

V101 - Summer weather preview - AL

As anyone living in the valley can tell you right now....it's hot!

A kind of hot that reminds me of that scene from King of the Hill where Bobby Hill visits Phoenix for the first time:

play clip

A hundred and eleven degrees?? Phoenix can't really be that hot, can it??

Oh my god it's like standing on the sun.

This city should not exist. It is a monument to man's arrogance.

While I firmly believe that Phoenix is a city that should exist, just stepping outside can make me understand Peggy's point.

I've lived here nearly my whole life and while I never enjoy it, I'm reluctantly adapted to the scorching summer temperatures.

Welcome to Valley 101, an podcast by the Arizona Republic and azcentral.com about metro Phoenix and beyond. I'm producer Amanda Luberto and today I'm joined by meteorologist Matt Pace to give a preview of what we can expect during the dog days of summer.

music up

Matt Pace is a meteorologist for the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and is generally a great person to follow on Twitter. He updates about the weather patterns, shares cool videos and also takes the time to give a little context as to what you're looking at.

Because for someone without a degree in meteorology, sometimes the weather map looks like a big splotch of colors with arrows pointing in different directions.

While we can depend on the roasting climate, rain is a more fickle partner to our summer months.

I asked Matt to start by summarizing what we saw last summer.

Matt Pace: [00:00:10] So ~~certainly~~ when you look at last year, it was actually pretty good compared to 2020, I mean, there was nothing that happened in Phoenix. In fact, we only had one inch of rainfall. It was one of the driest monsoons on record last year at Phenix Harbor, though 4.20 inches. So that's above the average of just below two and a half. So it was certainly a good year when it

came to rainfall. Now on the air quality side, things were a little different. In fact, we saw over 50 ozone exceedances here in the valley. And the big reason for that was all the wildfires in the Pacific Northwest. A lot of that smoke wrapped around into the valley. And we did see ozone influenced or wildfire influenced ozone exceedances. So certainly a unique pattern that set up last summer here across Arizona. [00:00:59][48.8]

I do remember a good amount of rain. One of my favorite memories from last summer was actually having friends over for the first time since COVID and sitting on the patio watching a monsoon roll by: we feasted our eyes on the lighting show and soaked in the wet smelling air.

But there's no way to really predict how a monsoon season will turn out. Just because we had a good one last year, doesn't mean it will be the same this year.

Matt Pace: [00:02:10] So it was a very dry winter, ~~in fact, so far this year~~. When we look at Phoenix, we haven't seen measurable rain since March 29. So ~~so~~ far this year, we've just seen slightly above a half inch rainfall. We should be just below three inches. So we are well below average. Flagstaff as well, they're sitting at just over three inches of rain so far this year. They should have already seen eight inches of rain. And that's why we are starting to see these wildfires kick up even over the past couple of weeks that have resulted in quite a bit of smoke around the region. But the good news is, since we had a dry winter, typically that can start the monsoon pattern a lot earlier and we may see that coming in with a lot more active June and July. So unfortunately, it results in some wildfires, very dry conditions, a lot of drought. But if that can get the monsoon rain in here, hopefully that will drop our wildfire chances as the ground gets moist and we get a lot more moisture into the atmosphere. [00:03:04][54.4]

It seems like the sweet scent of creosote may not be in my immediate future.

music

Aside from the blistering temperatures and desperate pleas for monsoons, Arizona summers bring wildfires...especially up North.

And they've already started.

At the time of recording this episode, the Pipeline and Haywire Fires in the Flagstaff area are raging on. Governor Doug Ducey just called for a state of emergency in response.

news clip about the fire

It's tragic and disastrous and while Phoenixians can't see the red embers on the mountains, people in the Valley can certainly be impacted by the weather it causes.

Matt Pace: [00:03:25] ~~So~~ anytime there's a wildfire in the state, we're always looking at the smoke and where smoke may potentially move. Now, luckily, ~~these fires,~~ most of the smoke has been moving off towards the northeast. So we have not seen an impact here in the valley. But there is a chance, of course, early on in the monsoon that we get something called dry lightning. Essentially, you get lightning that there's no rain associated with it. So that can create more fires. And that, based on the wind conditions, could push smoke into the valley. In fact, last year, you may remember the telegraph fire that was burning just to the east of the valley. That was actually we saw a lot of smoke move over the valley, but that was one of our highest ozone exceedances that we've seen in ten or 20 years, purely because of all the smoke that moved over that enhanced ozone. So that's something we track very, very closely. But a big thing to think about is that especially when you look at last year and this is pretty average, 60, 64% of the wildfires that were started in Arizona were human caused. So certainly when you're outside a recreation, enjoying the outdoors, do everything you possibly can to prevent a spark, to prevent a wildfire, because those are emissions. Those are acres that don't have to be burned due to human behavior.

[00:04:38] [73.2]

Last summer, Matt joined me on an episode of Valley 101 to answer someone's question about what to do on days of bad air quality. You can listen to the episode in full wherever you get your podcasts, but his key takeaways were to invest in an air purifier and to wear a mask when walking outside. Especially if you are particularly sensitive.

monsoon sounds

The start of monsoon season has officially come and hopefully this means we can look to the dusty sky for a few drops of rain. Or if we're lucky a good old fashioned downpour.

But to really pinpoint when we'll see some sweet relief is like trying to keep your ice cream from melting in the Phoenix sun: basically impossible.

Matt Pace: [00:05:34] So it is looking like even ~~even~~ though we are going to start active, it doesn't necessarily equate to are we going to get a lot of rain or are we not going to get a lot of rain because it's so spotty, the monsoons very spot or you might get an inch of

rain and your neighbor gets almost nothing, it seems like. But since we are seeing a more active pattern set up earlier, there is a better chance of seeing more widespread rainfall across the region. Now, with that said, when we start looking at the September, the very end of monsoon, we're still likely going to be in a La Nina pattern, which is when you have cold water sitting right off the coast of South America and one that when that happens, we typically don't get as many East Pacific hurricanes. And that's what we really rely on for a lot of moisture to stream into the state and move up the Gulf and into Arizona during that September timeframe. So if we don't see that, it might be a slightly drier end to the monsoon, but of course, that's looking out quite a ways. And we all know monsoon is super tricky. So but it's always fun to play that, play the eight ball and see how it rolls. [00:06:36][62.0]

theme music up

During the summer here, you can look to the sky for answers on when you'll be able to break out a rare umbrella or if it's time to bust out the popsicles.

But for something more exact, Matt reminded me that you can download the Air Arizona app for updates on weather and air quality to make sure you're feeling your best and updated on things like high pollution warnings and other advisories.

Thank you so much for listening to this week's episode of Valley 101. If you have any questions about metro Phoenix, please submit them to our podcast by visiting valley 101 dot azcentral dot com.

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I'm producer Amanda Luberto, thank you again for listening. We'll see you next week...and stay cool out there.