

Why heatwaves have not been included as a notified disaster

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There is currently a debate going on regarding classifying heatwave as a recognized disaster under India's Disaster Management Act amidst extreme heat and the resulting lives. This change is believed to allow states to create specific disaster categories for heatwave management. Currently, heatwaves aren't included, leading to funding and resource challenges for states.

What are Notified Disasters?

Notified disasters are specific disasters recognized under the Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005. The DM Act was created after the 1999 Odisha super-cyclone and the 2004 tsunami.

It defines disasters as events causing substantial loss of life, property, or environmental damage beyond the community's coping capacity.

Recognized disasters allow states to use the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). In 2023-24, only two states drew money from the NDRF.

What are the arguments for recognizing heatwaves as a disaster under India's Disaster Management Act?

Increasing Frequency and Severity: Over the last 15 years, heatwaves have become more severe and frequent, posing greater risks to public health and safety. The rising number of heat-related illnesses and deaths, especially among those who work outdoors, underscores the need for heatwaves to be recognized as disasters.

Improved Disaster Response Funding: Recognition would allow states to use funds from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) and potentially the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) for heatwave management, including financing Heat Action Plans (HAPs). These plans involve creating shaded spaces, ensuring water availability, and adjusting work and school schedules to mitigate heatwave impacts.

What are the arguments against recognizing heatwaves as a disaster under India's Disaster Management Act?

Financial Constraints: Recognizing heatwaves as a national disaster could significantly increase financial burdens. The 15th Finance Commission expressed that the existing list of notified disasters covers the needs of the states to a large extent, suggesting that the financial implications of adding heatwaves could be substantial.

Compensation Costs: Official recognition would require the government to compensate for heatwave-related fatalities and injuries. This year alone, more than 500 heat-related deaths have been reported, and official recognition could lead to higher compensation costs.

