

Climate Change Makes Air Quality Worse Across the Country, With Devastating Effects on our Health

Climate change is making air quality worse around the country and across the globe, which is directly making people sicker. Within the United States, one clear and visible cause of poor air quality are the [more frequent](#), destructive, and [longer-lasting](#) wildfires that fill the air with harmful smoke, including particulate matter.

Since [the 1980s](#), but especially in recent [decades](#), western states have felt the increasing negative impacts of wildfires, as they burn for longer and with more frequency. The smoke that blanketed the [eastern](#) United States this week underscores that the impacts of climate change and the fires it exacerbates will be felt nationwide.

Climate change is worsening air quality, which makes people sicker

- Climate change worsens air quality through increased smoke from more [frequent fires](#), [hotter temperatures increasing smog](#), and many other effects.
- Higher levels of air pollution, [especially from fires](#), lead to [premature deaths](#), more frequent [pre-term births](#), and more [asthma attacks](#), [lung infections](#), and [heart disease](#).
- For wildfires in particular, the effects of heavy smoke on public health are harmful and most obvious, but fires also contribute to less visible but still damaging air pollutants that are more widespread, affecting air quality [across](#) the United States.

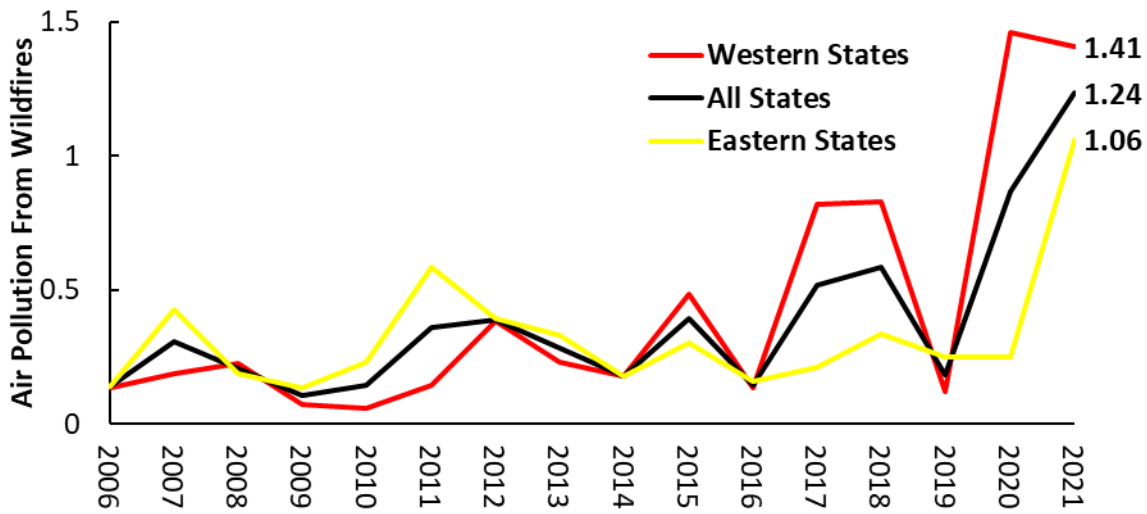
Western states are more likely to experience worse air quality episodes due to fires

- The graph below shows that air pollution from wildfires has increased since at least 2006, with pollution from fires in western states driving the overall increase.
- Now [eastern states](#) are also seeing how damaging wildfire smoke can be to daily lives.

The more common fires become, the greater the risk to overall health, which clearly highlights the need for continued federal climate action

- The frequency of poor air quality days means that more and more Americans will see worse health outcomes from both highly visible wildfire smoke and the now more consistent lower-level air quality issues stemming from this smoke across the country.
- The United States must build upon the landmark climate investments passed last year to facilitate clean [energy transmission](#), clean up our [power sector](#), and foster international climate action, while also working to recruit and retain more [wildland firefighters](#) who work on the front lines to prevent and contain these climate disasters.

Air Pollution from Fires Has Gotten Worse in Recent Years, Especially in Western States



Source: O'Dell et al, 2019

Note: "Air Pollution from Wildfires" refers to annual mean smoke concentration in the contiguous U.S. in micrograms per meter cubed.

