



Posted on Thu, Jun. 09, 2011

Heat burst sends temperature in Wichita soaring to 102 – in the middle of the night

WICHITA | Jerilyn Billings thought she had been teleported from Wichita to the desert.

“It was like I was in Phoenix,” she said in a Facebook post.

No wonder.

As 1 a.m. approached today, the temperature in Wichita suddenly vaulted past the 100-degree mark.

The mercury surged 17 degrees in 20 minutes — from 85 at 12:22 a.m. to 102 at 12:42 a.m.

The phenomenon was heat burst, which occurs when dry air plummets to the earth’s surface as a thunderstorm collapses, meteorologists said. As the air nears the ground, it heats dramatically.

“They are rare, but dramatic,” WeatherData chief executive Mike Smith wrote in his weather blog Thursday.

Wind speeds of nearly 50 mph accompanied the heat burst in places.

“You have to have perfect conditions ... in order to get these things,” said Chance Hayes, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Wichita.

For starters, it has to be very dry.

Today’s heat burst resulted from thunderstorms that collapsed in northwest Harper County, sending winds and intense heat surging northeast right into Wichita, Hayes said.

“As the storm is collapsing, there’s a lot of compression of air,” Hayes said.