



Deciding when it's too hot for man or beast

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By Paul Bowers

Withering heat and shirt-soaking humidity come as no surprise to Charlestonians this time of year, but some authorities are exercising caution when it comes to the recent temperature spikes.

One man concerned about the heat is Robert Knoth, owner of Carolina Polo & Carriage Co. The city regulates everything from carriage size to veterinary inspections, and it also decides what temperatures are safe for the horses. When the official city reading reaches 98 degrees, the tours are reined in.

"The carriage companies generally run until the city closes us down," Knoth said. "I think it's more than reasonable."

Knoth said the city bases its decisions on the temperatures reported by WeatherBug, an online weather service. The site claims those readings are taken from a thermometer at 287 Meeting St., where Knoth said it is well above street level. He describes the location as a compromise.

"If you do it here," Knoth said, indicating a point near the sandal-melting asphalt on Hayne Street where buildings block the sea breeze, "the temperature's not going to be the same as when the horses go down to The Battery."

So far, carriage companies have not had to shut down this summer, but Knoth said he's made judgment calls in previous years and called the horses back before the city did.

"It behooves us to take care of our animals," Knoth said. "If we don't take care of our horses, we don't eat."

Also because of the heat, the Charleston Farmers Market in Marion Square will close at noon today instead of the usual 2 p.m., said Ray Swagerty at the City of Charleston's Office of Cultural Affairs.

"Right now we're pretty comfortable with that call," Swagerty said. "The forecast hasn't changed much."

Swagerty said he based the decision on sizzling forecasts from the National Weather Service that put the heat index at 102 degrees in the early afternoon. The early closing, he said, is based as much on the safety of the vendors as the safety of the shoppers.

"When the event is over, the event's over in the sense that the public gets to leave and go home, but at noon tomorrow, the farmers don't get to go home," Swagerty said Friday. "

They pack up their trucks, and then City Parks Department crews have to strike tents and restore the square."

It gets worse: The National Weather Service forecast calls for a heat index high of 105 degrees in the tri-county area, with a heat advisory in effect from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. in Charleston County.

While most area hospitals reported no heat-related incidents in the past few days, East Cooper Regional Medical Center reported treating one heat injury during the temperature jump