

Fighting Florida's Climate Chaos: Next Steps in Saving Our State

Florida is expected to bear the largest U.S. burden of climate chaos. Faced with flooding, compromised drinking water and heat waves, Florida needs bold action to protect the public from such threats. Fortunately, there are real solutions. Transitioning off fossil fuels and increasing energy efficiency are critical to protecting communities from the worst climate change impacts.

Climate Change in Florida

Climate change is already impacting Florida.¹ Over three-quarters of the population and nearly 80 percent of the state's economy are in coastal counties.² More Category 4 and 5 hurricanes are expected, and rising sea levels increase flooding, storm surges and erosion.³ Saltwater intrusion and compromised septic systems threaten drinking water.⁴ In Miami-Dade County, 56 percent of septic systems may already be impacted by elevated groundwater levels during wet periods, posing health and environmental risks.⁵

Miami and Tampa-St. Petersburg are among the most vulnerable cities, facing substantial economic losses from flooding.⁶ By 2060, sea levels could rise up to 34 inches in Southeast Florida and 42 inches around Tampa.⁷ By 2100, we risk a rise of 81 and 102 inches, respectively.⁸ By 2040, sea walls to protect coastlines could cost Floridians around \$76 billion.⁹

Without drastic changes, Florida could face an additional 8,100 deaths annually, with over 1,000 additional deaths in Miami-Dade County by the end of the century.¹⁰

Florida's Fossil Fuel Problem

Regrettably, the state has locked itself into fossil fuels, a major driver of climate change.¹¹ Fracking has led to the construction of several pipelines to bring natural gas to Florida.¹² While the United States generated 35 percent of its electricity from natural gas, Florida doubled down at 70 percent in 2018.¹³ And Florida's electric grid is set to have the nation's largest share of gas generation by 2021.¹⁴ A labyrinth of pipelines will be needed to service these facilities, like the proposed Southeast Market Pipelines Project that aims to deliver gas to Florida.¹⁵



Gas plants increase climate-destroying emissions both from the facilities and from widespread methane leaks from connecting infrastructure, meaning that natural gas cannot be considered a low-carbon fuel.¹⁶ Beyond the leaks, infrastructure is at risk of damage from flooding and storms, raising concerns about additional environmental impacts.¹⁷

Clean, Renewable Energy

Despite its moniker, the Sunshine State generates just 1 percent of its electricity from solar, which encompasses nearly all of Florida's clean, renewable energy.¹⁸ Comparatively, the United States sourced 9 percent of its electricity from clean energy in 2018.¹⁹ An essential step to reducing the threat of climate change is to avoid making it worse. Florida's leaders and Congress must take swift action to put the United States on track to 100% clean, renewable energy by 2030. Scientists have concluded that economic reorientation to 100 percent renewable energy is necessary to stave off the imminent risks of climate catastrophe.²⁰

Energy Efficiency

As the third largest energy-consuming state, and with utilities five times less efficient than the national average, Florida must improve its energy efficiency.²¹ Efficiency measures are a proven, cost-effective way to reduce climate emissions by avoiding the initial demand to generate electricity.²² The full deployment of energy efficiency upgrades in buildings alone could eliminate the need to build additional power plant capacity — and efficiency investments are cheaper and faster to deploy than building new power plants.²³

Energy efficiency upgrades could especially benefit economically and socially disadvantaged households if incentivized through rate reductions or subsidies. High energy burdens can force these households to decide whether to pay their utility bills or spend money on other basic necessities like food or medical care.²⁴

Climate Resilience

Resilience is critical to managing the climate crisis. Climate resilience is the ability to adapt to, withstand and recover from adverse impacts like hurricanes and flooding. Adaptation measures that protect shorelines prevent damage to coastal properties, save Floridians millions in damages and improve resilience.²⁵ Flood insurance is critical to

ensuring that communities can recover from climate-related flooding and becomes more affordable when communities implement strategies that reduce flooding risk.²⁶

Conclusion and Recommendations

Florida is on the front lines of the climate crisis, but there are real solutions to protect the state's communities. Transitioning off fossil fuels, increasing energy efficiency and building resilience can help protect Florida communities from the worst climate change impacts.

You can help by calling on Governor DeSantis and your Congressman to take action to transition Florida and the rest of the country to 100% clean, renewable energy by 2030.

Endnotes

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