

Why the California Polluters Pay Climate Superfund Act is Important for Health

SB684 (C. Menjivar)/AB1243 (D. Addis)

WHO WILL PAY FOR THE RISING COSTS OF HEALTH AND ECONOMIC HARMS FROM THE CLIMATE CRISIS?

California taxpayers are facing an unprecedented and escalating financial burden from the climate crisis, caused by fossil fuels. Tens of thousands have lost their homes to wildfires and floods, home insurance costs are skyrocketing, and the financial impacts of sea level rise loom large. Climate change and pollution from fossil fuels are **the greatest health threat of this century¹, and the fossil fuel industry must be held accountable for the health costs.**

The direct and indirect health costs of fossil fuel pollution and climate change in the US exceed \$800 billion per year. The burden of illness, disease, and death from climate change in California are staggering; yet the health-related economic costs to California have not been well documented or calculated. These costs—in premature deaths, respiratory and cardiovascular disease, hospital and ER visits, mental health, food and water-borne illness, and more—affect everyone but fall hardest on vulnerable communities and exacerbate health inequities.

The health costs of climate change and fossil fuel pollution: A 2021 study estimated that the US health costs of climate change and fossil fuel air pollution (i.e., sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds) already far exceed \$800 billion per year and are expected to become even more expensive in years to come without a stronger societal response to address this crisis. This price tag most likely vastly underestimates the true total costs of these problems, due to limited available health data.²

The health costs of wildfires: A recent study from the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health found that from 2008 to 2018, more than 52,000 premature deaths in California were attributable to fine particulate matter (PM2.5) from wildland fire, with an estimated economic impact of more than \$430 billion.³ For example, the wildland firefighters protecting our communities are at increased risk of lung cancer and heart disease.⁴

The health costs of extreme heat: California's Insurance Commissioner studied seven extreme heat events from 2013 to 2022 and found that these events resulted in almost 460 deaths, over 5,000 hospitalizations, and nearly 10,600 emergency department visits, with associated total costs of over \$4.8 billion.⁵

Local and state budgets are already stretched thin. The federal government is threatening big cuts in Medicaid funding, with frightening implications for the 15 million Californians who receive health care through Medi-Cal and for the health care workers, community health centers, and rural hospitals who provide that care. We cannot afford to continue to pay 100% of the billions of dollars of climate- and fossil fuel pollution-related health and economic costs while the polluters responsible do not pay at all. This bill is an opportunity to buoy the budget and address these harms, while lessening the burden California taxpayers bear.

A commonsense solution: The Polluters Pay Climate Superfund Act

A small number of the world's largest corporations have emitted the vast majority of global greenhouse pollution. These corporations have knowingly sacrificed our health and well-being while raking in immense profits. California Senator Caroline Menjivar and Assemblymember Dawn Addis introduced the Climate Superfund Act ([SB684/AB1243](#)) to ensure climate polluters pay their fair share for the climate and health damage they have caused in California. The Polluters Pay Climate Superfund Act will tap into a small fraction of polluters' profits to provide critical funding that communities and local governments desperately need to protect and promote health in the era of climate change.

Specifically, the bill will:

- Direct CalEPA to complete a climate cost study to quantify total damages – including health damages and costs - to the state (through 2045) caused by past fossil fuel emissions;
- Direct CalEPA to identify responsible parties and assess compensatory fees on the largest fossil fuel polluters proportional to their fossil fuel emissions from 1990 through 2024, to address damages quantified in the cost study; and
- Fees collected will fund projects and programs to mitigate, remedy, or prevent climate change costs and harms. The aim of the bill is to dedicate at least 40% of the funds to benefit communities hit hardest by fossil fuel pollution and prioritize strong labor and job standards. It will provide much needed resources to the state for programs and projects we need to protect Californians, including investments in a clean energy transition, community resilience, and climate disaster response.

This bill is different from California's cap-and-trade program; specifically, the Polluters Pay Climate Superfund Act seeks recompense for damages from past fossil fuel emissions, while California's cap-and-trade program uses market incentives to reduce future emissions. The bill is also distinct from climate accountability lawsuits brought by the State of California and local governments to hold polluters accountable for lying and deception about climate change.

Supporting Health and Medical Organizations

American Academy of Pediatrics California
California Nurses Association
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call to
ACTION

Sign on your organization on [here](#) to endorse the bill. For more information on how you can take action, see the [Action Toolkit](#). For more info contact: sari@humanimpact.org

Bill Sponsors:

Center for Biological Diversity, California Environmental Voters, Campaign for a Safe and Healthy California.

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