Climate Change and Unnatural Disasters

Climate change is exacerbating extreme weather events across the world, causing thousands of deaths and leading to damages in the trillions of dollars.\(^1\) What’s more, it could make parts of the planet uninhabitable this century.\(^2\)

While the impacts of climate change will affect all of us, certain areas will be more directly affected than others. These impacts will fall disproportionately on low-income communities.\(^3\) These effects can be subtle, such as higher food prices in the grocery stores, or more dramatic, like high tide flooding in coastal cities.\(^4\)

More Intense Weather

This year has brought scorching heatwaves to the Southwestern United States, disastrous hurricanes to the Gulf Coast, and destructive forest fires to the Western United States. While none of these events are in and of themselves a product of climate change, the intensity and record-breaking nature of these events is linked to climate change.\(^5\)

Rising sea surface temperatures and atmospheric water vapor are expected to increase hurricane intensity and rainfall.\(^6\) Sea level rise, caused almost exclusively by melting glaciers and warming oceans, can also lead to more damaging hurricanes and increased flooding.\(^7\)

Climate change will also increase the likelihood of droughts due to decreasing precipitation and increasing evaporation.\(^8\)

Public Health Impacts

Human health is threatened by climate change. Health effects can occur directly due to changes in temperature or increased occurrence and intensity of heat waves, floods, droughts and wildfires. Indirectly, health may be damaged by ecological disruptions brought on by climate change, such as crop failures or displacement of populations following prolonged drought.\(^9\)

Higher summer temperatures can substantially harm public health, primarily through heat stress, higher concentrations of air pollutants and the spread
of emerging tropical diseases. The Center for Disease Control reports over 600 people die annually from extreme heat, while thousands of others are hospitalized.

The Cost of Climate Change

While the economic cost of climate change will vary across regions, we know it will increase income inequality. Since 1980, 212 weather and climate disasters reached or exceeded $1 billion in overall damages. The total cost of these events is over $1.2 trillion. To date, 2005 was the costliest due to several tropical cyclones, and 2012 was the second most costly due to the extreme U.S. drought and Superstorm Sandy driving the losses. The cost of extreme weather events in 2017 are poised to exceed any previous year, due to record-breaking storms, forest fires and heatwaves.

Take Action

We know the solution to reducing the impacts of extreme weather is to transition off fossil fuels as quickly as possible and no later than 2035. The Off Fossil Fuels for a Better Future Act (the OFF Act) does exactly that. The OFF Act charts a path for the United States to achieve 100 percent clean renewable energy by 2035, requires 100 percent zero-emission vehicle sales by 2035, ends oil and gas subsidies, and prioritizes environmental justice.

Tell your member of Congress to support the OFF Act today: https://fwaction.us/OffActPetition

Endnotes

12. Hsiang et al. (2017) at 1363 and 1369.