



Issue Brief: State Attorneys General and Climate Disaster

Background

As human-caused increases in greenhouse gases change Earth's climate, extreme weather events [are becoming](#) more frequent and intense. The tragic July Fourth flood in Texas that killed over 100 people earlier this month [shined a spotlight](#) on the nation's growing vulnerability to climate disaster. From devastating floods in Texas and North Carolina to record-breaking wildfires, such as those in Hawai'i and California, communities across the country are facing unprecedented environmental challenges.

Climate disasters encompass a range of weather events, including droughts, floods, freezes, severe storms, tropical cyclones, wildfires, and winter storms. In 2024, the United States [experienced](#) 27 individual weather and climate disasters that resulted in at least \$1 billion in damages. It was the second most disaster-prone year since the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) began evaluating climate events in 1980, and the fourth most costly (approximately \$182.7 billion).¹ The frequency and intensity of climate disasters have increased dramatically. In the 1980s, there were an average of 3.3 climate disasters and \$22.0 billion in annual losses. The annual average from 1980 to 2024 is 9.0 events, and the yearly average for the most recent five years (2020-2024) is 23.0 events.

Role of State Attorneys General

State attorneys general are playing an increasingly central role in combating the impacts of climate-related disasters through legal action, oversight, and regulatory advocacy. Acting as the "People's Lawyer," the State Attorney General safeguards the legal rights of the state's residents and organizations, and, notably, represents the public interest in the state's natural resources as well. In the wake of wildfires, floods, and extreme weather events, state attorneys general have launched investigations into government and private sector failures, secured settlements, and pushed for systemic reforms.

State attorneys general have brought lawsuits to block unsafe developments, enforce environmental standards, and hold federal agencies accountable for withholding disaster recovery funds. They have also led efforts to prevent post-disaster fraud and illegal price gouging, and have advocated for

¹ Determining how frequently such events occur will soon become more challenging, as the Trump administration has [directed](#) NOAA to cease updating the database due to "evolving priorities, statutory mandates, and staffing changes."

stronger federal regulations, including recognizing extreme heat and wildfire smoke as disasters and requiring companies to disclose their climate-related risks. Together, these efforts underscore the pivotal role state attorneys general are playing in safeguarding communities and enforcing accountability in the face of intensifying climate disasters.

Examples of State Attorney General Actions

Below are examples of actions that state attorneys general have taken to prevent and respond to climate disasters. Other AG Studies issue briefs address how state attorneys general use their enforcement powers under state consumer protection laws to hold companies accountable for disseminating [climate misinformation](#) and engaging in [price gouging](#).

Preventive Litigation

- In October 2021, California Attorney General Rob Bonta [secured](#) a victory in a lawsuit challenging the approval of Otay Ranch, a proposed low-density mixed-use San Diego development in a very high wildfire risk area. Similarly, in January 2023, Bonta [publicized](#) a settlement that required a proposed low-density, luxury development project, known as the Guenoc Valley project, to be revised to a smaller, high-density footprint to reduce wildfire risk and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Following substantial flooding in 2017 and 2019, New York Attorney General Letitia James [sued](#) the International Joint Commission, which failed to implement its flood protocol for the Moses-Saunders Power Dam on Lake Ontario. The suit sought not only to compensate for previous damage but to ensure that proper flood-prevention protocols were implemented in the future.

Disaster Funding Litigation

- In March 2025, New York Attorney General Letitia James led a coalition of 23 attorneys general in [seeking](#) a court order to force the Trump administration to unfreeze essential funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The attorneys general won a preliminary injunction ordering the release of funds, but the administration has continued to withhold hundreds of millions of dollars in grants to states from FEMA.
- In April 2025, North Carolina Attorney General Jeff Jackson [joined](#) the 24-state lawsuit against AmeriCorps for unlawfully terminating congressionally approved grants that fund jobs and critical programs, including three projects employing a combined 84 people that were directly supporting western North Carolina's recovery from Hurricane Helene. In June 2025, a court order [halted](#) AmeriCorps funding cuts in the plaintiff states.
- Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul led a coalition of 20 state attorneys general in May 2025 in [filing](#) a lawsuit against the Trump administration for attempting to illegally coerce

their states into sweeping immigration enforcement by threatening to withhold billions in FEMA funding for emergency services and infrastructure.

Regulatory Comments and Legal Advocacy

- In July 2024, Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes [led](#) a coalition of 14 state attorneys general in petitioning FEMA to initiate rulemaking to update its regulations to recognize extreme heat and wildfire smoke events as eligible for major disaster declarations under the Stafford Act and clarify that wildfire smoke events are eligible for Fire Management Assistant Grant funding.
- California Attorney General Rob Bonta [filed](#) an amicus brief in August 2024 supporting the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) climate disclosure rule, which required companies regulated by the SEC to assess and report climate-related risks, such as those from extreme weather events.
- In July 2023, New York Attorney General Letitia James led a coalition of 16 attorneys general in [calling on](#) the Federal Communications Commission to expand language access for critical government alerts sent to cell phones, including weather emergencies. In February 2024, James led a coalition of 10 attorneys general in [petitioning](#) the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to implement a nationwide emergency extreme heat standard to protect workers from heat exposure.

Disaster-Related Consumer Protections

Price Gouging

- In January 2025, California Attorney General Rob Bonta [filed](#) charges against a real estate agent for attempting to price-gouge a couple who lost their home in the Los Angeles Eaton Fire. The California DOJ sent more than 500 warning letters to hotels and landlords who were accused of price gouging.
- In August 2023, then Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson [warned](#) Spokane County businesses and hotels that the Attorney General's Office was relaunching its "See It, Snap It, Send It" campaign to combat illegal price gouging, which was initially established in the spring of 2020 after more than 1,300 Washingtonians filed complaints.
- After many Coloradans lost their homes in the December 2021 Marshall Fire, a grass fire in Boulder County, Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser [sent](#) letters to major online real estate marketplaces – Airbnb, Zillow, Vrbo, and REColorado – to take the necessary steps to ensure unscrupulous actors did not excessively raise prices for temporary or permanent housing.

Post-Disaster Fraud

- Following the devastating flash flooding in central Texas over the July Fourth weekend in 2025, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton [warned](#) Texans to be aware of scammers, [issuing](#) a consumer alert to combat fraudulent charitable giving. Several other state attorneys general have warned their residents to exercise caution when donating to Texas flood relief, including, among others, New York Attorney General [Letitia James](#), South Dakota Attorney General [Marty Jackley](#), and Pennsylvania Attorney General [Dave Sunday](#).
- North Carolina Attorney General Jeff Jackson [launched](#) a new “Safe to Rebuild” initiative in April 2025, focusing awareness, investigative, and prosecutorial resources on deterring property theft and home repair fraud in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina.
- In May 2022, then New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas [alerted](#) New Mexicans to scams targeting survivors of the Calf Canyon/Hermit’s Peak wildfire, the largest and [most destructive](#) wildfire in New Mexico's history, which burned between early April and late June of that year.
- Following historic 2021 flooding in Detroit that [exceeded](#) the capacity of the public sewer system, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel [reissued](#) three consumer alerts, reminding people to research contractors if home repairs are needed, to beware of water-damaged vehicles being sold on the used car market, and to know how to complain about unreasonable vehicle towing fees.

Aftermath Investigations

- In June 2025, Hawai’i Attorney General Anne Lopez [concluded](#) a nearly two-year department investigation into how state and county government agencies responded during and in the immediate aftermath of the August 2023 Lahaina Fire. The Hawai’i investigation produced three reports, [providing](#) a minute-by-minute account of actions taken by government agencies, [examining](#) preparedness efforts and the influence of weather on infrastructure, and [prioritizing](#) 140 recommendations. In line with those recommendations, Lopez [announced](#) the official transition of future wildfire analysis, mitigation, and coordination efforts to the new state fire marshal and the Hawai’i Wildfire Management Organization.
- In the aftermath of a 2023 flash flood that resulted in the death of ten dogs, in October 2024, District of Columbia Attorney General Brian Schwalb launched an investigation into whether District Dogs, a dog daycare, boarding, and grooming business, misled, concealed, and downplayed the known risks of previous floods. The resulting settlement [required](#) the company to pay \$100,000, develop detailed emergency responses for every location, and train all staff on evacuation procedures.

The Leadership Center for Attorney General Studies is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to educating the public about the important role state attorneys general play in addressing pressing issues, enforcing laws, and bringing about change.