



Global Warming and Latinos A Growing Threat to our Health, Economic, and Social Well Being

Air pollution is posing an even more serious threat as it brings on global warming. Global warming could seriously affect the health, economic, and social well being of Latinos.

Changes in the Earth's atmosphere are occurring due to the buildup of greenhouse gases caused by the burning of fossil fuels in our cars, trucks, and factories. When carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases build up in the atmosphere, they trap heat, causing increased temperature and altered precipitation patterns, in essence, global warming.

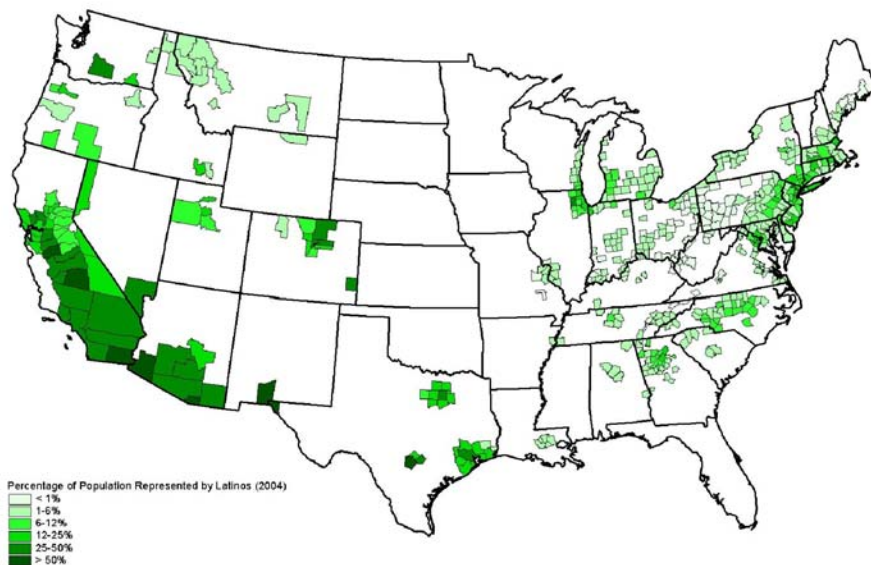
Global Warming may result in¹:

- Changes in patterns and forms of precipitation, resulting in droughts in some regions and excess rainfall in others;
- Increased intensity of storms and increased frequency of flooding and wildfires
- More rapid spread of infectious diseases,
- More intense heat waves and more bitter cold in the winter, and,
- Increased ozone smog (when the right combination of heat and sunlight come together)

A Warmer Climate Will Make Air Quality Even Worse with Higher Levels of Ozone Smog.

Latinos have an increased risk of developing acute and chronic illnesses like asthma and other respiratory and pulmonary disease from exposure to air pollution because a disproportionate number of Latinos live in areas failing to meet one or more federal standards for clean air.

Percent of Population in Nonattainment Areas Represented by Latinos



- Nearly 30 million Latinos – 72% of the Latino population in the U.S. – live in areas that don't meet federal air pollution standards for one or more pollutants. Further, nearly 29 million Latinos – 70% of the population - live in areas that don't meet federal standards for ozone.²

The Latino Community is Vulnerable to Natural Disasters. At highest risk from the impacts of global warming are communities that have the fewest technical and social resources to cope with illness, catastrophic loss of property and jobs, and increased costs of essential goods like food, water and electricity.³ Because Latino families rank among the poorest of American families, global warming could seriously affect the health, economic and social well being of Latinos. Furthermore, if global warming trends continue, it is likely that floods and droughts will become more persistent and hurricanes will be stronger and more destructive.

- Water shortages in the west, brought on by a decrease in snowpack, will particularly affect the agricultural industry.⁴
- In California alone, water shortages could cause agricultural losses as high as \$1 billion.⁵ 65% of the agriculture work force in California is Latino.⁶
- California is also home to 27% of Latino-owned businesses in the U.S.⁷
- Latinos are vulnerable to disruptions in agriculture both as consumers and as a source of employment. In California, Latinos spend 40% more of their income on food than whites.⁸
- In the hurricane-prone states of Florida and Texas, 48% and 59%, respectively, of the farm workers are Latino.⁹ In addition, Texas and Florida are second and third in the Nation, respectively, for the number of Latino-owned businesses.¹⁰
- Low-income families are more likely to live in older, poor quality housing and are less likely to be financially prepared to evacuate or re-locate in the event of a natural disaster.¹¹ Mobile homes are particularly vulnerable to wind and water damage. Following the Florida landfall of Hurricane Wilma in 2005, 21% of the population in FEMA assistance counties was Latino.¹²

Latinos Living Below the Poverty Level are More Likely to be Vulnerable to the Effects of Air Pollution. Living in poverty affects access to quality health care and housing, making these communities vulnerable to climate change related illnesses and respiratory illnesses. In addition, a warmer climate means that more areas of the U.S. will be hospitable to insects and the diseases they spread (like malaria, St. Louis encephalitis, Lyme disease, and Dengue fever) and rodents (carriers of the hanta virus).¹³ Many of these diseases can be treated if medical care is given promptly – a luxury many Latinos do not have.

- More than 9 million Latinos live in poverty or 21.9% of the Latino population compared to the poverty rate of 8.6% in the non-Latino white population.¹⁴
- Children in poverty are more likely to be uninsured than all children. In 2004, 21.1% of Latino children did not have health insurance compared to 7.6% of non-Latino white children.¹⁵
- 32.7% of Latino (13.7 million people) do not have health insurance and non-elderly uninsured adults and children are likely to be Latino.¹⁶ The uninsured are three times more likely than those with insurance to report problems getting needed medical care and are less likely to receive preventative care.¹⁷
- People lacking English language proficiency face the greatest barriers to care, especially if they are uninsured. Two-thirds (66%) of uninsured Spanish-speaking Latinos did not have a regular doctor, compared with a substantially smaller proportion of uninsured whites (37%) and African Americans (44%).¹⁸

What We Can Do

The most recent scientific studies prove that global warming is here now and is already causing environmental changes that will have significant economic and social impacts. The good news is that if we act now, and act decisively, we can stop the worst effects of global warming. We must urge our elected leaders, community leaders, and both the English and Spanish media to support a real solution to global warming. They must:

- 1. Take Immediate Action.** If we wait, it will be too late. Leading scientists now warn that we must stabilize emissions within 10 years if we are to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius and avoid the most dangerous impacts of global warming.
- 2. Guarantee Global Warming Pollution Reductions, with Enforceable Deadlines.** Scientists say that we must begin to significantly reduce our emissions from today's levels in the next 10 years and cut them by 60-80% by 2050 if we are to avert the worst consequences of global warming.
- 3. Promote Clean and Efficient Sources of Energy.** We can start using a number of low- and zero-pollution options immediately, including energy efficiency, renewable energy and environmentally beneficial bio-fuels.

¹IPCC, 2001. Climate change:2001: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability: Summary for policymakers. <http://www.ipcc.ch/pub/wg2SPMfinal.pdf>

² Federal air pollution standards are issued for the following pollutants: lead, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter (PM10), 1-hour ozone standard, 8-hour ozone standard and PM2.5. Based on the September 2004 US EPA Green Book, the April 2004 EPA determinations for 8-hour ozone, and the December 2004 EPA determinations for PM2.5.

³ Redefining Progress, 2006. Climate Change in California: Health, Economic and Equity Impacts. <http://www.rprogress.org/newpubs/index.shtml>

⁴ California Climate Change Center, 2006. Our changing climate – assessing the risks to California. http://www.climatechange.ca.gov/biennial_reports/2006report/index.html

⁵ California Climate Change Center, 2006. Our changing climate – assessing the risks to California. http://www.climatechange.ca.gov/biennial_reports/2006report/index.html

⁶ Redefining Progress, 2006. Climate Change in California: Health, Economic and Equity Impacts. <http://www.rprogress.org/newpubs/index.shtml>

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. Survey of Business Owners – Hispanic-Owned Businesses, 2002. (Issued March 21, 2006). <http://www.census.gov/csd/sbo/hispanic2002.htm>

⁸ Redefining Progress, 2006. Climate Change in California: Health, Economic and Equity Impacts. <http://www.rprogress.org/newpubs/index.shtml>

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. Census 1990: Detailed Occupation by Race, Hispanic Origin and Sex. <http://censtats.census.gov/eo/eo.shtml>

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. Survey of Business Owners – Hispanic-Owned Businesses, 2002. (Issued March 21, 2006). <http://www.census.gov/csd/sbo/hispanic2002.htm>

¹¹ Redefining Progress, 2006. Climate Change in California: Health, Economic and Equity Impacts. <http://www.rprogress.org/newpubs/index.shtml>

¹² U.S. Census Bureau. Hurricane Data and Emergency Preparedness: Hurricane Wilma. <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2005/wilma.htm>

¹³ IPCC, 2001. Climate change:2001: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability: Summary for policymakers. <http://www.ipcc.ch/pub/wg2SPMfinal.pdf>

¹⁴ DeNavas-Walt, C. B.D. Proctor and C.H. Lee. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-229. Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC. 2005.

¹⁵ DeNavas-Walt, C. B.D. Proctor and C.H. Lee. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-229. Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC. 2005.

¹⁶ DeNavas-Walt, C. B.D. Proctor and C.H. Lee. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-229. Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC. 2005.

¹⁷ Early Release of Selected Estimates Based on Data From the 2005 National Health Interview Survey (Released 6/21/2006) National Center for Health Statistics.

¹⁸ Doty, M.M., 2003. Hispanic patients' double burden: lack of health insurance and limited English. The Commonwealth Fund. February.