

The effects of climate change on the Latino community  
By Brianna Alexander and Lila Kozlik

Climate change. A topic that has been highly discussed and debated within the past few years. As the levels of carbon dioxide have increased on a global scale, temperatures have crept higher and higher. These temperatures only continue to rise, affecting climates and communities across the world.

While this is a worldwide issue, Latino communities have been affected in extreme ways - many of which are overlooked. While the globe feels the effect of carbon dioxide levels rising and everyday pollution, Latino communities are hit in more ways than one. These changes are destroying economies, farms and businesses and so much more.

Puerto Rico is a prime example of this global change. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has conducted research based around Puerto Rico and its major changes due to climate change. Environmental factors can impact people such as ocean acidification which kills off marine life-impacting fisheries and reducing tourism, two major economic factors. The rise in temperature also is unhealthy for the farm life according to the EPA and reduces the health of animals and causes water shortages. The hotter nights and days in Puerto Rico are affecting people's nervous systems and cardiovascular systems and this can be life-threatening for children, elders and impoverished people. These warm temperatures that humans are causing also allow mosquitoes to breed rapidly in Puerto Rico spreading diseases such as malaria and yellow fever around more rapidly.

These issues in Puerto Rico - while they affect the people still living there - also have major effects on the families of those living there.

Andrea Mendez Cerame, a sophomore at UMass Amherst, has lived and has family currently living in Puerto Rico. She said that climate change-induced hurricanes have, “destroyed some of [her] family’s homes to a degree where they had to move to Massachusetts because their house was inhabitable.”

She has also noticed that “many people that live near the beaches or coasts are leaving the islands to move to the U.S. or towards the mountains because of the rising sea levels.” This directly correlates to the report from the EPA.

“As a kid, I remember we would have around 2-3 tropical storm warnings during hurricane seasons, and hardly any hurricanes stronger than Category 3 would pass near Puerto Rico. Category 5 hurricanes were extremely rare, but now there are around 2-3 hurricanes stronger than Category 4 with every season, and we are all worried.”

These hurricanes and effects of global warming are affecting her life even while she lives here in Massachusetts.

Climate change is not just warming the planet and causing a small rise in temperature, it is something that affects the day to day lives of people around the world. Especially in the Latino community.

Locally asthma rates in even Springfield's North End are some of the highest in the nation.

"One of the top 5, if not 3 asthma rate capitals," according to Zulmalee Rivera-Delgado, a community organizer for Neighbor to Neighbor located in Springfield.

"There is serious air pollution in the North End, largely attributing to the major interstate highway built right in the middle of one of Springfield's major Latino communities," she said.

Climate change is something that affects the Latino community - not only a global scale, but on the local scale, too. Climate change scales far and wide and will continue to persist so long as real change is not implemented. These changes start in individual communities.