," she said.

And hiding from the heat is becoming harder and harder: "All my places to go for a quick break were absurdly hot — Oregon, North Carolina, even upstate New York? Where is left to go? Even Canada isn't safe."

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