

Homes destroyed during Superstorm Sandy.

Hitting Close to Home

Global Warming Is Fueling Extreme Weather Across the U.S.

Every year, weather-related disasters injure or kill hundreds of Americans and cause billions of dollars in damage. Many of the risks posed by extreme weather will likely increase in a warming world. Scientists have already noted increases in extreme precipitation and heat waves as global warming raises temperatures and exacerbates weather extremes.

Photos credits: Top — Leonard Zhukovsky/Bigstock; Inset — NJ Governor's Office/Tim Larsen

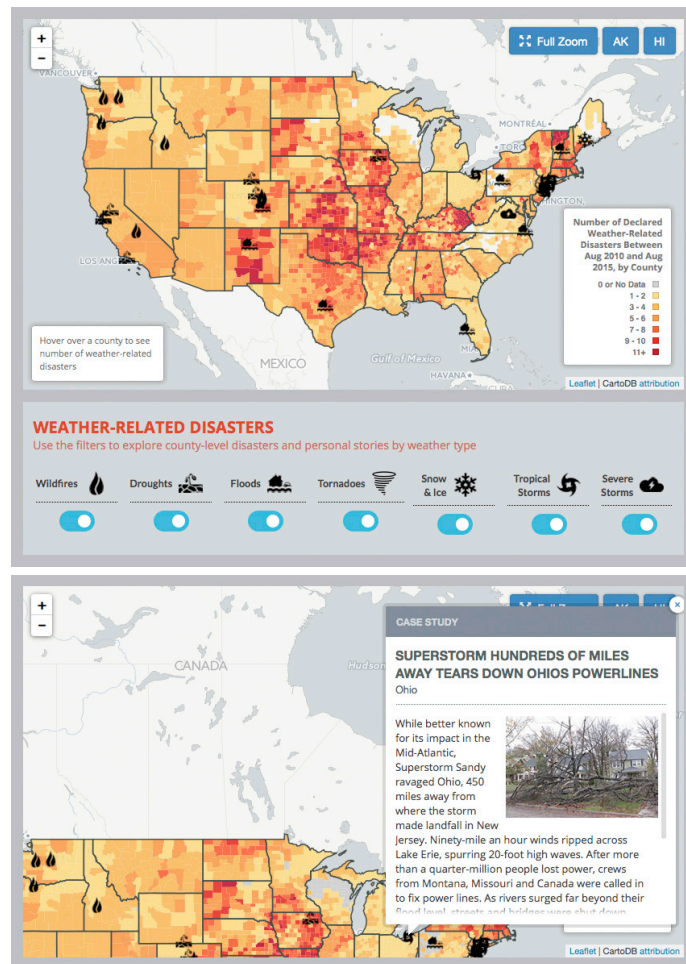
Weather-Related Disasters Affect Millions

Since September 2010, counties housing 96 percent of the total U.S. population (nearly 309 million Americans) were affected by federally-declared weather-related disasters.

- Over the last five years, weather-related disasters were declared in all 50 states and in D.C.
- In 32 states, every county had at least one weather-related disaster.
- More than 40 million Americans live in counties that were affected by five or more weather disasters.

New Online Map Shows Weather-Related Disasters and Extreme Weather's Personal Impact

Environment America's new interactive extreme weather map shows weather-related disasters in the United States over the last five years and tells the stories of the people and communities who have endured some of those disasters. Map visitors can focus in on specific types of weather and even add their own stories of how extreme weather has affected their lives.



Weather Extremes Are Becoming More Common

- Globally, 2015 will likely be the hottest year on record, surpassing 2014, which beat out 2010. This would mean that the three warmest years in the historical record have happened in the past six years.
- California is experiencing its **worst drought** in more than a millennium.
- The flooding in South Carolina during the fall of 2015 was triggered by **record rainfall**. In the first week of October, the state received more precipitation than it had ever recorded for an entire month of October.
- Wildfires raging across western states in 2015 have burned more than 9 million acres. In more than 50 years of record keeping, only three other years had more than 9 million acres of forest burn, all of them in the last decade.

Many types of **extreme weather events** are expected to **become more frequent or severe in a warming world**, which could lead to more weather-related disasters throughout the United States.

- **Tropical Storms and Hurricanes:** Global warming has the potential to make tropical storms more destructive. Hurricanes and other coastal storms are likely to be more powerful and deliver more rainfall because of warmer temperatures, while storm surge could be more destructive as sea levels rise.
- **Heavy Rain and Snow:** Extreme precipitation is already increasing, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest; continued trends could increase the risk of intense downpours, heavy snowstorms and severe flooding.
- **Droughts and Wildfires:** While global warming is anticipated to bring more rain to some areas, it will also likely elevate temperatures and extend dry spells between rain events. The potential for more severe drought – and, in some cases, greater area burned by wildfires – will increase, particularly in the West and Southwest.



For full methodology, citations and the online map, please visit

www.EnvironmentAmerica.org/ExtremeWeather

Population of counties with federally declared weather disasters, by type, from September 2010 – August 2015.

Type of Disaster	Population Affected
Drought*	233,991,000
Flood	149,735,302
Severe Storm	182,434,257
Snow/Ice	69,094,592
Tornado**	75,144,567
Tropical Storm	78,100,477
Wildfire	7,776,163

* Drought disasters are declared by the secretary of the USDA. All other disasters are presidentially declared major disasters.

**There is little scientific clarity about how global warming may affect tornadoes, but tornadoes are a major cause of weather-related disasters in the United States.

The United States Must Reduce Global Warming Emissions

To protect America from a future of even more extreme weather, the United States should reduce global warming pollution now.

- The U.S. must **reduce emissions by at least 35% below 2005 levels by 2020 and by at least 85% below 2005 levels by 2050**. This will require strong policies, including robust implementation of the federal Clean Power Plan and extending and strengthening the Northeast's Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.
- The U.S. must **forge the strongest possible agreement to cut global emissions** as world leaders convene in Paris at the United Nations Climate Conference in December 2015.
- Decision-makers must take steps to **reduce our dependence on fossil fuels** and promote the development of clean energy and energy efficiency programs by:
 - **Rejecting projects that facilitate the development of carbon-rich fuels**, such as the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, and keeping the ban on crude oil exports.
 - Adopting enforceable targets, financial incentives, regulatory changes and investment strategies that increase the use of **renewable energy sources** such as wind and solar power.
 - Implementing **ambitious energy efficiency** measures for appliances, buildings and vehicles.
 - Continuing to develop and implement the fuels and technologies of the future to ensure that **all vehicles on the road in 2050 are zero-emission vehicles**.