

Arizona and the Rising Cost of Extreme Weather

Many Arizonans are under **enormous and increasing emotional and financial strain from the COVID-19 pandemic** and its economic fallout. Hundreds of thousands of people have filed for unemployment, and countless small businesses have closed. Yet even during this crisis, Arizonans face the growing threat of additional economic harm and damage to public health from excessive heat, drought and other extreme weather events, confirming that climate change is a “threat multiplier” making other challenges to our country much more complicated to address.

A new report from Datu Research, *Climate Change-Fueled Weather Disasters: Costs to State and Local Economies*, reveals how extreme weather has already inflicted huge costs on Arizona taxpayers. We cannot fully rebuild America’s economy by continuing to ignore the threat of steadily worsening weather events that we now know are driven by climate change.

Climate change is fueling rising disaster costs

Nationwide, since 1980:

- The number of annual severe weather disasters has increased fourfold, costing U.S. taxpayers **more than \$1.75 trillion**.
- The annual cost has risen from **\$17 billion to \$84 billion**.

It’s only going to get worse

Climate models predict that without action, we could see up to 70 more extreme heat days per year in the Southwest, including 115 high wildfire potential days in Arizona per year by 2050. Across the West we could see up to six times more acres burned by wildfires.

Arizona has seen this firsthand.

- 15 of Phoenix’s 16 hottest days on record have occurred in the past 30 years, including three during the 2017 heat wave where

temperatures reached 119 degrees. This trend is continuing, with 2020 already breaking the record in the city for the number of days in a year over 110 degrees.

- This extreme heat leads to lost productivity. For example, 40 flights were cancelled in one day during that heat wave. Studies suggest extreme heat can cut productivity by up to 3% in some high risk sectors.
- Arizona has been in a moderate or worse drought for half of the past 20 years.
- Arizona has been part of 11 billion-dollar wildfires in recent decades.
- **This raises the critical question: how will governments, businesses and communities, in the future, afford to keep pace with increasingly intense calamities fueled by a changing climate?**

We can avoid the most costly extreme weather impacts if we act now

To stop the trend of ever-more-destructive and costly weather events, we must immediately reduce climate pollution and move toward a 100% clean economy. This means investing in cleaner energy and transportation systems, modernizing our buildings and manufacturing, and more. And knowing that climate pollution will for some time continue to drive up costs, policymakers must also prioritize pre-disaster planning, mitigation, and response. Anything less will mean increasing strain on already overburdened local and state economies.

With discussions happening in Congress now on COVID-19 recovery, it’s critical that our leaders prioritize policies that mitigate the costs of future disasters. We can’t afford not to act.