

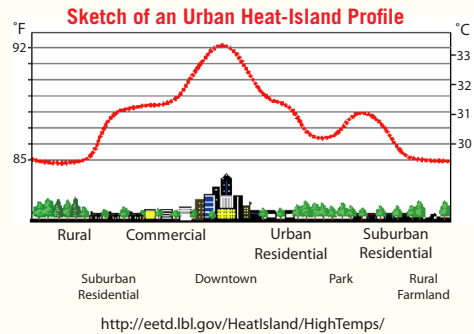
# The Climate Gap and How to Close It

## There is a Climate Gap in the United States.

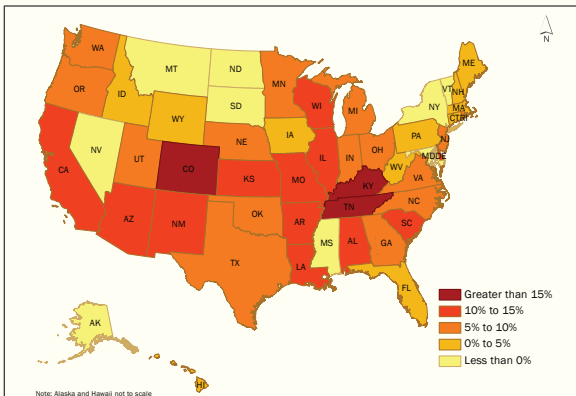
Climate change will cause minorities and the poor in the United States to...

**Suffer more during extreme weather events.** Hurricane Katrina revealed how extreme weather events cause particularly devastating damage to minorities and the poor. Another example is in Los Angeles, where African Americans are twice as likely to die from a heat wave as other residents.

Minorities and the poor are more likely to live in urban centers with less tree cover to reduce heat and more concrete and pavement to trap it. They also have less access to air conditioning, and are less likely to own cars to escape extreme weather events.



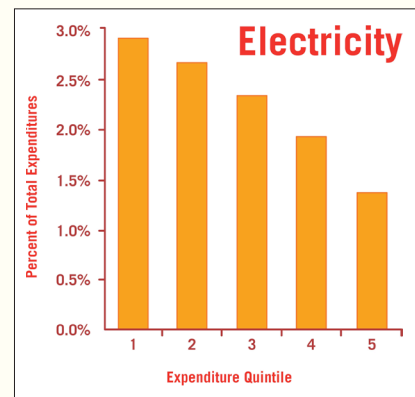
Graph shows temperature differences between neighborhoods.



Map shows rates of disparity between minority share of the population and their share of the health risk from air pollution.

**Breathe dirtier air.** A recent study titled, "Justice in the Air" found that minorities and the poor in the U.S. already breathe dirtier air than other Americans. Climate change will cause the air we breathe to get even dirtier, exacerbating the disparities in the health impacts of air pollution.

**Pay even more for basic necessities.** Low-income Americans already spend a greater portion of their income on basic



Graph reveals the difference between the percentage of income the poor (quintile one) and the wealthy (quintile five) pay for electricity.

necessities. Too often, those who oppose taking action on climate change point to higher prices that may result from climate solutions. However, doing nothing won't help: climate change will lead to higher prices for energy, food and water.

**Have fewer or shifting job opportunities.** The majority of jobs in sectors that will be significantly affected by climate change, such as agriculture and tourism, are held by low-income people of color. Workers in these industries would be the first to lose their jobs in the event of an economic downturn due to climatic troubles.

## We Can Solve Climate Change & Close the Climate Gap

Protecting the most vulnerable ensures that we better protect everyone. Lessons from Hurricane Katrina show us that if we had properly maintained the levees to protect the Lower Ninth Ward, the devastating flooding of New Orleans could have been avoided. Similarly, by choosing policies that close the Climate Gap, reducing the very real dangers facing low-income neighborhoods and people of color, we will ensure that climate policy will be effective for the entire nation.

By solving climate change and closing the Climate Gap we can cool the planet and create economic and health opportunities for everyone. Here's how:



### **Identify**

Climate Gap neighborhoods that are most at-risk.



### **Invest**

A portion of auction or fee revenues to offset the higher costs of basic necessities, and promote community preparedness to cope with and recover from extreme weather events.



### **Focus**

Greenhouse gas reduction efforts on strategies that will also reduce toxic pollution in Climate Gap neighborhoods. This is an efficient approach to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent preventing climate change and saving lives today.



### **Target**

Job training resources to Climate Gap neighborhoods, which are likely to suffer the highest rates of job loss or transition due to climate change and efforts to prevent climate change, and stress energy efficiency measures that reduce fossil fuel consumption, reducing both greenhouse gases and toxic pollutants.

## **Three Ways to Improve the American Clean Energy Security Act's Impact on the Climate Gap**

This legislation is an important step forward—yet there are critical opportunities to close the Climate Gap that the bill could incorporate as it moves towards President Obama's desk.

- 1. Establish a Vulnerable Communities Climate Change Adaptation Panel:** While the bill does include assistance to help communities prepare for extreme weather events, the domestic budget isn't targeted to those who are least able to cope. However, the Natural Resources Climate Change Adaptation Fund is an extensive program established to focus on natural resource adaptation that could be a model for a similar program focused on community adaptation in Climate Gap neighborhoods.
- 2. Target Green Job Opportunities:** While the legislation includes language on green jobs and worker transition, it is not targeted to people of color and the poor, who research says will suffer from reduced or shifting job opportunities as a result of climate change. Such targeting is entirely in line with the emerging notion of using the green economy to create pathways out of poverty, thus combining both environmental and social sustainability. Increasing the percent of allowances that will be auctioned rather than given away could also help by raising more funds for training and other purposes.



- 3. Incentivize Public Health Benefits:** The absence of any incentives or requirements to focus greenhouse gas reductions in the neighborhoods with the dirtiest air, and the exemption of greenhouse gases from the Clean Air Act is a major weakness that should be addressed. Some may argue that it makes little difference where we reduce greenhouse gas emissions—an offset (in which emissions are reduced in, say, another country) or a trade (in which emissions are reduced in another region of the U.S.) has the same effect on the planet. That's true for global warming—but these sorts of reductions have very different consequences for the communities where other pollutants released from the same source, such as particulates and air toxics, accrue.

To see the full Climate Gap report and other materials, go to <http://college.usc.edu/geography/ESPE/perepub.html>