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NEW YORK BUSINESS SUFFERS HEAT RASH

LANDLORDS DARKEN LOBBIES. CINEMAS HIKE THERMOSTATS A FEW CAREFULLY CALIBRATED DEGREES. JACQUES TORRES RESCUES HIS SHINY CHOCOLATES: "SO STRESSFUL, YOU HAVE NO IDEA."

By [Hilary Potkewitz](#)

The heat wave is forcing New York businesses into a deft balancing act of trying to keep customers happy while at the same time trying not to overstress the city's power grid.

As temperatures soared into the triple digits, dozens of small blackouts have been reported in various parts of the city but so far the Big Apple has avoided a catastrophic power grid failure.

The mayor's office has asked city buildings to keep thermostats no colder than 78 degrees, including City Hall, in an effort to conserve energy. City Hall employees have been asked to turn off air conditioning in unused conference rooms, according to a spokesman, but the mayor has stopped short of asking private businesses to do the same.

It's just as well, because for many small businesses that would be an untenable request. Just ask Jacques Torres, the famed New York chocolatier. After all, no one says, "Life is like a box of melted chocolates."

"This is so stressful you have no idea," said Mr. Torres, who has two air conditioning systems in each of his store locations – downtown Manhattan and in Dumbo – just in case one system goes down, he'll have a backup.

But these days, he has both systems running, and the best they can do is just over 70 degrees – "That is the absolute maximum the chocolate can handle," he says. "Anything higher, and the chocolate loses its shine, and nobody wants chocolate that doesn't shine!" The Frenchman explains that chocolate, like red wine, must be kept at between 65 and 70 degrees.

In fact, Mr. Torres has bought thermal bags and ice packs which he is giving away when customers buy boxes of his gourmet chocolate, and says he's just eating the extra cost. "What else can I do? I want my customers to come back."

Other New York staples also rely on colder temps to keep customers. Theaters typically keep their auditoriums between around 67 degrees, hence the popularity of going to the movies on a hot day.

"A lot of our guests enjoy beating the heat by going to movies – it's like a two hour mini-vacation," said a spokesman for AMC Theatres. The company declined to give specifics, but said that its theaters are experiencing an uptick in attendance during this heat wave. A warm auditorium would not serve the same purpose.

AMC's standard guidelines are for its theaters to maintain a temperature of 74 degrees in the summer, "but we always give management teams at theaters the authority to make adjustments for extreme climates, and New York City is definitely experiencing an extreme climate right now," he added.

The AMC Loews Kips Bay usually keeps its temperatures hovering just below 70 degrees, according to theater's customer service line, but on days like these they've adjusted up to 73 degrees.

"Management teams make adjustments if there's a city ordinance of some kind," the company spokesman said, "but ultimately our first and foremost concern is that our customers are satisfied and comfortable."

Con Edison asks all customers to set thermostats no lower than 78 degrees. A Con Ed spokesman said that tens of thousands of customers complied, and that the company does not single out movie theaters in its campaign. "I'm not going to pass judgement on movie theaters and their use of power," the spokesman said, adding that in the grand scheme of things that movie theaters were not among the city's largest power users.

The Real Estate Board of New York organized hundreds of commercial property owners into an Energy Reduction program with Con Ed, about 300 million square feet in all, to participate on voluntary brown outs and other power reductions when the utility requests it on the hottest days, usually just a handful of times per year.

Wednesday was one of those days, and property managers across the city shut off lobby lights and reduced power use all day at the request of the power company