

THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND BREAST CANCER

IMPACTS OF THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY

The impacts of the fossil fuel industry on public health crises are well documented. In addition to fossil-fueled health harms, the industry is also driving the climate crisis. There are grave health consequences of climate change that directly impact people living with and at risk of breast cancer.

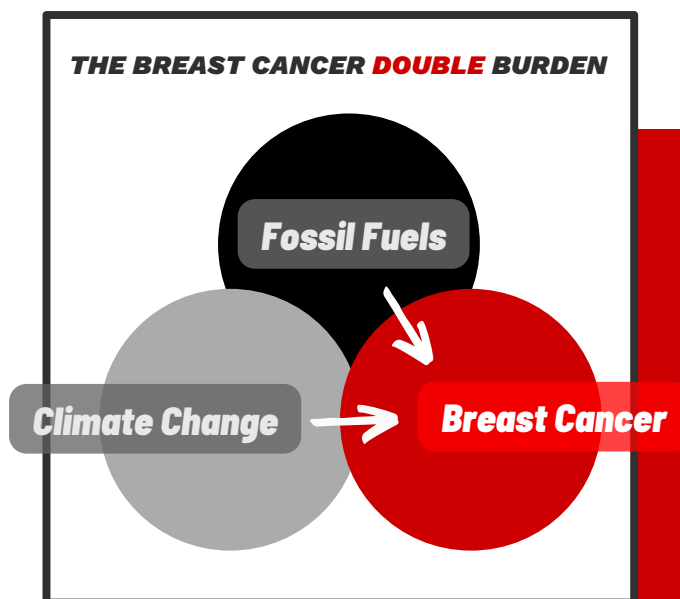
As severe climate changes are projected to increase, so will the frequency of extreme weather events such as hurricanes and tsunamis, heatwaves, and drought and wildfires. These events are known to increase health harms for people globally by 1) intensifying exposures to many chemicals that have been linked to higher breast cancer rates and worse outcomes and 2) creating the double burden of fossil fuels and climate catastrophe on the breast cancer crisis.

The fossil-fueled health and climate crises affect us all. However, we cannot ignore that these issues must be addressed at the intersection of racism, classism, and sexism. As the climate crisis intensifies, so do the prevailing health injustices. Black, Brown, Indigenous and low-income communities are already on the front lines of fossil fuel impacts and as climate change worsens, these communities will bear an even greater burden of exposure.

The double burden of fossil fuels and climate change on breast cancer refers to how each of these phenomena intensifies the breast cancer crisis. As our unchecked climate crisis worsens, we witness the predictable increase in frequency and severity of extreme weather events. The devastation caused by these events means that we are all exposed to an increasing amount of toxic chemicals used throughout the fossil fuel continuum, from extraction to processing to resultant byproducts. When we add this to other sources of toxic exposure, the accumulated contamination of our air, water and soil significantly increases our risk of breast cancer.

CHEMICALS OF CONCERN AND BREAST CANCER

About half of the people assigned female sex at birth diagnosed with breast cancer in the United States have no known risk factors. It is critical to understand the full impact of how chemicals in the environment impact our health and more specifically, our breast cancer risk, because we are exposed to these chemicals involuntarily and often. Some of the chemicals of concern mentioned in this document (PCBs, PFAS, air pollutants, and flame retardants) have been shown to increase breast cancer risk in their ability to interfere with normal hormone functioning; their ability to potentially suppress the immune system, which helps the body prevent rogue cells from growing into breast cancer; their potential to alter mammary gland development; and their potential to interfere with common breast cancer treatments. For more information on the specific chemicals mentioned in this resource and their association with breast cancer please visit www.bcaction.org/climate-crisis-report.



EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS & YOUR HEALTH

HURRICANES AND TSUNAMIS

As the oceans warm up, hurricanes and tsunamis occur more frequently, are more extreme, and cause more damage than they have in the past. These devastating effects of ocean warming also increase our exposure to harmful chemicals. Hurricanes and tsunamis disturb water supplies and damage wastewater pipes, including water infrastructure contaminated by the fossil fuel industry. Drinking water can become contaminated when uprooted trees cause waterline pipes to crack or break. This often leads to our drinking water supplies being contaminated with harmful chemicals such as benzene, lead, and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS, or "forever chemicals" used in fossil fuel extraction). All of these can increase our breast cancer risk.

HEATWAVES AND DROUGHT

Greenhouse gases and excess carbon dioxide produced by the fossil fuel industry result in higher ambient temperatures. Increased temperatures create drought conditions that make wildfires more common and increase air pollutant sources. An increased risk of breast cancer has been associated with ambient air pollution that often includes nitrogen oxide (NO₂), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) emissions. Additionally, rising temperatures can make it harder for bodies to break down and expel toxic chemicals (that we're exposed to on a daily basis) by weakening natural metabolism and excretion processes.

WILDFIRES

The increased number and intensity of wildfires that we have seen over the past decade, caused by the fossil-fueled climate crisis, have a direct negative impact on the breast cancer crisis. Some fires are necessary to the balance of the natural carbon cycle. However, with more and more wildfires occurring, especially in more densely populated areas, more people are exposed to air pollution in the form of the fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) that has been linked to breast cancer and other health harms. In addition to the air pollution produced by wildfires, persistent chemicals, such as PFAS and flame retardants that are used to put out or control fires, often contain chemicals that affect the endocrine, immune, and reproductive systems.

- 1. Hurricanes and Tsunamis** 
- 2. Contaminated Water Supplies** 
- 3. Environmental Racism** 
- 4. Breast Cancer Risk** 

- 1. Heatwaves and Drought** 
- 2. Wildfires** 
- 3. Environmental Racism** 
- 4. Breast Cancer Risk** 

- 1. Air Pollution** 
- 2. Toxic and Persistent Chemicals** 
- 3. Environmental Racism** 
- 4. Breast Cancer Risk** 

WHY WE MUST ACT NOW

The breast cancer crisis, the climate crisis, and the fossil fuel industry are increasingly intertwined. Although we are all affected by the climate crisis, these impacts are disproportionately experienced by different communities. Due to decades of racially-biased zoning practices, redlining, and segregation, communities of color and low-income people are more likely to live in urban and densely-populated areas that are on the front lines of these environmental injustices, and have been shown to be hit first and worst by each of these types of extreme weather events. To get to the root causes of the breast cancer crisis, to stop this disease before it starts, and to address and end disparities in breast cancer, we must demand solutions that end our national fossil fuel dependence and stop the climate crisis.