

Beating the heat

By SARA PHILIPS

WILDFIRES have been raging across Europe as heatwaves send temperatures soaring, forcing the evacuation of thousands of people and causing some deaths. Heatwaves have also besieged parts of Asia, especially China and India.

While the extreme temperatures have triggered many forest fires, in some countries, urban areas have not been exempted.

On July 19, a blaze broke out in London, among others, as the United Kingdom recorded the hottest day in its history, breaking the 40°C barrier for the first time ever. Several houses were

destroyed as extremely dry grass caught fire, and the blaze ripped through nearby buildings.

Climate change is turning up the heat and the hottest places to be in the future will be cities, say experts.

For many years, geographers and urban planners noticed that towns and cities were always hotter than the surrounding countryside. Our cities, made of concrete, asphalt, tiles and tin amplify the heat, warming up

during the day and radiating heat all night. These materials are also “impervious” surfaces that do not allow rain to soak in. Unpaved areas absorb the rain, providing a cooling effect from the moisture.

Urban areas can be between 4°C and 10°C hotter than surrounding rural areas.

For most urban residents the answer is to crank up the air conditioning. But the electricity use ultimately makes climate change

worse, and for the city’s poorest residents, the cost is too much to bear.

While parks and gardens are the best weapon against urban heat, keeping it in check will become harder as climate change bites.

Authorities will need the tools of urban planners, public health experts, architects, and clinicians to prevent loss of life as our cities become hotter and hotter.
— 360info

Reality check

- Earth’s average surface temperature has increased at a rate of 0.07°C per decade since 1880, but the rate has tripled since the 1990s.
- More than five million people die annually due to excessively hot or cold conditions.
- Around 30% of the world’s population is exposed to potentially lethal heat for at least 20 days a year. By 2100, this number is projected to increase to 48%.
- Economic loss due to the “urban heat island” effect could reach up to 10.9% of GDP by 2100.