

ENVIRONMENT

‘Off-the-charts’ heat to affect millions in U.S. in coming decades

Within 60 years, hot days in the U.S. could be so intense that the current heat index can’t measure them.

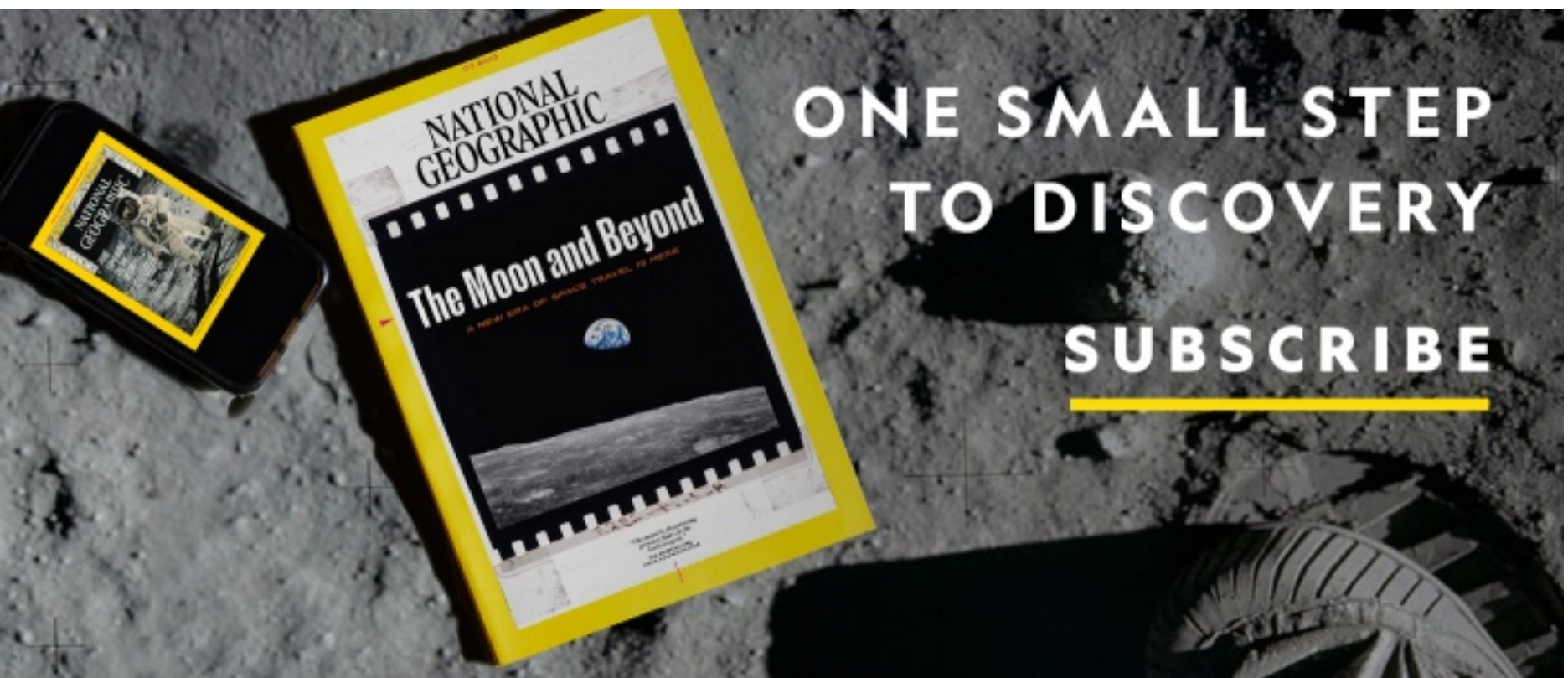
BY STEPHEN LEAHY

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In less than 20 years, millions of people in the United States could be exposed to dangerous “off-the-charts” heat conditions of 127 degrees Fahrenheit or more, a startling new report has found. In 60 years over one-third of the population could be exposed to such conditions, “posing unprecedented health risks,” the report says.

This first United States county-by-county look at what climate change will do to temperature and humidity conditions in the coming decades finds few places that won’t be affected by extreme heat.

“We were very surprised at how steeply and quickly the number of days of dangerous heat increased in such a short time,” says Kristina Dahl, senior climate scientist at Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), and co-author of the report “Killer Heat in the United States: Climate Choices and the Future of Dangerously Hot Days.”



“I don’t think anyone appreciated how quickly conditions can change,” says Dahl.

Where the heat is on

Without any action to reduce global carbon emissions, parts of Florida and Texas would experience the equivalent in days of at least five months per year on average when the heat index—which includes humidity in its calculations—exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Most of the time, that would be during the summer months.

The Nation

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