

# Climate Change Impact on Arizona's Latino Community

The Sonoran Institute is currently developing training and technical assistance resources for communities across the Intermountain West seeking to address climate change impacts through local planning efforts. As part of this initiative, we are engaging Latino communities to inform them on how climate change can impact their neighborhoods and families.



*Shaping the Future of the West*

## Project Purpose & Description

**H**ave you noticed that summers in Arizona last longer and are hotter each year? Are you running your air conditioning more than previous summers? Do you, or your family members, work or spend a lot of time outside? Have you, or someone you know, experienced dehydration or heat stroke from the hot temperatures? Do your children suffer from asthma? Is the heat stopping you and your family from doing things you enjoy?

Hot, dry days are not new to Arizonans. However, the average temperature in the Southwest is warming faster than other regions in the United States. Scientists project that the Southwest will get even hotter and drier in years to come. Extreme heat waves, drought, high risk of wildfire in rural communities, damaging flash floods, and concentrated heat in neighborhoods in downtown Phoenix and Tucson, known as the urban heat island effect, are just some of the effects of rising temperatures.

These hot and dry conditions have a tremendous impact on your city, neighborhood, and your family's health, finances, and well being. Because many of these extreme weather conditions disproportionately affect Latino communities, Latinos have demonstrated a growing desire to protect their children and grandchildren from these impacts. Recent polling indicates that nine in 10 Latinos want to see the government act on climate change. Additionally, 86 percent of respondents feel it's our moral duty to leave our children a clean planet. Just as our ancestors cared for the Earth, so too must we continue that legacy and protect the environment.<sup>1</sup>

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## Impacts to Your Health

**E**xtrême heat and weather can cause many health issues. Young children, older adults, people with medical conditions, those who work outdoors, and low-income families are more vulnerable than others to heat-related illness, such as dehydration and heat stroke. Dehydration occurs when your body does not have enough water to carry out its normal functions. Heat stroke is when your body overheats; your body temperature rises to 104 or higher. Young children and the elderly are especially at risk of experiencing heat stroke and dehydration because their bodies do not regulate temperatures effectively. In addition, people living without air conditioners are more susceptible to heat stroke than people with air conditioning in their homes. Summer temperatures commonly over 100 degrees places not only more vulnerable populations, but everyone at greater risk of heat-related illness.



Air quality declines in hotter and drier climates and can impact your health. Poor air quality occurs when pollutants reach high enough concentrations to endanger human health and the environment. Air pollutants are caused by a number of sources such as cars, factories, and power plants. More than 147 million Americans, over 47 percent of the nation's population, live in areas with poor air quality.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 50 percent of Latinos in Arizona/United States live in a county that frequently violates ground-level ozone standards.<sup>3</sup> Poor air quality is associated with an increase in asthma and other chronic lung conditions. Children are more at risk of asthma than adults.

## Financial and Economic Costs

**R**ising temperatures and extreme weather events can also cost you and your family money. Summer temperatures over 100 for extended periods require air conditioners to run longer to maintain reasonable temperatures, thereby increasing electricity usage and your energy bills. The urban heat island effect will produce a larger rise in energy costs for urban residents. The urban heat island effect refers to the occurrence of hotter temperatures in urban areas as compared to rural or suburban areas due to more buildings and roads, which hold heat, and less vegetation and trees, which cool the surrounding area. If you live in an urban neighborhood with few trees and plants, you will likely have to run your air conditioner more and for longer periods of time than a rural household would to maintain the same inside temperature, costing you and your family more money.



An often overlooked financial impact of climate change is the cost it takes to repair damage caused by extreme weather events. Dust storms, flash floods, and wildfire are all climate impacts that can damage your home, automobile, and other property. A single extreme weather event, such as a dust storm, can cause hundreds of dollars worth of damage.



Farming and ranching make up a large portion of Arizona's economy and these industries and their employees will also be directly impacted by climate change. Changes in temperature, as well as droughts and floods, affect food production on farms and the amount of cattle that can be raised on a ranch. A decrease in Arizona's or the Southwest's farming and cattle production will likely cause a rise in food prices. This impacts rural and urban residents alike.

## Get informed!

Knowledge is the best way to prepare for the climate changes ahead. The following organizations and resources are experts on climate change and how it will affect people:

- 2014 National Climate Assessment – Southwest Region Report: <http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/report/regions/southwest>; Spanish materials available here: <http://www.ccass.arizona.edu/nca>
- Environmental Protection Agency (website also available in Spanish): <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/>
- Center for Disease Control – Climate and Health: <http://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/>
- Latino Coalition on Climate Change (website also available in Spanish): <http://latinocoalitiononclimatechange.org/>

## Prepare for Climate Change

Climate change is happening – but steps can be taken to prepare for climate impacts. Here are some things that you can do today to prepare.

### Learn

The first step that you can do to prepare for climate change is to get informed about the climate impacts that will affect you, your family, and neighbors. This factsheet is a starting point, but there are a number of free resources available to you on the topic of climate change impacts and ways to prepare. See the sidebar, “Get Informed!”

### Small Steps Yield Results

Even small actions to prepare for climate change can have a big impact.



- Make sure you and your family are drinking enough water during the summer months to avoid heat-related illnesses.
- Plant native trees in your neighborhood to help reduce the urban heat island effect.
- Close your blinds, curtains and shades during the hottest part

of the day to prevent the sunlight from warming your home to save money on your electricity bill.

### Teach and Connect

Once you are informed on the topic and begin preparing for impacts, reach out to your family, friends, and neighbors and teach them about climate change and how it can affect their health, safety, and well being. As your friends, family, and neighbors learn about climate change you can share ideas for minimizing the effects. Your community can respond quickly and positively to extreme weather events if together, you are ready for them.

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## Partner Organization



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### Endnotes:

1 <http://www.nrdc.org/media/2014/140123b.asp>  
2 <http://www.stateoftheair.org/2014/key-findings/>.  
3 Center for Disease Control and Prevention. “CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities report - United States 2011,” January 2011.