



## The Cost of Inaction on the Climate Crisis: Extreme Weather Events, Loss of Life, and the Ever-Increasing Costs of Recovery

American taxpayers are paying an exorbitant amount of money responding to natural disasters made increasingly more destructive by the climate crisis. Instead, we should be addressing the root source – greenhouse gas pollution – and preparing our infrastructure for new climate realities.

- The total cost of U.S. billion-dollar disasters over the last 15 years tops **\$1 trillion**.<sup>1</sup>
- 2020 set a new record with **22 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters in a single year**.<sup>2</sup>
- These disasters have **more than quadrupled in both total cost and frequency** since the 1980s.<sup>3</sup>
- Over the last 5 years, the U.S. has spent an average of **\$126 billion per year** in damages on billion-dollar disaster events, shattering records along the way.<sup>4</sup>
- **No state has gone unscathed** by these disasters,<sup>5</sup> which are getting more frequent, more severe, and more costly.<sup>6</sup>

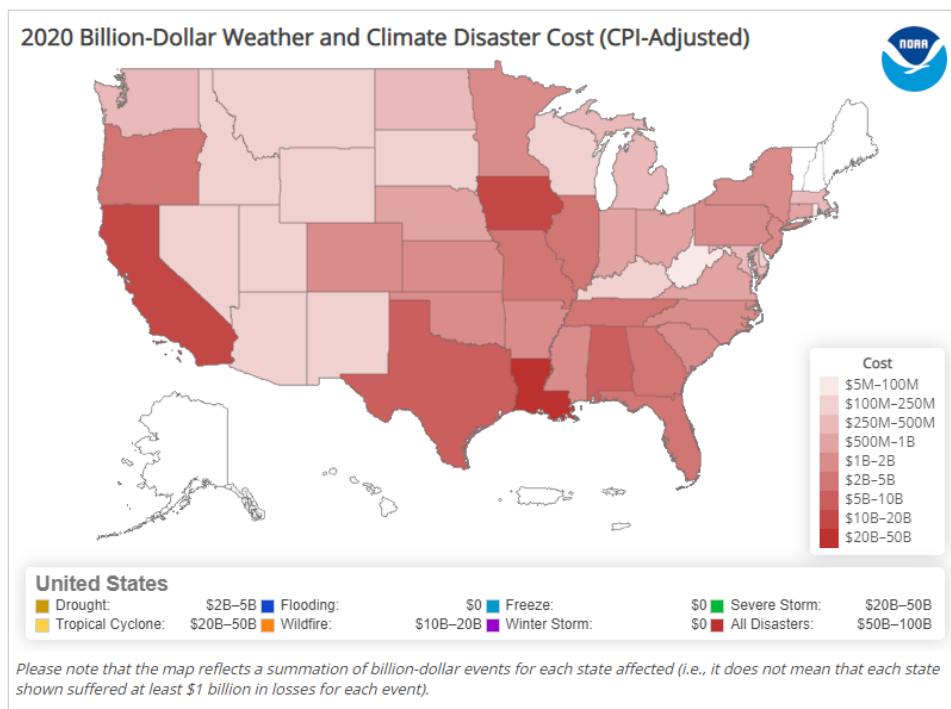
**If we do not combat the climate crisis with the urgency it demands, we will soon be spending hundreds of billions of dollars a year to deal with the damage and destruction.**

**The cost of inaction is immense. We must act NOW.**

**2020 – A Year of Extremes:** On top of the enormous toll of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 was a year marked by natural disasters. With 22 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters, 2020 shattered the previous record of such events in a single year and highlighted the increasing cost of the climate crisis.

Here is a breakdown of this historic year of extremes:

- Tropical cyclones cost 86 lives and \$42.3 billion.
- Severe storms cost 85 lives and \$34.8 billion.
- Wildfires cost 46 lives and \$17.1 billion.
- Droughts and heat waves cost 45 lives and \$4.7 billion.



**In total, 22 separate billion-dollar disasters cost the nation \$98.9 billion in damages, and cost 262 Americans their lives.<sup>7</sup>**

Click [HERE](#) for background on each event.

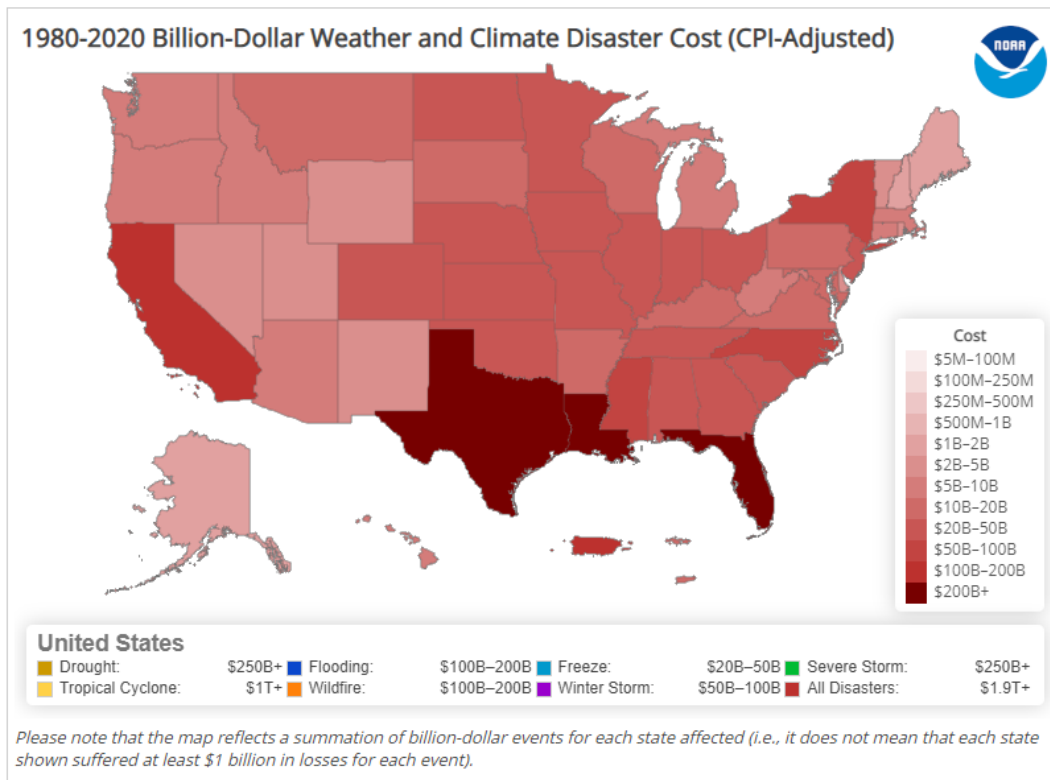
**Not an Outlier, But Rather a Trend:** Although 2020 set the record for most billion-dollar disasters in a single year, it is just one data point in a larger trend toward more frequent, more severe, and more costly extreme weather events – a direct result of the climate crisis.

The 1980s saw 29 separate billion-dollar disasters – or 2.9 per year. By the 2010s, this number had more than quadrupled to 123 – or 12.3 per year. Over the same span, the annual average cost of climate and extreme weather disasters in the U.S. quadrupled as well – from \$18.4 billion per year in the 1980s to \$84.5 billion throughout the 2010s – while total deaths nearly doubled.<sup>8</sup>

The rapidly escalating frequency and toll of weather disasters – highlighted here – represent just the start of what is to come if greenhouse gas emissions continue unabated and global temperatures continue to rise.<sup>9</sup> Since NOAA began keeping records, hurricanes, severe storms, droughts, floods, and wildfires have – together – accounted for nearly 95% of the total costs associated with billion-dollar weather and climate disasters. The climate crisis will exacerbate these threats:

Disaster Type	Impact of the Climate Crisis
Hurricanes (53% of total cost)	NOAA projects more Category 4 and 5 hurricanes <sup>10</sup> as increasing air and water temperatures threaten to amplify tropical storm winds – and their resulting damage. At the same time, climate-induced sea-level rise will amplify storm surges. <sup>11</sup>
Severe Storms (15.4% of total cost)	Changes in temperature, humidity, and wind due to the climate crisis will result in more frequent storms, particularly in Midwestern and Southern Plains states. <sup>12</sup>
Droughts (13.7% of total cost)	In large part due to increased air temperatures, the climate crisis will lead to more frequent and more intense drought, particularly in the Southwest. <sup>13</sup>
Floods (8% of total cost)	Scientists estimate that, as temperatures rise, there will be more frequent extreme precipitation events in certain regions of the country, particularly in the Midwest, which will exacerbate flood risks. <sup>14</sup>
Wildfires (5.4% of total cost)	The climate crisis will result in hotter, drier conditions in parts of the country, increasing wildfire risks, particularly for Western states. <sup>15</sup> Wildfire burned over 10 million acres in the U.S. just last year, a near-record. <sup>16</sup>

While certain climatic changes will impact particular regions of the country more than others, no state is insulated from natural disasters. As illustrated below, each and every state has borne the cost of a billion-dollar disaster.<sup>17</sup> If greenhouse gas emissions are left unchecked, such events will become more frequent, more severe, and more costly – a burden that every state will bear.<sup>18</sup>



Click [HERE](#) to see the state-by-state impacts of billion-dollar disasters.

Click [HERE](#) to read about state-by-state climate risks.

**Footing the Bill:** As the annual cost of these natural disasters skyrockets, who gets stuck with the bill? The short answer: We all do.

Between 2005 and 2019, American taxpayers spent at least \$450 billion on weather disaster assistance – an average of \$30 billion per year.<sup>19</sup> Unsurprisingly, costs are on the rise, illustrated by the fact that FEMA’s Public Assistance Program spent 23% more on natural disasters during the 2010s than it had during the 2000s.<sup>20</sup>

More frequent and more costly climate and weather disasters also carry hefty financial implications for states, tribes, territories, and local governments, which pay for a portion of the costs associated with a Presidentially declared disaster in addition to those events that do not reach the federal-assistance threshold.<sup>21</sup> The financial risks are, likewise, staggering for individuals, who don't always get help after a disaster. For farmers and ranchers, this increase in damaging weather is particularly acute, costing billions in disaster aid and leading to historic stress on the federal crop insurance program.

**Click [HERE](#) for state-by-state information on federal disaster allocations.**

**Solution – The Build Back Better Budget:** If we are to avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis, we need to address its root cause – greenhouse gas pollution. The Build Back Better Budget does just that, while creating millions of good-paying American jobs along the way.

### **The Build Back Better Budget will:**

- **Make electric vehicles more affordable for Americans, while helping to ensure that they're built right here in the U.S. by proud union workers.**
- **Provide clean energy tax incentives and fund clean energy procurement in order to decarbonize our electricity.**
- **Help ensure that the technologies that will make a clean transition possible are built – and sourced – right here in the U.S. by providing tax credits for manufacturers to retool or build new plants to produce advanced energy parts.**
- **Make polluters pay, holding them responsible for their actions.**
- **Support natural carbon removal by restoring our forests and making them more wildfire-resistant.**
- **Invest in climate-smart agriculture and research, so that farmers and ranchers can continue to be part of the solution.**

Together with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Package – which represents the single largest investment in climate resilience<sup>22</sup> – the Build Back Better Budget will answer the call on the climate crisis for our children and grandchildren.

**The costs of inaction are simply too high to ignore.**

## Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/summary-stats/US/2006-2020>
- 2 <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/summary-stats/US/2020>
- 3 <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/summary-stats/US/1980-2020>
- 4 <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/summary-stats/US/2015-2020>
- 5 <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/mapping/freq/1980-2020>
- 6 <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/summary-stats>
- 7 <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/summary-stats/US/2020>
- 8 <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/summary-stats/US/1980-2020>
- 9 <https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/content/report-ClimateChange-FueledWeatherDisasters.pdf>
- 10 <https://www.gfdl.noaa.gov/global-warming-and-hurricanes/>
- 11 <https://www.c2es.org/content/hurricanes-and-climate-change/>
- 12 <https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/content/report-ClimateChange-FueledWeatherDisasters.pdf>
- 13 <https://nca2014.globalchange.gov/highlights/regions/southwest>
- 14 <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/25082020/extreme-weather-costs-wildfire-climate-change/>
- 15 <https://www.c2es.org/content/wildfires-and-climate-change/>
- 16 <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires>
- 17 <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/mapping/cost/1980-2020>
- 18 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/billion-dollar-disasters-shattered-u-s-record-in-2020/>
- 19 <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-183t-highlights.pdf>
- 20 <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2020/09/how-states-can-manage-the-challenges-of-paying-for-natural-disasters>
- 21 <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2020/09/how-states-can-manage-the-challenges-of-paying-for-natural-disasters>
- 22 <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/livable-future-rests-congress-passing-climate-focused-reconciliation-bill>