

United States of America

Impact of Climate Change

Poorer or developing nations find it harder to cope with the result of climate change, but the effects will be global. Rich nations will also feel the impact.

Katrina

This was clearly illustrated in August 2005, when hurricane Katrina caused devastation to the city of New Orleans and many other towns in the southern USA. Although the USA is a rich country, once again the less prosperous members of the community were least able to cope.



A satellite image from NASA, which shows the white swirling storm clouds of hurricane Katrina in the Gulf of Mexico

New Orleans is a large city with a population of around 480,000 in the central districts and a total of 1.3 million in the metropolitan area. It sits in the Mississippi delta and is actually slightly below sea level. The city is prevented from flooding by levees (raised earth barriers) and pumps which remove excess water. In 2005, hurricane Katrina breached these defences.

Some effects of Hurricane Katrina

	Before hurricane	6 months after hurricane
City residents	480,000	200,000
City hotels	265	100
Local businesses	81,000	42,000
Hospitals open	20	12

The city was evacuated and this caused tremendous chaos. Those unable to evacuate needed to be rescued. People lost their homes and possessions. Statistics hide personal stories of loss and devastation.



Many homes were completely wrecked

(photo: istock photos)

A huge area of land was flooded

(photo: NASA)



Rescue teams used helicopters and boats to take survivors to safety

(photo: istock photos)

Though sympathy and support were forthcoming, there was subsequently much criticism of the handling of the crisis



Global Impact

The southern USA is a region where oil is produced and refined. Hurricane Katrina disrupted oil and petrol production and this had economic repercussions around the world.

Climate Change and Katrina

As global temperature increases, violent weather like hurricane Katrina will become more common. The increased temperature feeds more energy into the sea and atmosphere that drive the world's weather systems. Areas like the southern coast of the USA, which already experience seasonal hurricanes, will be at greater risk.

Disasters like hurricane Katrina are likely to become more frequent events, and are likely to become more severe.