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A Better Response



Ebony Faulk, a behavioral health specialist, works in the radio room at the Philadelphia Police Department headquarters. A pilot “co-responder unit” program will pair a health-care provider with a police officer. **MONICA HERNDON / Staff Photographer**

For crisis calls, police to send co-responders

By Anna Orso
STAFF WRITER

For years, Philadelphia officials made adjustments in how authorities respond to 911 calls for people in crisis. More police were trained to intervene. Outreach workers were paired with cops in Kensington. And a behavioral health specialist was embedded in the dispatch center. Then in October, Philadelphia police fatally shot Walter Wallace Jr., firing 14 times at the 27-year-old Black man who approached them while wielding a knife and ignoring calls to drop it. Police were responding to 911 calls with screaming in the background from family and neighbors who said Wallace was hitting his parents. When police arrived, Wallace’s wife shouted that her husband was “mental,” and family later said he was in crisis that day. But Wallace’s mental health



Lakith Wallace (center), sister of Walter Wallace Jr., speaks on the six-month anniversary of Wallace’s shooting. Siblings Wynetta Wallace (left) and John Brant joined her on stage April 25. **DAVID MAIALETTI / Staff Photographer**

status wasn’t discussed during the frantic 911 calls, and the police’s new behavioral health specialist wasn’t in the radio room when the calls came in. Pressure almost immediately mounted for city officials to accelerate police

reforms they say could prevent deadly outcomes. Mayor Jim Kenney’s administration said it’s poised to take a big step toward that. Police and behavioral health officials

THE CORONAVIRUS

N.J. to reopen much by summer

The state moves to remove limits on outdoor gatherings and allow businesses to operate at capacity.

By Allison Steele and Amy S. Rosenberg
STAFF WRITERS

New Jersey will lift many coronavirus restrictions later this month, Gov. Phil Murphy said Monday, removing limits on outdoor gatherings and allowing stores, restaurants, theaters, and other businesses to operate at full capacity as long as they keep patrons six feet apart.

That requirement will continue to limit occupancy inside many restaurants, as well as places like salons and gyms. And masks are still required when distancing is not possible.

But the news, coordinated with similar announcements by the leaders of New York state and Connecticut, represented the most significant step toward a return to normalcy since the state became one of the nation’s earliest battlegrounds for the virus.

The restrictions will lift May 19, just over a week before Memorial Day weekend, the start of high season on the Jersey Shore and a widely watched economic engine for the state.

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N.J. Gov. Phil Murphy

The news was cheered by many business owners, even if they wondered why it took so long.

“I have a lot of people now that want to eat inside,” said Cheryl Venezia, owner of Annette’s Restaurant, a breakfast and lunch spot in Ventnor, who kept her business afloat last year by transforming a parking lot into outdoor seating. “They’re

► **RUSSIAN DELAYS:** After boasting about its early success, the country is struggling to vaccinate citizens. **A4**

► **SERVING UP SURVIVAL:** Restaurant owners hope \$28.6B U.S. grant program stems the tide of closings. **A5**

EPA to phase out greenhouse gas

New rule targets pollutants used in refrigeration that are thousands of times more potent than carbon dioxide at warming the planet.

By Juliet Eilperin and Dino Grandoni
WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency proposed a rule Monday to slash the use and production of a class of powerful greenhouse gases used widely in refrigeration and air-conditioning in the next decade and a half. The proposal marks the first time President Joe Biden’s administration has used the

power of the federal government to mandate a cut in climate pollution.

Unlike many of the administration’s other climate initiatives, there’s broad bipartisan support for curbing hydrofluorocarbons, pollutants thousands of times more potent than carbon dioxide at warming the planet. Congress agreed at the end of last year to slash the super-pollutants by 85% by 2036 as part of a

broader omnibus bill.

A global phasedown of hydrofluorocarbons, also known as HFCs, is projected to avert up to 0.9 degrees Fahrenheit of warming by the end of the century.

Widely used in refrigeration as well as residential and commercial air-conditioning and heat pumps, HFCs were developed as a substitute for chemicals that depleted the Earth’s protective ozone layer. But their heat-trapping properties have helped further fuel rising temperatures. “With this proposal, EPA is taking an-

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U.S., Europe lift restrictions as new cases, deaths subside

By Bobby Caina Calvan
and Heather Hollingsworth
ASSOCIATED PRESS

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Air travel in the United States hit its highest mark since COVID-19 took hold more than 13 months ago, while European Union officials are proposing to ease restrictions on visitors to the continent as the vaccine sends the number of new cases and deaths tumbling in more affluent countries.

The improving picture in many places contrasts with the worsening disaster in India.

In the U.S., the average number of new cases per day fell below 50,000 for the first time since October. And nearly 1.67 million people were screened at U.S. airport checkpoints on Sunday, according to the Transportation Security Administration, the highest number since mid-March of last year.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed legislation giving him sweeping powers to invalidate local emergency measures put in place during the outbreak. While the law

The EU may soon welcome vaccinated visitors.

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VACCINES | B1

Gritty greets governor to get the word out.

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Flyers mascot Gritty joined Gov. Wolf to promote vaccines. Story, **B1**. **TOM GRALISH / Staff**

Crisis

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cials are rolling out a pilot “co-responder unit” program, which pairs a health-care provider with a police officer. The pilot will launch within weeks, and units will operate during the day across a swath of the city that includes Kensington, parts of North Philadelphia, and Center City, areas Police Staff Inspector Francis Healy said have “the most need based on the data.”

The co-responder model has been adopted in cities including Los Angeles and San Antonio, and advocates have pushed it for years as a way to reduce police interactions with people in crisis. A quarter of people fatally shot by U.S. law enforcement since 2015 had a mental illness, according to the Washington Post.

The city and some disability advocates have hailed Philadelphia’s pilot program, saying it will connect residents to services, divert people from the criminal justice system, and de-escalate potentially volatile situations.

But others say the model doesn’t go far enough and advocate removing police entirely, sending social workers and clinicians instead.

Keen Tobar, director of racial equity and inclusion at Community Legal Services, said while she supports the pilot as a step forward, the long-term goal should be non-law enforcement units that can request police only when “extremely necessary.”

The city hasn’t ruled that out. The Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services already uses mobile crisis units to respond to calls to the Philadelphia Crisis Line. Kenney’s administration has proposed new funding to expand those programs and better integrate them with 911 dispatch.

Community health centers also use mobile crisis units, but are only connected to police informally, said John F. White Jr., president and CEO of The Consortium, a behavioral health center in West Philadelphia. He said while the co-responder units represent “a major step in the right direction,” a successful citywide response will require officials to work more formally with centers like his.

Healy said the co-responder units are part of a broader, layered approach to crisis response in which dispatchers can tap a variety of resources to respond to a call based on how they assess the risk. Late last year, police introduced a new 911 script they say helps dispatchers better identify a mental health crisis.

Multiple response systems can get complicated, so cities must have protocols that clearly establish the types of calls each team responds to, said Daniela Gilbert, director of the policing program at the Vera Institute of Justice, a New York based advocacy and research group. She also said there must be policies on what happens at the scene, including who — the health-care specialist or the officer — de-



Brian Quinn, a police communications dispatcher, works in the radio room at the Philadelphia Police Department headquarters. Philadelphia is trying a co-responder model that has been adopted in other cities. MONICA HERNDON / Staff Photographer

cides on care.

Healy said teams are training to navigate the relationship between officer and civilian provider. He said the officers involved in the pilot — who will wear “a khaki-type uniform” instead of the traditional blues — are among the 2,700 cops who have undergone 40-hour crisis-intervention training. (That’s fewer than half the force. The regimen is voluntary, Healy said, as some studies have shown better outcomes in police attitudes when they “self-select”

“This program is working. It’s going to be the new model for law enforcement.”

Fred Harran, Bensalem’s director of public safety

to be trained.)

Police in Bensalem this year started a co-responder program by embedding a social worker and clinician with the police department. Over the last four months, they’ve worked with more than 80 people in distress, some on multiple occasions, said Director of Public Safety Fred Harran. He

noted one person has called 911 for help five times in the first few months of this year, compared to 37 times during the same time frame last year.

“This program is working,” Harran said. “It’s going to be the new model for law enforcement.”

Amy Watson, a University of Illinois professor who studies mental health and criminal justice, said co-responder programs have grown popular over the last couple years, but the eventual goal is sending just health-care workers

who can request police assistance if necessary.

She said the presence of police when a person already feels vulnerable can escalate a situation, especially in communities of color that have long borne the brunt of police brutality. But for some cities, she said, “there’s this fear that it’s too dangerous to send non-law enforcement.”

Healy said police can get to a scene quickly: “We do have lights and sirens.” And in many cases, police want the backup and understand clinicians are equipped to help a person experiencing a mental health crisis.

In Denver, officials launched a co-responder program in 2016 that has expanded from three mental health workers to 25. Those teams respond when there’s an imminent safety concern, like a person in crisis who could be homicidal.

Last June, the city began piloting a Support Team Assisted Response, or STAR, which removes law enforcement. A paramedic and a clinician work in the city’s downtown area out of a van, responding to behavioral health calls and connecting residents with services.

STAR has responded to about 1,400 calls, and not one has required police backup or led to an arrest, said Chris Richardson, associate director of criminal justice services at Mental Health Services of Denver. He said providers have built rapport with residents, making follow-up more seamless.

He hopes it expands following the yearlong pilot.

“We’re not trying to be an authority,” he said. “We’re trying to support that person and be the support along the way.”



Sisters Lakitah (left) and Wynetta (right) Wallace carry a banner in memory of their brother Walter Wallace Jr. They were marking the six-month anniversary of the fatal police shooting. DAVID MAIALETTI / Staff Photographer

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EPA

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other significant step under President Biden’s ambitious agenda to address the climate crisis,” EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement. “The phase-down of HFCs is also widely supported by the business community, as it will help promote American leadership in innovation and manufacturing of new climate-safe products. Put simply, this action is good for our planet and our economy.”

The new rule lays out how the agency would provide allowances for the production and use of HFCs starting next year, with those amounts shrinking in the years to come. For 2022 and 2023, the EPA plans to set the U.S. level of consumption at a rate that, if released, would be equal to 269.1 million metric tons of carbon dioxide.

The EPA plans to finalize its system for allowances, which could be traded between companies, in place by Jan. 1. Last month, EPA finalized a list of new refrigerant options that could be used as substitutes.

The EPA is also proposing to establish a new enforcement system that targets one of the most powerful chemicals in this class, HFC-23, which often arises as a byproduct of making Teflon and other plastics. The proposal would institute tracking measures, mandate third-party audit-

ing, and require that suppliers put the chemicals in reusable cylinders that would make it harder to traffic illegally in HFCs.

Avipsa Mahapatra, climate lead for the nonprofit Environmental Investigation Agency, said in an interview that the proposed regulation anticipates many of the problems that might arise from cutting HFC use and production so sharply.

“It’s very forward looking,” said Mahapatra, whose group has conducted several undercover investigations focused on climate-damaging refrigerants. She added that the group is “thrilled” that the new administration has acted so swiftly to target these pollutants. “They have not compromised on ambition in the interest of speed.”

The moves mark a sharp shift from the Trump administration, which rolled back Obama-era policies aimed at fulfilling the nation’s commitment to reduce HFCs under a 2016 international agreement, called the Kigali Amendment. Former President Donald Trump never submitted the treaty for Senate ratification, and his deputies reversed a rule requiring companies to detect and repair leaks from any appliance or piece of equipment using more than 50 pounds of HFCs.

Biden officials are reviewing whether to revive the rule, and the president signed an executive order in January instructing Secretary of State Antony Blinken to submit the Kigali Amendment to the Senate for a vote. A total of 119 other nations have ratified the

treaty. The European Union and Canada already have their own regulations in place dealing with HFCs, while China agreed to work with the United States to cut their use when John F. Kerry, Biden’s international climate envoy, visited there last month.

In the meantime these heat-trapping gases’ emissions rose by 4 million metric tons between 2018 and 2019 in the United States, according to the EPA.

The new rule arose from a rare bipartisan deal in Congress which Sens. John Barrasso (R., Wyo.) and John Neely Kennedy (R., La.) authored with Sen. Thomas R. Carper (D., Del.).

Carper, who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, hailed the implementation of the law, which he said “will create hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs that will combat climate change.”

Barrasso spokesman Mike Danylak said in an email that the senator is reviewing the proposed rule, adding he “is concerned about the lack of advanced notice for Senate Republican committee leaders, especially given the provision was fully bipartisan when it passed Congress.”

David Doniger, senior strategic director of the Natural Resources Defense Council’s Climate and Clean Energy Program, called the new EPA rule a “strong, fast start” in implementing “the most important climate law passed in a long time.”

The agency estimates its pro-

posed rule would yield \$284 billion in benefits from 2022 through 2050, while saving industry money with cheaper chemicals and better energy efficiency in equipment. By the time it is fully implemented, the agency projects, it will prevent the equivalent of 187 million metric tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere, roughly equal to the annual greenhouse gas emissions from one out of every seven vehicles registered in the United States.

U.S. manufacturers have developed more climate-friendly refrigerants, and several major chemical companies lobbied for transitioning away from hydrofluorocarbons. Stephen Yurek, head of the Air-Conditioning, Heating, and Refrigeration Institute, which represents makers of heating and cooling equipment, said his trade group’s members “appreciate the expediency” with which the EPA issued the rule.

“EPA’s action will help create the certainty necessary for U.S. companies to maintain their natural technological advantage in the global HFC marketplace,” he added.

A number of large supermarket chains — including Walmart and Whole Foods, which is owned by Amazon — have pledged to phase out the chemicals in their operations. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos owns the Washington Post.

However, there is still widespread leakage of these climate

super-pollutants in the commercial food sector. The industry estimates that every year, supermarkets lose an average of 25% of their refrigerant charge. And in a recent EIA undercover investigation of grocery stores in Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia found that more than half the surveyed stores were emitting HFCs.

Commercial refrigeration, which includes grocery stores as well as restaurants and food processing operations, accounts for about 28% of all U.S. emissions of HFCs. Air-conditioning for commercial buildings and homes represents 40% to 60% of emissions, according to federal data.

The EPA proposal is just a first step in tackling the super-pollutants under the new law. Both the makers of cooling appliances and environmental organizations are petitioning the EPA to mandate less-polluting alternatives for many smaller air-conditioning products, as well as ensure that the federal government’s HFC regulations are consistent with those from California, which has acted on its own to curb the greenhouse gases.

Kevin Messner, senior vice president for policy and government relations at the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers, a trade group, said he hopes “states will defer to a national program to meet climate targets” and avoid a patchwork of rules across the country.