

# The Intersection of Disaster Medicine with Climate and Health

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## Editorial

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The Society for Disaster Medicine and Public Health (SDMPH) began the planning for our annual meeting several months ago, but, because of the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been difficult to make specific plans in terms of both defining a program and the issue of attempting an in-person versus a virtual or a hybrid venue. At this point in time, we are planning a 2-day meeting with Day 1 (December 2) consisting of presentations/panels and a second day (December 3) comprising 1 or 2 hours of presentations followed by a Society meeting. More information on this is available at [www.sdmph.org](http://www.sdmph.org).

As to the program, the overarching theme will be the intersection of disaster medicine with climate and health, emphasizing how the effects of specific major events are magnified by the ever-increasing magnitude of climate change on the environment and vice versa. Recognition of this will have profound impacts on our preparedness and response activities, as well as our educational and research domains, which will be increasingly reflected in such publications as *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*.

And yes, there is an urgency to this. In the past 50 years, major weather, climate, and water events have increased fivefold (see [Figure 1](#)), and these account for only about 50% of events that meet the accepted definition of a disaster, which includes meeting 1 of 4 criteria: (1) 10 or more individuals killed, (2) 100 or more negatively impacted, (3) declaration of a State of Emergency, and (4) a call for international assistance. Even then, such events as the Lituya Bay Tsunami of 1958 (the tallest wave ever recorded at 1720 feet) would not be classified as a disaster because it occurred in a remote wilderness with 2 lives lost, although it was responsible for extensive environmental damage.<sup>1,2</sup>

In short, climate change is one of the most important health care issues of our time and, like disaster medicine and public health, should be of concern to all health care practitioners. To facilitate the medical community's awareness regarding health and climate change, the Medical Society Consortium was formed and currently brings together multiple associations representing over 600 000 clinical practitioners. Because of our overlapping missions and goals, SDMPH has become a member of the Consortium—not to shift our focus but to broaden it—and to lend our support to confronting a looming public health disaster that, left unchecked, could well have species-ending consequences.

Our first action in support of the Consortium's effort was to sign on to a letter recently delivered to Congress and reproduced at the end of this issue.<sup>3</sup>

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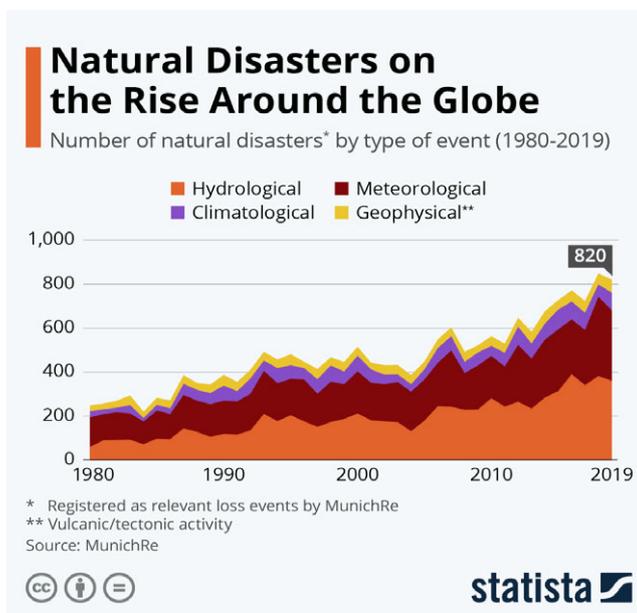


Figure 1.

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