

PRESS RELEASE

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Report Reveals Climate Gap among Minorities, Poor in U.S.

Climate change will cause people of color, the poor to pay more for basic necessities, experience greater mortality rates during extreme weather events and breathe dirtier air

Researchers on federal legislation:

“Preventing climate change is the single most important strategy towards closing the Climate Gap”

WASHINGTON DC — Most Americans now concur that climate change is real, and could pose devastating consequences for our nation and our children. A new report out today reveals that an equally real and urgent problem is the “Climate Gap,” the often hidden and unequal harm climate change will cause people of color and the poor in the United States. The research team behind the report also released an analysis of the global warming legislation currently moving through Congress, hailing it as a critical first step towards solving climate change and suggesting ways it could close the Climate Gap.

“Climate change does not affect everyone equally in the United States,” said Rachel Morello-Frosch, associate professor of Environmental Science, Policy and Management at the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley. “People of color and the poor will be hurt the most — unless elected officials and other policymakers intervene.”

While past research has shown how climate change will disproportionately hurt people in developing nations, “The Climate Gap: Inequalities in how climate change hurts Americans and how to close the gap,” is an analysis of available data that explores the disparities in the domestic impact of climate change and the abilities of different groups within U.S. borders to adapt to it.

The report highlights how extreme weather events such as heat waves, droughts and floods already impact people of color and the poor disproportionately, and are expected to increase in their frequency and intensity in coming decades. For instance, African Americans living in Los Angeles have a projected heat-wave-mortality rate that is nearly twice that of other Los Angeles residents. Minorities and the poor are also less likely to have access to air conditioning and cars, restricting their capacity to evacuate.

In addition to experiencing greater harm during extreme weather events, researchers say minorities and the poor will breathe even dirtier air and pay even more for basic necessities just as they have fewer or shifting job opportunities as a result of climate change.

The report encourages policymakers to close the Climate Gap in their efforts to address climate change to avoid reinforcing current socioeconomic and racial disparities.

“As America takes steps to prevent climate change, closing the Climate Gap must also be a top priority,” said Dr. Manuel Pastor, Professor of Geography and American Studies & Ethnicity at the University of

Southern California and Director of the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at USC's Center for Sustainable Cities.

Pastor continued, "If we protect those who are most vulnerable, we will protect all of us. Properly maintaining the levees would have shielded the Lower Ninth Ward and would have saved all of New Orleans against Hurricane Katrina. Similarly, by choosing policies that shield against the very real dangers facing low-income neighborhoods and people of color, we will insure that climate policy will be effective for the entire nation."

Solutions that can solve climate change and narrow the Climate Gap include:

- Adopting technologies that identify neighborhoods most vulnerable to the Climate Gap;
- Choosing either an auction or fee-based system that would generate revenue to help families living in poverty absorb the higher costs of water, food and energy;
- Seizing the opportunity to reduce greenhouse gases from sources that also cause toxic air pollution in the neighborhoods with the dirtiest air;
- Prioritizing the training of people who are most likely to lose their current job because of either climate change or climate solutions for jobs in the new economy; and
- Focusing outreach, intervention, and preparedness efforts for extreme weather events in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.

In analyzing the American Clean Energy Security Act based on this solutions framework, the researchers found that offering fewer free pollution permits to the oil sector—which has a majority of its facilities in minority and low-income neighborhoods—and several cushions against higher prices were positive steps.

"Preventing climate change is the most important strategy towards closing the Climate Gap," said Dr. James L. Sadd, Professor of Environmental Science at Occidental College in Los Angeles, California. "That's why the American Clean Energy Security Act represents real progress. While the bill could do even more to directly address Climate Gap issues, it's a critical first step toward addressing global warming and the catastrophic consequences for all Americans.

The executive summary, full report—which includes an appendix on California's climate policy—and the American Clean Energy Security Act analysis can be found at <http://college.usc.edu/geography/ESPE/perepub.html>.

***About the Research Team:** Rachel Morello-Frosch is associate professor of Environmental Science, Policy and Management and the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Manuel Pastor is Professor of Geography and American Studies & Ethnicity at the University of Southern California where he also serves as Director of the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) at USC's Center for Sustainable Cities and Co-Director of USC's Center for Study of Immigrant Integration (CSII). Dr. James L. Sadd is Professor of Environmental Science at Occidental College in Los Angeles, California. Seth Shonkoff holds an MPH in epidemiology from UC Berkeley and is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management at UC Berkeley.*

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